

Torridge District Council – Full Council, Monday 8th April 2024

14. Notices of Motion – 14b Written Notice of Motion from Councillor Hames

“Given this Council's support for a revival of the Bideford to Barnstaple railway link it is proposed that, in common with other local councils, we now help to further that aim by joining the North Devon Railway Development Alliance.”

Good evening, Councillors,

Firstly, may I formally thank those who attended the inaugural meeting of the Northern Devon Railway Development Alliance in Bideford on Friday 1st March and heard much about the public transport injustice that the constituents, local businesses and industries are experiencing, and which continues to drive investment down and car ownership and usage up.

Secondly, I wish to thank you for your commitments so far:

~ with a motion in June 2022 to support the extension of the railway line.

~ through adoption in December 2023 of the Strategic Plan with this addition under Local Economy - “*Investigate with the relevant partner organisations the appetite to jointly commission and fund a study to evaluate the economic and environmental benefits and impacts of re-establishing the rail link.*”;

~ and then in January 2024 agreed funding from this year’s Shared Prosperity Fund “for feasibility studies, including *Bideford railway study (to work alongside other key stakeholders).*” Further funding towards a Strategic Outline Business Case has been applied for, supported by this Council’s most welcome match funding contribution, and I will come back to this council when I have confirmation on grant funding.

The present narrative suggests that the Greater Bideford area is struggling on a social economic level that ranks the district as one of the nation’s poorest areas. Low-quality transport is one of the reasons why this story will work with and towards the Levelling Up Partnership place board. A rail link to Bideford would map a path to investment and give the Torridge district a strong model shift to sustainable transport.

One fact I will allow this room to know is that this area of Devon is now in the nation’s top 50 most congested towns and cities, and this high-car dependency is of course connected with 40% of residents that commute out of the district for work.

Finally, I hope that the motion to join the Northern Devon Railway Development Alliance by Cllr Hames is favoured by the councillors, as it was to join the ACE Rail campaign by the late great Torridge vice chair Cllr Christie. Membership of the wider Alliance of stakeholder organisations implies no more, at this early stage, than to follow through on the Council’s previous decisions to support the principle of a new rail link and the necessary investigations into the feasibility of that aspiration.

Thank-you for allowing me this opportunity.

Tim Steer, Tarka Rail Association Vice-Chair and ACE Rail campaign project lead