

Dear Roger

Thank you for your letter of 19 December.

In October 2017 I emailed Tor Justad, saying:

“My view is that the DRS terminal is high - requiring top lift of containers, and has curved track. As the crane doesn't move the train would have to constantly shunt if it was to be used for lifting. The terminal on the other side of the bridge as used by Safeway traffic in the past allows track-level access, the train can be split there, and the sidings are extendable if required.”

No commercial scheme has recently come forward to use either of the terminals at Georgemas; the pipe traffic which is currently in abeyance uses the running line for off-loading. Should a scheme materialise the market will dictate as to how trains will operate.

I have attached the freight paper that went to the Far North Review Team.
I hope this is helpful.

Best wishes

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HITRANS Far North Freight Capability

The line's characteristics for freight are as follows:

Far North Freight Capability								
Section	RA	Structure Gauge	GTL tonnes up	GTL tonnes dn	Loop length SLU	Terminals/sidings	Traffic Actual Potential	Notes
Inverness-Invergordon	8	W8	1955	1460	50	Distillery 1 and 2	Whisky products	MOO 73 SLU, DIN 65 SLU, IGD 63 SLU allows greater flexibility. Pipes run over-length. Severe speed restriction DIN-LRG 30mph.
Invergordon-Lairg	5	W8	1955	1460	50	Ardgay Lairg Oil Lairg Yard	Oil, timber	Severe speed restriction ARD-LRG 10 miles at 20 mph. Shin Viaduct 10 mph. RA5 =38 tonnes for a 2 axle wagon and 76 tonnes for a 4 axle wagon
Lairg-Georgemas	5	W8	1230	1230	50	Gmas NDA Gmas sidings	Pipes, fuels, intermodal, timber, Dounreay decomm	Section includes Kinbrace Lineside
Georgemas-Thurso	5	W8	1230	1230	50	Thurso Yard		
Georgemas-Wick	3	W8	550	550	50	Wick Yard		Wick with RA4 to RA6 traffic allowed subject to Heavy Axle Weight speed restrictions

Access

As the entire line is controlled from Inverness Signalling Centre by RETB there may be considerable flexibility to run freight services on 'night' shift between 2200 and 0600.

However, it must be noted that there is also a requirement to maintain the line and running additional traffic through the night would have an impact on maintenance and engineering access.

Freight services originating from Central Scotland enter the FNL via the Rose St Curve . Stopping at Millburn or Needlefield Yards uses up valuable capacity.

Transit times are inhibited by severe speed restrictions, particularly Dingwall-Lairg.

Current freight operations

Pipes from Hartlepool to Georgemas for the off-shore oil industry. This has not run for some months due to changes in the market. The northbound DB Cargo train runs overnight on the FNL, and is shunted between the NR sidings and the nuclear siding for off-loading on the running line when passenger trains have passed. The train is over-length, and when crossing passenger trains departs first with the ScotRail train recessed in the loop. It is crewed from Millerhill.

Nuclear flasks from Dounreay and Vulcan move on an approx. monthly basis from the bespoke NDA terminal, with DRS drivers lodging in Caithness. DRS have a traincrew depot at Inverness.

The following trains have now been withdrawn, but HITRANS is in discussion with another operator regarding a restart. Weekly trains (not summer) operated by DB Cargo run from Grangemouth to Lairg carrying heating oil and some derv. 8 TTAs, which also go to Fort William in the cycle, are downrated because of weight restrictions (see above). The train is crewed by a Mossend driver and an Aberdeen based shunter lodging in Lairg FO. The pathing requires reversal at Tain to cross and allow service trains to pass.

Freight potential

Timber

HITRANS' Branchliner project has resulted in commercial discussions between Tillhill and a rail freight company to lineside load c.20000 tonnes of roundwood in 2017 to Inverness for onward despatch by road to Norbord. The success of this project could lead to a fixed terminal with a new connection that would be future-proofed for a passing loop. Norbord's input is rising to 750ktpa.

Balacas Invergordon is a biomass energy plant potentially served by the former Alcan smelter sidings, now disconnected.

HITRANS has surveyed numerous sites around the Flow Country for low-cost lineside loading.

Whisky

Lifting the Spirit attempted to gain product from Invergordon and Glenmorangie distilleries without success. Glenmorangie has invested heavily in warehousing on site but there may be opportunities for raw materials and barrels. Much of Invergordon's output is alcohol for export for blending. Invergordon has sidings either side of the line north of Invergordon station.

Caithness/Orkney Intermodal

A number of schemes have been mooted for Georgemas. Midnight Train to Georgemas (internal overnight services, mixed) is the latest of these, attempting to capture retail and fish traffic, for Caithness and Orkney. HITRANS will be seeking consultancy support on understanding the seafood market. HITRANS is also assisting suppliers of fuel products in their bid to develop a terminal at Georgemas.

One factor inhibiting the development of Orkney intermodal traffic is the principle of national pricing for distribution whereby delivery to a port is free throughout the mainland. A load of construction materials, for example, can be delivered to Aberdeen or Scrabster without surcharge for onward paid-for shipping. The supplier would charge the same for delivery to Mossend, and a third party would be left to cover the rail haulage to Georgemas, adding unnecessary cost.

Furthermore the current Northlink freight pricing policy means it is cheaper to move a container to Kirkwall via Aberdeen than to send it across the Pentland Firth. A review of freight fares on the NIFS and CHFS networks is soon to take place.

Other commodities

In recent memory agricultural lime, seed potatoes and flagstone have been conveyed. Other opportunities lie in aggregates, the Beatrice Offshore Windfarm Limited which will be supplied from Wick, and decommissioning work at Dounreay, Nigg and Invergordon.

Frank Roach HITRANS 16/2/17