

Major step forward in creation of new Devon rail link

It's a huge moment for Devon's railway as it seeks to modernise and reach more communities

NEWS By [Lewis Clarke](#) 05:00, 10 MAR 2024

<https://www.devonlive.com/news/devon-news/major-step-forward-creation-new-9134630>



Photo of Barnstaple railway station platform 1 by Tim Steer

In the heart of Devon, where the echoes of steam engines once resonated through the rolling hills, a new dawn breaks for the Northern Devon Railway Development Alliance.

The alliance has marked a pivotal moment after launching its bid to secure a new rail link between **Bideford** and **Barnstaple** - **which has already attracted support from locals** - as well as the upgrade of the **North Devon** (Tarka) Line between **Exeter** and Barnstaple.

Thirty representatives from 13 stakeholder organisations came together to commit to develop a compelling case to be put to Government to support the reconnection of the long-marginalised Torridge community of more than 40,000 people.

This set the scene for the inaugural gathering of the new Northern Devon Railway Development Alliance at an event organised by Railfuture in Bideford's historic Royal Hotel on with the aim of reversing Beeching's Bideford closure in 1965.

Torridge & West Devon MP Sir Geoffrey Cox said in a statement: "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."

North Devon MP Selaine Saxby also issued a statement saying: "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. 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."

Devon County Council's Andrea Davis, cabinet member for climate change, environment and transport added "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."

The new Alliance's statement of purpose is "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."

Sixty years ago, these communities lost their rail lifeline. Charles Kingsley wrote 'Westward Ho!' there, Rudyard Kipling was schooled there, Winston Churchill and Dwight D. Eisenhower met there, it's home to the annual Appledore Book Festival, and 170 years since its foundation Appledore shipyard now witnesses Harland & Wolff continuing ship building there.

Three years ago, the town welcomed the return of the original name and number plates from steam locomotive 'Bideford' with the town's then Mayor quipping that what he really wanted was the return of the town's railway. The local Tarka Rail Association with its 'ACE Rail' campaign supported by national lobby group Railfuture have since been developing local support for just that, culminating in the formation of the new Alliance.