

Your views extra



PLEA: Cllr Tim Steer

Reopening request

I am a newly elected Fremington parish councillor for North Devon and newly elected director of Bideford Railway Heritage Centre. North Devon has been fulfilling its government obligation to housing development, however the area has no relief roads or extra public transport. The volume of road traffic is tailing back for miles between Bideford and Barnstaple, yet ever more housing is approved. I am looking at the Maunsell report that was made in 1999.

My local area needs now more than ever the Barnstaple-Bideford line to be reinstated, not only for commuters but also for tourism. Every high season the area is swamped with holiday makers.

I would like to talk to Railfuture and others on how to achieve reopening the line.

I have local parish and district councillors who would support me. Please advise me on the best way to proceed and forward my email to persons who could aid in updating the Maunsell Report.

Councillor Tim Steer
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successful in attracting visitors, but cannot run longer trains and seems reluctant to consider double tracking. I have suggested it.

We owe the NYMR and other preservation organisations an immense debt for the great job they have done.

But the NYMR is a victim of its own success. The bigger it gets, the more passengers it carries, the less it conforms to the initial aspirations of its founder members. It is a conundrum that needs to be solved.

Michael Paine, Willingham by Stow,
Gainsborough, Lincs DN21 5LD

Covid exclusion

I am concerned that, during the Covid-19 crisis, three inter-city operators have imposed reservation-only services. We have always had and must always have a walk-on railway. When motorists have to book slots on the M1 and M6 motorways, it might make sense for inter-city rail operators. Not before!

Mike Crowhurst, Station Court,
Garforth, Leeds LS25 2QQ

Lead the way

I am a member of a dozen or so railway-related organisations but I have always avoided Railfuture.

However, I read Christian Wolmar's article (*Railwatch* 167) pointing out that franchising has resulted in an expensive railway.

Railfuture should have been using the expertise of its members to formulate its own views rather than "waiting for Williams".

Richard Bowry
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Well done, Harry

Your views extra

Talk versus action

The government talks about a green agenda but its actions do not reflect its words. For example, why is the new Oxford-Cambridge rail line not being electrified?

I recently received details of a statutory consultation on widening the A12 road between junctions 19 and 25. One of the stated aims is to reduce traffic congestion but studies show that any "improvements" result in extra traffic. Little seems to be done to encourage people to use public transport. For example, at Witham railway station, signs direct passengers to the taxi rank but no signs indicate that there are two bus stops outside the station. On Sundays, mind you, there are no buses!

Roger A Smith, Station Mews, Station
Road, Witham, Essex CM8 2FP

understandable if some parts of England feel they are being unfairly treated with regard to rail investment spending but we suggest the source of these ills can be found in Westminster, and not Edinburgh and Cardiff.

Peter Kingsbury
Chair Railfuture Wales
Allison Cosgrove
Chair Railfuture Scotland

Mistaken views

Calls to reopen stations at Bow, Sampford Courtenay and North Tawton on the Okehampton line are mistaken. North Tawton station is about a mile from the village and there is no space for a decent-sized car park. Bow and Sampford Courtenay villages are both far away from their old station sites.

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Devon and Cornwall



Picture: CHRIS SAVILE/NETWORK RAIL

TRIUMPHAL HANDOVER: (from left) Network Rail's Christian Irwin, Devon County Councillor Andrea Davis, GWR's Matt Barnes and Phil Coupland of Aggregate Industries in July

Regular services from Exeter to Okehampton are expected to start later this year, following Network Rail's acquisition of 15.5 miles of the Dartmoor Railway in July.

Until then, the section from Coleford Junction to Meldon Quarry was owned by Aggregate Industries for more than 25 years, after it was sold during rail privatisation in the 1990s.

Network Rail has taken over the main platform of Okehampton station from Devon County Council. It is also upgrading six footpath level crossings with warning lights and is installing a mobile communication system.

Great Western Railway is planning to operate regular daily services to Okehampton, thanks to a grant from the government's Restore Your Railway fund in March.

Volunteers were planning to celebrate in Okehampton in early October, when the town will put up a triumphal arch of flags and flowers along with bands and

parades to celebrate the opening of the line 150 years ago – and the 2021 reopening.

The *Okehampton Times* calls the reopening the "biggest rail news for a generation in Devon". Railfuture is hoping the reopening is a step towards restoring the complete route through to Plymouth.

It would have been extremely useful for diversions when a Tesco lorry embedded itself under a rail bridge at Lipson on the existing Plymouth-Exeter line, on August bank holiday Monday, causing disruption. CrossCountry services were cancelled for five days.

Network Rail said the lorry caused huge damage to the line connecting Cornwall and south Devon, creating misery for thousands.

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Join Railfuture at www.railfuture.org.uk/join

Church bells ring out to welcome rail's No 1 comeback

Devon and Cornwall

By Gerard Duddridge

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Public service trains returned to the Exeter-Okehampton route on Saturday 20 November 2021, a gap of 49½ years since the 1972 closure, and 150 years since the original opening of the railway.

It is the first line to reopen under the government's Restoring Your Railway programme. The new service runs approximately every two hours, and during the day the 118 bus service provides a link to Okehampton town centre, and on to Lydford and Tavistock.

Both Lydford and Tavistock were each served by two rail lines, but lost their services in the 1960s. Next year the Okehampton-Exeter trains will become hourly and a bit faster after the track is improved between Coleford Junction, Yeoford and Crediton.

On opening day an enhanced timetable was run to cope with the large number of passengers. The Dartmoor Railway Association opened its museum on platform 2 and served refreshments. A free

shuttle bus ran to the town centre every half hour. Twenty miles away at Crediton, the significance of the rail reopening was recognised when the bells rang out for 20 minutes at the Crediton Parish Church of the Holy Cross.

The Okehampton reopening resulted from cooperation between the Department for Transport, Network Rail, GWR, Devon County Council, Devon and Cornwall Rail Partnership and local campaigners and MPs. The DfT said the reopening had been accelerated, delivering passenger services in only nine months from the original funding being approved. It said more lines and stations will be reopened in future.

See also:

Rail reopenings logjam: Page 5

Return to the trains

Passengers are returning to the trains in Devon and Cornwall faster than in some other areas of Britain. Passenger numbers on the Exeter-Barnstaple line were at 116% in October, compared to pre-virus levels.



REOPENING DAY: Mid-afternoon train at Okehampton

Picture: GERARD DUDDRIDGE

North East

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Waiting for extra trains

Railfuture campaigners were hoping that a promised sixth train would feature in Grand Central's Sunderland line December timetable. This was one good feature of the ill-fated LNER timetable draft for May 2022.

Boost for Ferryhill vision

Public opinion is swinging behind Durham county council's plan for a new station at Ferryhill, where the Stillington line branches off the East Coast main

can sometimes introduce too much risk into a rail journey.

Access cash for Teesside

Government funding announced in the Chancellor's autumn financial statement will allow the completion of the third platform project at Middlesbrough station and the enhancement of platforms at Hartlepool. Money was also made available for gauge clearance, particularly on the Eaglescliffe-Yarm-Northallerton section, to allow larger and longer freight trains. Railfuture