



Scottish Association for Public Transport

Date 30th October, 1984

Please reply to: 11 Queens Cres.
GLASGOW G4 9AS

Chief Executive
Sutherland District Council

or phone Inverness 231582

Dear Sir,

The Far North Line

Our Association has become increasingly concerned at the failure to link the announcement of funding for the Dornoch Firth Bridge with any statement about the future of the railway line to the Far North. As you will know, British Rail has a general requirement under the Public Service Obligation to continue rail passenger services in a form similar to that provided at present. However, this requirement is now being interpreted more flexibly and government has already indicated its interest in new legislation to allow British Rail, under the PSO, to provide guaranteed bus services as rail replacements.

Since coach services on the improved A9 offer shorter journey times than are available by rail and will have even greater time advantages on completion of the Dornoch Bridge, we believe that an extremely serious threat to the future of the entire Far North Line would arise from construction of a road-only Dornoch crossing. The attached paper, which will be published in November, elaborates on this threat and indicates that it could be avoided by incorporating a direct rail link from Tain to Golspie in plans for the Dornoch crossing.

It may be argued that the interests of the further north would be best served by total abandonment of the Far North railway but such a decision ought not to be taken lightly or in default of proper examination of all the relevant costs and benefits. In our opinion, it is highly desirable that the Far North railway should continue to operate and the most effective way of ensuring its future would be combined measures to reduce operating costs (with suitable grant-aided investment) and to improve the quality and speed of service between Inverness, East Sutherland, Caithness and Orkney.

In these circumstances, we are asking for your support for an early joint meeting to discuss the future of the Far North railway and to give particular attention to the proposal that consultants should be commissioned to produce a comprehensive report on future options not later than the end of 1985. The Association would itself be willing to arrange a joint meeting but it would be preferable for such an initiative to be taken either by the Highlands and Islands Development Board or by the Highland Regional Council.

Yours faithfully,

F.D.N. Spaven
Vice Chairman