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RAILWAY DIGEST SCOTLAND



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- DORNOCH FIRTH RAIL CROSSING?

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The earthworks for the roadbridge stretch out into the Dornoch Firth from the Tain side. The railway would be on the right hand side of the picture. (PA)

FACT OR FICTION?

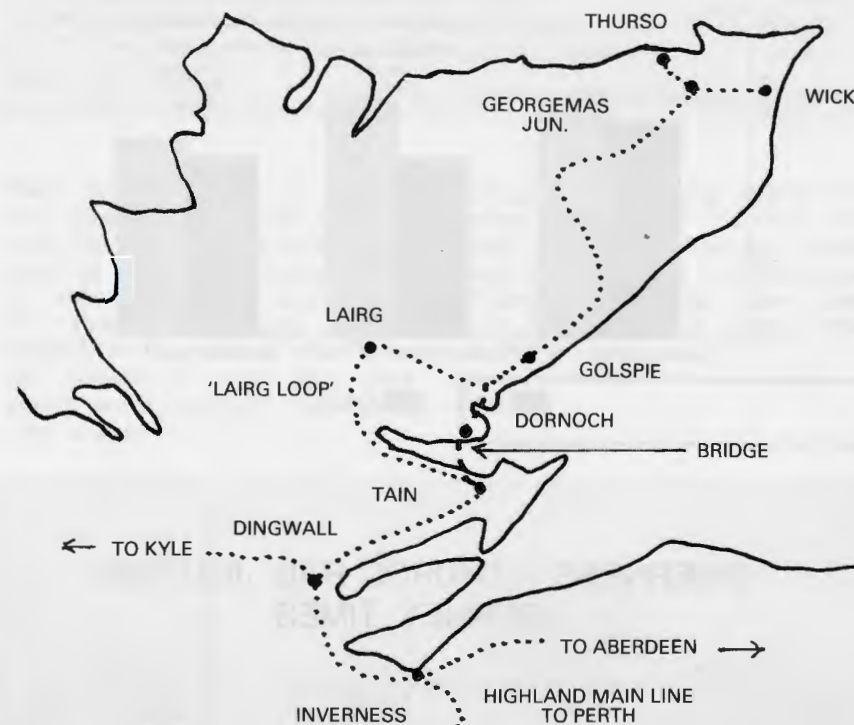
Speaking on BBC Radio Scotland in Mid December 1987, Mr John Ellis, ScotRail's general manager said: "We are talking about a total cost for the rail element of the Dornoch bridge of somewhere between twelve and fourteen million pounds. That is a very large sum of money. I accept that it was said at previous times by ScotRail that if we didn't have the Dornoch bridge then it put the future of the north line at some risk. I am bound to say that if you are campaigning hard for an issue then things of that sort can be said from time to time.

"We now see, in a more sober reappraisal of the situation, that this is the case". It would seem therefore that ScotRail's position is a very positive 'no' to the building of a rail crossing across the Dornoch Firth. This, it must be said, is a complete 'U' turn in their policy since 1984.

The project involves the building of 13 miles of new railway from near Tain in Ross-shire, north across a joint Road Rail bridge to Dornoch, then over Loch Fleet to rejoin the North Line just south of Golspie. The approach roads for the road section of the bridge are now under construction and four companies are vying for the £13M contract to construct the bridge which is due to open in 1990. If constructed, the direct rail route would almost certainly mean the closure of the 'Lairg loop' and the loss of services to Ardgay, Culrain, Invershin, Lairg and Rogart.

The road bridge and approach roads will cost in excess of £20M and are part of a £300M plan to improve the A9 road. One cannot but feel that ScotRail's change of policy on the project can only be as a direct result of Government pressure.

ROUTE OF NORTH LINE SHOWING PROPOSED BRIDGE



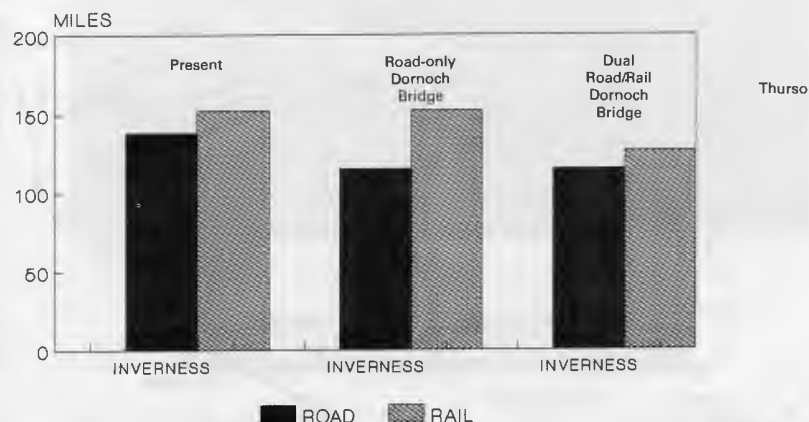
Although the new railway would cost £14M only £3M joint funding is still required. Already it has been agreed that contributions from the European Regional Development fund (£7M), The Highland Regional Council (£1M), The Highlands and Islands Development Board (£0.5M), British Rail (£1.5M) and the Scottish Office (£1M) would be forthcoming.

In 1984 ScotRail had commissioned an independent feasibility study which stated that loss of business to road upon the opening of a new

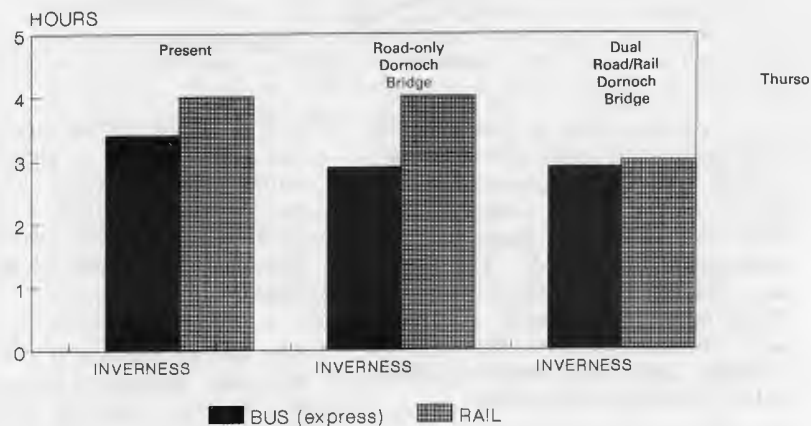
bridge would be as much as 25% and would result in closure of the north line. However should the rail bridge be built a saving of £375,000 per year would result from closure of the 40 mile 'Lairg loop'.

The loss of revenue if the bridge is not built is thought to be £120,000 p.a. Yet the Railway Development Society (Scotland) have produced some very interesting figures which show a true cost benefit in excess of £900,000 p.a.

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Figures courtesy of R.D.S. (Scotland).

RAILWAY DEVELOPMENT SOCIETY FIGURES

Operating savings from the closure of Lairg loop	400,000
30% passenger revenue protected by a new rail bridge	180,000
15% passenger revenue regained from Kessock & Cromarty road bridges	90,000
10% additional revenue gained by faster services via Lairg	60,000
10% extra revenue from opening of a new station at Dornoch	60,000
20% extra revenue and economies from Sprinter operation via Dornoch	120,000

Overall annual benefits of a rail bridge = £910,000

Much has been made of the fact that approach roads and advanced work on the bridge is being organised so that a rail crossing could be added later. It is clear though that this is meaningless as the position of the road in relation to the railway is such that they would never interfere with each other anyway.

Despite overwhelming support from many people within ScotRail, local MPs, Caithness District Council and the House of Commons own Transport Committee there seems now little chance of seeing a Dornoch Firth rail crossing.



A misty afternoon at Tain as 37 418 pilots the noon train from Wick into the station. Tain would be the last station before the bridge. (PA)