

Northern Devon Railway Development Alliance



“To secure a new rail link between Bideford and Barnstaple and upgrade of the North Devon (Tarka) Line between Exeter and Barnstaple, championing their transformational benefits for communities and businesses and advocating to decision-makers the economic, social and environmental case for developing and investing in the project.”

Event sponsored by Bideford and Barnstaple Town Councils, Tarka Rail Association and Railfuture

Statements to inaugural event on Friday 1st March 2024 in Bideford, Torridge, Devon

**Andrea Davis, Cabinet Member for Climate Change, Environment and Transport,
Devon County Council**

“My sincere apologies for not being with you today, previous diary commitments preclude me from being with you in person. I am however very much with you in spirit.

Devon County Council and Peninsula Transport are committed to decarbonising the transport system, improving connectivity and giving genuine transport choice for our residents, visitors and businesses.

In Devon we have a track record for re-opening rail links, opening stations and integrating transport modes. Improving connectivity for residents in Northern Devon, supporting new development with transport infrastructure and creating healthy, connected communities for the future is key to our future wellbeing and prosperity.

We thank you for the work done so far and look forward to working with you in the future.”

The Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey Cox KC MP, Torridge and West Devon

“Firstly, I'd like to thank all of you in this organisation. You are embarking on a very worthwhile cause. It is to my regret that existing diary commitments prohibit me from attending, as I otherwise would have done.

I support the reopening of rail communications to Torridge and West Devon wherever possible. Last year, I held an extremely informative and constructive meeting with FGWR at the old Bideford Station who advised me the extension was at the top of their list of achievable projects in the South-West.

There is substantial support in Torridge for exploring the viability and economic case for this important railway connection to Barnstaple. Housing and population growth are likely to require improved communication links in the future. Such a link would no doubt require the upgrading of the line between Barnstaple and Exeter, and that too would have incalculable benefits for Torridge.

In West Devon, the Government has recently announced that it will “fund to delivery” the Tavistock to Bere Alston railway line. I wish to see a similar success in the Torridge part of this constituency.”

Selaine Saxby MP, North Devon

My apologies for not being with you today, but I wholeheartedly support the Northern Devon Railway Development Alliance's ambition to restore the rail link between Bideford and Barnstaple, and to upgrade the existing Tarka Line between Barnstaple and Exeter.

As many of you in the local area will have seen recently following the Cedars Roundabout traffic disruption, commuting via the roads in North Devon can sometimes be difficult and frustrating.

In the summer seasons especially, the roads around North Devon and Torridge can become gridlocked from an influx of tourists coming to enjoy our beautiful beaches and countryside. Whilst we welcome and appreciate tourists and the benefits they bring to our economy, our roads often bear the brunt with an uplift in traffic that can be difficult to manage for everyone.

Therefore, the proposal to re-establish the old railway line between Barnstaple and Bideford, although not necessarily a replica of the former route, would be a huge advantage for locals and tourists alike. Providing visitors with an ease of access between the two would both encourage more tourists to come here by train, reducing the number of cars on the roads and therefore making daily commutes less stressful and erratic for locals. Students and workers will also have increased opportunities to travel safely to additional learning or employment centres, allowing more people to get involved in projects for their own personal or professional development. Improved access and reduced road traffic will reflect positively on the economic prosperity of both Barnstaple, Bideford and the wider region.

Re-establishing this rail link will be the next natural progression on upgrading the Tarka Line, increasing the number of trains and carriages particularly for the early morning journeys. Exeter, our nearest City is never getting physically closer and serves as the gateway to the national rail network with easy links to places like Bath and London, and with its own renowned universities and research centres in the city centre. An upgraded line would therefore enable students and workers to commute daily or travel beyond with greater ease and efficiency. Equally important is the likely positive effect improved access will have on the local economy. It may even encourage young professionals into Barnstaple and the surrounding area, which could serve to alleviate some of the difficulties my constituents are facing from the lack of workforce in critical industries such as dentistry and social care. Indeed, a dental practice cited concerns from prospective employees about the lack of public transport infrastructure as a reason they could not recruit.

In that regard, enhancing and extending our rail network couldn't be a more important step in our ambition to level up North Devon and enhance the Taw and Torridge economic area. I therefore offer the Alliance my full support on their ambition.

Mike Day, Tarka Rail Association Chair

My apologies once again that I could not be with you. I am so pleased to see the start of the media coverage of it. I had a long conversation with Tim (Steer) on the phone; it's truly amazing what has not only been achieved but also in the time it has been achieved. I am so very grateful for all of the many, many hours that have been put into this. We have given huge hope and fight back into a town that felt forgotten and that nothing could change it. This project will change so many lives for the better and for generations to come.