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Rail campaign pays off

England's south-west area has seen significant rail development progress since the last *Railwatch* was published in December.

Railfuture's number one regional priority – the South West Rail Resilience Programme, to secure the existing asset of a strategic route between Exeter and Plymouth via Dawlish – has continued apace. It pursues an established risk management approach of investing to reduce the chances of disruption, to reduce the impact of disruption and to reduce the time to recover from disruption. The current focus is on solutions to the problem of rockfall between Dawlish and Teignmouth.

A new station at Marsh Barton, on the Riviera line a mile south of Exeter St Thomas and part of the Devon Metro network, was nearing completion in February. Marsh Barton is one of three awarded funding in 2021. Railfuture wishes to see a fourth round of the new stations fund soon, as there are plenty of worthwhile candidates, such as Plympton between Plymouth and Ivybridge.

Dartmoor line feeder bus services increased in the autumn to include "virtual branch line" services connecting Okehampton station with Bude and Launceston. Tavistock has had a bus link since 2021. This is the kind of transport integration applauded by Railfuture.

Flying the flag

In December Great Western managing director Mark Hopwood gave leading members of the Tarka Rail Association the Christmas present of a visit to Barnstaple, where he performed the first public unveiling of the new ACE Rail campaign banner, which also bears Railfuture's logo.

Cornwall Metro

In January, levelling-up fund Round 2 support was announced for a successful *Restoring Your Railway* bid, the Cornwall Metro.

There will be nearly £50 million to create a direct train service linking Newquay, St Austell, Truro and Falmouth, alongside better walking and cycling access to stations.

Devon transport hub

In Devon, there will be £13.5 million for a new railway station on the eastern edge of Okehampton – the West Devon Transport Hub – complete with high quality cycle facilities and electric vehicle charging points. Together with the Dartmoor line reopening two years ago, Railfuture is keen to see modal shift to rail of some journeys from the nearby A30 road. Economic benefits will be generated in the area around



CLEAR MESSAGE: (from left) David Northey, freelance railway senior strategic planner and Tarka Rail Association committee member; Andrea Davis, Devon County Council cabinet member for climate change, environment and transport who is also the TRA president; Tim Steer, TRA's ACE Rail lead officer; and Mark Hopwood, Great Western Railway managing director, at Barnstaple in December. Picture: Mike Day

Bideford, following the £15.6 million investment in the Appledore clean maritime innovation centre which will research green technology.

In November, Harland & Wolff's Appledore shipyard was included as preferred bidder for a £1.6 billion contract to build three ships for the Royal Fleet Auxiliary.

If this much can be achieved with the prospect of a railway to Bideford, imagine the area's long-term economic prospects with a passenger train service actually running again and being only 60 minutes from Exeter, ACE Rail campaign's target!

Restoring Your Railway briefing

In January, Railfuture assisted Tarka Rail Association with a briefing requested by North Devon MP Selaine Saxby ahead of Torbay MP and former Rail Minister Kevin Foster's Westminster Hall debate on the *Restoring Your Railway* fund.

Her speech can be seen here:

<https://www.selainesaxby.org.uk/restoring-your-railway-fund-debate-24th-january-2023>

Railfuture banners

Two further ACE Rail campaign banners, like the one illustrated and both funded by Railfuture, have been installed at Crediton and Eggesford stations. All 12 stations along the Tarka line are getting new station news posters on their dedicated Tarka Rail Association notice boards including mention of last year's Railfuture Rail User Group Awards – a Commendation to the Association in the Paul Abell Best Newsletter category and the Oliver Lovell Gold Award for Best New Group for its ACE Rail campaign.

Tim's Talks and media success

ACE Rail project lead's "Tim's talks" have in recent months been at Connect Bude's AGM, in Devon & Cornwall Rail Partnership's revived Tarka Line Forum, at the Taw U3A

Railway Group, to Barnstaple Christ Church Community Choir, to the official Devon Rail Forum, with North Cornwall MP Scott Mann, and to a joint meeting of parish councils around Eggesford station.

Our campaign has featured on Network Rail's website, the *Cornish & Devon Post*, *Heritage Railway* magazine, *Railway Magazine*, *RAIL* magazine, in a joint letter with Railfuture in *Modern Railways*, in the winter issue of Bideford railway heritage centre's *Atlantic Coast Express* magazine, the *Lynton & Exmoor Advertiser*, in the *Crediton Courier*, and in Torridge & West Devon MP Sir Geoffrey Cox's Review of the Year column in the *North Devon Journal*. More information in the "Railway reopenings" section of the branch website:

www.railfuture.org.uk/Devon+and+Cornwall+Branch#Railway+Reopenings



RUG Awards report – by Awards organiser Roger Blake with judges co-ordinator Vice-President Stewart Palmer

Since our *Railwatch* 174 report, the judging panel of Railfuture vice-presidents has lost Adrian Shooter CBE. In his honour it is intended that the category which he oversaw in 2022, Best Website, be dedicated to his memory and named the Adrian Shooter Award.

The closing date for nominations for Railfuture's 9th Awards for Rail User Groups (and similar organisations such as local campaigns, station adopters and rail partnerships) will be Saturday 8 April 2023.

Awards and commendations for the six categories – for best new group, newsletter, website, social media, campaign, and campaigner – will be presented after Railfuture's 2023 annual general meeting, to be held in London on Saturday 15 July 2023.

Full details of all the awards and commendations from 2022 and previous years are on the Railfuture website, in *RUG Awards* under *What's on*.

The now re-named award for Railfuture Member of the Year is a separate award, and is only for individual Railfuture members. It has a different closing date – Sunday 21 May 2023.

Railfuture hails post-Beeching era

By Roger Blake

Publication of this issue of *Railwatch* marks the 60th anniversary of the Beeching Report.

It is worth remembering though that railway lines and stations had been closed long before anyone had even heard of Beeching – or Ernest Marples.

Marples was appointed Minister of Transport by "Supermac" prime minister Harold Macmillan in 1959.

Marples lasted until Supermac's successor Sir Alec Douglas Home lost the 1964 general election.

But rail closures became the order of the day with the Conservative government and the Labour administration which followed.

Richard Beeching joined the British Transport Commission in March 1961, becoming its chairman in June. He was later appointed the first chairman of the new British Railways Board from January 1963. He lasted until June 1965.

Some lines and stations did not close despite the Beeching Report recommendations that they should, and some were closed even though they were not earmarked for closure.

For six years from October 1964, the new Harold Wilson government then had four transport ministers deliberating on the individual recommendations.

In far too many cases, they implemented Beeching's closure recommendations.

Tom Fraser was there until December 1965, Barbara Castle until April 1968, Richard Marsh to October 1969, and Fred Mulley until the June 1970 general election.

For Railfuture, however, all of that matters far less than the scores of stations and track miles which have opened or been reopened over the past 60 years.

We can take 27 March 1963 as our reference point, and we can be proud that many achievements were the result of campaigning efforts of individual and affiliated Railfuture members.

Documented in Railfuture's own 2017 publication *Britain's Growing Railway* – the sixth edition of our A-Z guide – the stations tally is eight in the 1960s, 55 in the 1970s, 144 in the 1980s, 109 in the 1990s, 44 in the 2000s, and 45 in the 2010s. With Inverness Airport station opening in February 2023 we have seen 10 in the 2020s (excluding the complications of the Elizabeth line's stations).

The record of line reopenings, short chords as well as longer lines, is one in the 1960s, six in the 1970s, 26 in the 1980s, 32 in the 1990s, 20 in the 2000s, and 15 in the 2010s.

How was this amazing record of



Children plant tree to mark Inverness Airport station opening

Scottish transport minister Jenny Gilruth was joined by school children from Croy primary school to mark the opening of the new Inverness Airport rail station, which opened on 3 February. They helped plant a tree to mark the event. Ms Gilruth said: "The £42 million package provided by the Scottish government, including the station and wider rail network infrastructure investment, will build resilience and additional capacity. It will encourage inward investment and housing growth, which will support both the local and wider economies." The first train was piped into the platform

Picture: Transport Scotland

success achieved? *Railwatch* readers may recall *Connecting Communities*, the 2009 report from the Association of Train Operators.

That report was crucial because it identified the social and economic value which add to the transport benefits of rail reopenings.

Politicians and officials associated with the government's *Restoring Your Railway* programme have moved on from a focus on disconnected centres of population to embrace clusters of population.

That perspective goes some way to explaining why certain lines are seeing their projects developed and others not.

The Northumberland line will add a catchment of around 100,000 people to the passenger rail network, while for the Ivanhoe line the figure will be about twice that.

Reopening old routes which would link places which are already on the rail network, but adding no additional populations of significant size, will struggle to make their cases. Campaigners may need to be able to identify populations of 25,000 or more to be taken seriously in Whitehall. It will be a big challenge. Further

Restoring Your Railway programmes may even be re-badged to something more like *Connecting Communities*.

The purpose may well be to cultivate new markets for rail by taking the network closer to significant-sized communities.

There remain at least 24 communities of over 25,000 people which do not have rail access within five kilometres.

In west Oxfordshire, the proposed Windrush line was unsuccessful in its bid to the *Restoring Your Railway* ideas fund. But in January it attracted a Network Rail visit.

The A40 corridor through which it would run, via Eynsham/Salt Cross garden village and Witney to Carterton/RAF Brize Norton, is already a corridor of 50,000 people which, by the time the new railway is open, will have grown further.

A particular reason for Network Rail's interest is the potential, in an area of higher land values than Northumberland, to co-finance an entirely new railway.

Very little of the old railway remains, and is not best placed now. But innovative funding may

make less demand on the public purse and is therefore more likely to be of more interest to the Department for Transport and the Exchequer.

In northern Devon, the population principle also applies, with the Tarka Rail Association's ACE Rail campaign targeting "Greater Bideford" as by far the largest population cluster in the South West without ready access to rail.

Pass it on

The best way to recycle *Railwatch* is to pass it on to a friend who may be interested in railways and tempted to join Railfuture.

Eco-friendly

The see-through wrapper in which *Railwatch* is delivered by post is starch film and is 100% compostable and biodegradable.

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Top quality signs pointing to a better rail future



READY REOPENING: Richard Searight of TavyRail, Mike Moore of Connect Bude and Alan Clark of Tarka Rail Association on behalf of ACE Rail. Councillor Julie Yelland, who until May represented Okehampton South on West Devon Borough Council, holds the Christow (Teign Valley) sign *Picture: Dave Ellis*

As a show of support from the Teign Valley, station signs were made for local campaign groups and handed over at Okehampton station in April.

They could have been made less expensively, but it was thought that they carried more weight being the "real thing", made by a long-standing railway supplier, Rydon Signs in Exeter.

The firm had the British Rail contract and still supplies much of the national network.

The signs use the original double-arrow and rail red colouring. The lettering is in **Rail Alphabet** font which dates back to 1965. Subtle changes were made in 2009 when **New Rail Alphabet** font was launched. In 2020, **Rail Alphabet 2** font was adopted by Network Rail for new signage and can be seen on the recently reopened station at Marsh Barton, Exeter.

The British Rail double arrow is one of the most enduring and recognisable corporate symbols, although it has been modified for the digital age.

It was first sketched by its designer, Gerry Barney, on the back of an envelope while he was going into work on a tube train.

As Tavistock is a two-direction campaign, another sign has been ordered for OkeRail, to be kept at

Okehampton, and there will also be an Ilfracombe sign for Coombe Rail. All four stations closed after British Rail's corporate identity was established in 1965. Now that the signage is done, all they need to do is rebuild the railways.

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Editor's note:

Tavy Rail aims to reinstate Tavistock to Plymouth rail services by reopening the line from Tavistock to Bere Alston. An hourly service would complement existing Tamar Valley services from Plymouth to Gunnislake

OkeRail wants reinstatement of the Southern main line from Okehampton to Plymouth via Tavistock

Connect Bude aims to restore the railway from Okehampton to Holsworthy and Bude

Tarka Rail wants to reconnect Bideford to Barnstaple

Combe Rail exists to preserve the heritage of the Barnstaple-Ilfracombe railway, with the prospect of reinstated light and heavy rail services

More Devon and Cornwall news on page 19

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Trevithick example

Unique to Cornwall, Camborne Trevithick Day is celebrated every year in April. This year marked the 190th anniversary of the death of the inventor of the first practical steam locomotive. Following Trevithick's example, Railfuture Devon and Cornwall aims to set the agenda for rail campaign activity.

Banner repeater

Following last December's launch of the Tarka Rail Association's ACE Rail project campaign banner at Barnstaple station by GWR's MD Mark Hopwood CBE (*Railwatch* 175), Railfuture D&C funded two more which included the Railfuture logo. The banners now adorn Crediton and Eggesford stations, the places on the Tarka line where all trains have to stop in passing loops for the manual exchange of Victorian-style signal tokens.

Installation of the additional banners generated publicity in the *Crediton Courier*, the *North Devon Journal*, and *Devon Live*.

Tim's Talks

The newly Railfuture-affiliated Tarka Rail Association's ACE Rail project campaign lead Tim Steer has given presentations to parish councils along the Tarka line. The latest were at Bishop's Tawton, south of Barnstaple, and at Chittlehampton, which includes the well-used station at Umberleigh, the third-busiest intermediate station along the line after Crediton and Eggesford. Both presentations resulted in official declarations of support for the Tarka Rail Association's ACE Rail project.

OkeRail

Okehampton's Charter Hall was the venue for a May OkeRail coffee morning, also attended by TRA/ACE Rail, Tavy Rail and Connect Bude. The collaboration between north and west Devon lobby groups was inspired by the success of the Dartmoor line. In April, Okehampton station was the scene for the handover of authentic replica station signage for the use of those reopening campaigns. Generously commissioned by Colin Burges of the Exeter and Teign Valley Railway, the new station signs were manufactured by former BR signage contractor Rydon Signs of Exeter. The reverse sides of the three signs show the last days of trains at Bude, Bideford and Tavistock, using photos taken by railway photographer and author Bernard Mills.

Rail-Mindedness Index

In February, Railfuture Devon and Cornwall published updated research based on the latest estimates of station usage for 2021-22 from the Office of Rail and Road and on 2021 Census population data. The purpose was



CREDITON, BARNSTAPLE AND BIDEFORD UNITED: Town, district and county councillors, including past and present town mayors, line up at Crediton. Tarka Rail Association's ACE Rail project campaign lead Tim Steer on the right and GWR's David Whiteway (left) are holding a Railfuture-funded banner before displaying it at Crediton station in January. The train is an Exeter-bound Tarka Line service **Picture: South West News**

to develop an indicator, however approximate, of the comparative use, and under-use, of stations on lines in different areas in relation to their resident populations. Although an inexact science, it has indicated that the average use of Devon's 50 stations per head of the county's total population in 2021-22 was 12.5, or once a month. For North Devon District's five stations (all on the Tarka line) it was only 4.7. For Mid-Devon District, with seven of its eight stations on the Tarka Line (the other being Tiverton Parkway), the average was still only 7.1 station visits per local head per year.

Those figures suggest huge untapped potential – or suppressed demand – for modal shift to rail, provided that a more attractive train service can be offered. Further Railfuture research published in April showed that,

despite 2022-23 including 29 operating days when no trains ran as scheduled, the year recorded over 700,000 Tarka line journeys for the first time ever. That was 30,000 more than the previous best year 2018-19, and almost 160,000 more than the previous (partly pandemic-affected) year.

Beeching report 60 years on

Monday 27 March 2023 marked the 60th anniversary of *The Reshaping of British Railways* – a euphemism if ever there was one. Devon and Cornwall, like other predominantly rural regions of Britain, suffered grievously. ITV News West Country (South West) went to Bideford to interview Tim Steer on behalf of the Railfuture-affiliated Tarka Rail Association. He was supported by Dr Michael Ireland, chairman of last year's Judges' Special Award-winner OkeRail, and Tarka's own

strategic development adviser David Northey, formerly with Network Rail in a similar capacity.

Bigger, better railway

The government has provided £13 million levelling up funding to West Devon Borough Council to develop plans for a new parkway station and transport hub on the A30 road in east Okehampton. Exeter's new station at Marsh Barton opened in May with an hourly service, supplemented by a few extra trains in Monday to Saturday peak periods. The station was funded by the government, Great Western, Network Rail, Exeter City and Teignbridge councils, as well as the local enterprise partnership. More information in the railway reopenings section of the Railfuture branch website:

www.railfuture.org.uk/Devon+and+Cornwall+Branch



RUG Awards report – by Awards organiser Roger Blake with judges co-ordinator Vice-President Stewart Palmer

The closing date was Easter Saturday for nominations for Railfuture's ninth Awards for Rail User Groups, which include local campaigns, station adopters and rail partnerships. Eight groups across five Railfuture branch areas submitted 13 nominations. Five of the eight groups are believed to be participating in the awards for the first time. Awards and commendations for the five categories in which nominations have been received – for best website (the newly named Adrian Shooter award), newsletter (the Paul Abell award), social media, campaign, and campaigner (the

Clara Zilahi award) – have been assessed by the judging panel of Railfuture vice-presidents, under the ever-watchful eye of president Christian Wolmar. He will be presenting the certificates after the 2023 national annual general meeting in London on Saturday 15 July 2023. Winners of gold awards and the judges' special award, will make presentations after receiving their award certificates. The re-named award for Railfuture Member of the Year (previously Campaigner of the Year) is a separate award, only for individual Railfuture members. The closing date for that award was Sunday 21 May 2023. It will be presented at the AGM.

Railwatch is for Railfuture members, the rail industry and anyone interested in railways

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Signs of success

About 200 people had a chance to admire the signs (*Railwatch* 176) provided by Teign Valley when they visited the TavyRail stand at the EcoFest at Plymouth in July. Most were enthusiastic about the return of a Plymouth-Tavistock rail service.

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New members, new stations

Railfuture Devon and Cornwall has a modest membership but it is quality, not quantity which matters. Devon continues to be the agenda-setting hub of rail development campaigning activity. A warm welcome then to newly affiliated Torbay Rail User Group, and also to the chair of Heathfield Rail Link Association.

The new station at Marsh Barton opened on 4 July, more than six weeks later than *Railwatch* 176 predicted. There was also an official opening by transport secretary Mark Harper, accompanied by Andrea Davis (Devon County's cabinet member for climate change, environment and transport) and Great Western's managing director Mark Hopwood. Marsh Barton is the third new station in the Devon Metro network, launched in 2011 as part of the county council's 15-year local transport plan. Newcourt and Cranbrook opened in 2015.

Less encouraging are reports that there is a funding shortfall for the new station at Edginswell, on the Riviera line between Newton Abbot and Paignton. Part-supported by the Department for Transport's New Stations Fund, it is to be named Torquay Gateway and is quite close to Torbay hospital.

New campaign banner

A well-attended coffee morning in Okehampton's Charter Hall was hosted for local rail groups by award-winning OkeRail. Among the groups was Tavistock-based TavyRail, which is campaigning for reconnecting Tavistock with Bere Alston for services to and from Plymouth.

The Tarka Rail Association unveiled for the first time its new Railfuture-funded free-standing roller banner for the ACE Rail campaign. ACE recalls the glory days of the Atlantic Coast Express. There are plans for



MARSH BARTON OFFICIAL OPENING: The front row line-up includes transport secretary Mark Harper (second left), GWR's Mark Hopwood (right) and Devon's Andrea Davis

Picture: Great Western Railway

future such events to include newcomers such as the Heathfield Rail Link Association – which wants a mothballed freight line to Newton Abbot to be used for passenger services – and the now Railfuture-affiliated Torbay Rail User Group.

Okehampton station was shortlisted in the latest annual World Cup of Stations, held during May's community rail week, and it was the clear winner of the four in the South West Group. It lost out to a London station in the semi-finals.

Boost for Barnstaple

GW managing director Mark Hopwood made a second visit to Barnstaple to meet representatives of Railfuture-affiliated Tarka Rail Association, discuss common concerns and chart ways to fix

them. The top priority is extra capacity in some key weekday peak period trains, as growth in ridership continues unabated. In June, the Department for Transport published an updated National Rail contract for GWR, confirming its expiry in June 2028, so giving stakeholders five more years of working to secure improvements within a known framework.

Initial business case

National fortnightly *RAIL* magazine has had a recent six-page feature on the South West which included mention of GWR's contribution to an initial business case for the Tarka line upgrade and its extension to Bideford. The business case report, enabled by grants from Railfuture's fighting fund as well as GWR's customer and communities improvement fund, has been received by the client, the Tarka Rail Association. Its recommendations are under active consideration by the TRA chair and close advisers.

At the request of the Mayor of Bideford, and in the presence of Torridge and West Devon MP Sir Geoffrey Cox, the Tarka Rail Association's ACE Rail campaign lead Tim Steer presented an initial summary of some of the key findings and recommendations emerging from the initial business case. The timing was especially topical since Torridge is one of just 20 districts in the country identified by government to establish a levelling-up partnership and bid for a share of the total £400 million allocated. Railfuture is taking part in discussions about suitable bids.

A hat-trick for Devon

Railfuture's 2023 Awards for Rail User Groups saw three groups take

home half of this year's awards. The coveted Judges' Special Award went for the first time to a local authority, Devon County Council, for its leadership and record of achievement in rail development at both county and regional levels. The Tarka Rail Association scored its own mini-hat-trick, winning gold for best social media, a joint gold for best campaigner to its ACE Rail campaign lead Tim Steer, and a bronze in the best campaign category. After last year's judges' special award went to Okehampton-based OkeRail, neighbouring Dartmoor Railway Association took home a joint gold for best website this year.

In the days following the RUG Awards presentations, the local press and other coverage achieved for the trio of Devon winners was gratifyingly extensive. The county council's press release was picked up by local media in Exeter and a comprehensive *Crediton Courier* article was syndicated around four other local newspapers. Even a town council in Torridge, well away from the winners, celebrated their success. The Mayor of Barnstaple mentioned the awards in her official announcements at the start of a meeting of the full council. A liberally illustrated and extensive article appeared in the online *Devon Live* in August, and the news was spread to every one of the Tarka line's 12 stations via the TRA's station notice-boards. Details at www.railfuture.org.uk/RUG+Awards

Mid-Cornwall Metro

Railfuture Devon and Cornwall welcomes progress on the Mid-Cornwall Metro project, which is supported by the government's levelling-up fund. Specialists have been appointed to design improved pedestrian and cycle links between Penryn station (with its unique bi-directional platform and passing loop), the prestigious university campus and the picturesque town centre. Work to improve rail links between Newquay, St Austell, Truro and Falmouth will see the installation of longer platforms at the Falmouth stations. There will also be reinstatement of a second platform at Newquay and a new crossing place on the Newquay branch, bringing improved connectivity from through services and some increased service frequencies.

Under new management

Alan Clark from near Crediton is now acting as Railfuture branch secretary and is convening a virtual extraordinary general meeting on Saturday 30 September. Details of this meeting were sent out to branch members.

More information in the branch website:

www.railfuture.org.uk/Devon+and+Cornwall+Branch



RUG AWARD WINNERS: Sue Baxter, chair of Dartmoor Railway Association, left, Tarka Rail Association ACE Rail campaign lead Tim Steer and Andrea Davis, Devon Council's cabinet member for climate change, environment and transport

Picture: Paul Bromley

Railwatch is for Railfuture members, the rail industry and anyone interested in railways

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RAIL USER GROUP AWARDS

By Roger Blake
and Stewart Palmer

Railfuture's 9th Awards and Commendations for Rail User Groups (and similar organisations such as local campaigns, station adopters and rail partnerships) were presented by Railfuture president Christian Wolmar after this year's national AGM in London on Saturday 15 July.

Eight groups across five Railfuture branches – Devon & Cornwall, London & South East, Scotland, Severnside and West Midlands – had submitted 13 nominations in five of the six award categories, with five of the eight groups participating in the awards for the first time.

Winner of the 100th award/commendation since their inauguration in 2012 was the Bedwyn Trains Passenger Group in Severnside branch. The group previously won a Silver award in that first year, and a joint Gold with the Dartmoor Railway Association for the inaugural Adrian Shooter award for Best Website. Bedwyn Trains also won a Silver award for Best Campaign.

The Paul Abell award for Best Newsletter went with a Gold to the Stourbridge Line User Group in the West Midlands, also a previous Gold award winner for Best Website in 2017.

The Gold award for Best Social Media went to Devon & Cornwall's Tarka Rail Association for its Facebook and Twitter feeds and also its ACE Rail campaign's lively Facebook activity. The association also won a Bronze award for Best Campaign.

Going north of the border, the Gold award for Best Campaign went to the Rail Action Group, East of Scotland. The Clara Zilahi Gold award for Best Campaigner was

given jointly to East Sussex's Friends of Bishopstone Station's chair, Barbara Mine, and to the Tarka Rail Association's ACE Rail campaign lead, Tim Steer.

The Judges' Special Award went for the first time to a local authority, Devon County Council.

Commendations were given to Friends of Bishopstone Station for their website and social media, to Rail CargoLiner for its website, and to Tonbridge Line Commuters for their newsletter.

The awards and commendations were assessed by this year's judging panel of four Railfuture vice-presidents, under the ever-watchful eye of Christian Wolmar. Roger Ford commented: "The judging panel has always been one of my favourite events with good company and the chance to get up to speed on parts of the railway I don't usually cover."

Winners of the seven Gold awards, and Councillor Andrea Davis for Devon County Council as winner of the Judges' Special Award, all made brief presentations about their work after receiving their award certificates.

Especially gratifying this year was the extent of subsequent media coverage for some of the awards and their winners, most notably the Friends of Bishopstone Station, Devon County Council and the five awards won by the three organisations from that county.

They featured in five local newspapers and Great Torrington Town Council's online newspaper.

Full and illustrated details of all the awards and commendations from 2023, and previous years since inauguration in 2012, are on Railfuture's national website, in RUG Awards under What's on.

The 10th RUG Awards will accept nominations up to Easter Saturday next year – 30 March 2024.

journeys to Derby, but I suspect only a small minority would want to go to Sheffield, London and beyond.

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Devon memories

Congratulations to Devon County Council for its role in opening Marsh Barton station (*Railwatch* 177). The station should really have opened 70-plus years earlier when large numbers of American troops were stationed in the area during the Second World War, and an industrial estate opened after the war.

As a Devonian, I had never heard of a town or village called Newcourt or Cranbrook, which gained new stations in 2015. I strongly support the reopening of the rail line to

Bideford. It was a scandal that it ever closed. The line to Ilfracombe should be reopened too, although it might prove tricky as it would involve bridging the river Yeo in Barnstaple.

It is amusing that the branch line serving Torquay and Paignton is referred to as the Riviera line, even though it no longer serves Brixham, Churston or Dartmouth.

J Evered, Goylands Close,
Llandrindod Wells LD1 5RB
(but born in Exeter)

Editor's note: Newcourt is a suburb of Exeter which developed after the Second World War when it was an American supply depot for the Normandy landings. It is on the Exeter-Exmouth line. Building began in 2010 in greenfield land to create the new town of Cranbrook, on the Exeter-London Waterbo

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Branch revival gathers pace

Some long-overdue housekeeping has been taking place in Railfuture Devon and Cornwall since the report in October's *Railwatch* 177. The loss of an active branch secretary some years ago has now been addressed formally, with an online branch general meeting at the end of September confirming Alan Clark from mid-Devon in post to fulfil that vital role. Others who had taken part in the first branch members' online meeting back in early May were also ratified as committee members. Alan had helped to ensure that a new branch newsletter had been published before the general meeting. His email is alan.clark@railfuture.org.uk

Collaboration with local groups

It was gratifying to see representatives from a number of local user and campaign groups participating in September's regional branch general meeting – some, but not yet all, affiliated to Railfuture.

They included (in alphabetical order) ACE Rail, Connect Bude, Heathfield Rail Link Association, OkeRail, Tarka Rail Association, TavyRail and Torbay Rail Users Group, with Salisbury-Exeter Rail Users Group having to send apologies. They and others are tabulated on the Railfuture Devon and Cornwall webpage. Each group contributed a summary of its aims and activities, a basis for shared learning and future networking. Heathfield Rail Link Association, OkeRail, Connect Bude, and SERUG all had AGMs scheduled for October. Other activities for some members have included participating either in-person or online in GWR's annual community rail and stakeholder conference, this year based at Swindon's STEAM Museum.

The annual Railway Studies and Modellers Show, to be held in Newton Abbot Library, Market Street on Saturday 9 December, will provide a welcome opportunity for local groups to meet each other and spread the word among a wider audience about their campaigning activities.

Campaigns progress – 1 Tavistock-Plymouth

After very many years of hard work by an incalculable number of individuals and organisations, a political party conference speech in Manchester (rather than a proper ministerial statement in Parliament) announced the highly significant next step for what had been a successful bid to the Department for Transport's *Restoring Your Railway* ideas fund. In a letter published by Torridge and West Devon MP Sir Geoffrey Cox, rail minister Huw Merriman



BARNSTAPLE BLOOMING: The Tarka Rail Association, in collaboration with Barnstaple in Bloom, notched up another success in keeping Barnstaple station in the public eye when it won "Outstanding" in the "It's Your Neighbourhood Award" category after judges from the Royal Horticultural Society and South West in Bloom had visited. Barnstaple in Bloom also won a gold award, while the Station Master's Café was a gold winner in the business category as well. Mike Day's picture shows, left to right, Marcus Jones, Network Rail western route director, Alice and Robert of the Station Master's Café at Barnstaple station and Mark Hopwood CBE, managing director of Great Western Railway. Mark and his team were visiting the Tarka Rail Association for the third time since last December

wrote: "I am delighted to be able to confirm that the project (the reopening of the Tavistock to Plymouth line) will be funded to delivery, subject to future updates to the project business case. Funding will be provided to Network Rail to lead the next stage of work and support close collaboration with Devon County Council to progress the scheme to the required standard."

Another heartening result for the Railfuture RUG Judges' Special Award-winning county council!

For years the Peninsula Rail Group, now re-branded as TavyRail, had been campaigning for Tavistock, with a population of over 10,000, to be reconnected to the rail network at Bere Alston, only five miles away on the Tamar Valley line, from Plymouth. Most recently TavyRail held local campaign mobilising

events, first at Tavistock EcoFest in July and then at Tavistock Carnival in September.

Campaigns progress – 2 Tarka line boom

RUG Award-winning Tarka Rail Association continues to advance its activities on several fronts. It made a submission to the Office of Rail and Road on its draft determination of Network Rail's strategic business plan for the next control period, 2024-29. The association "wish to see active recognition of the dynamic growth in ridership being witnessed on the Tarka line. We observe that journeys recorded by Great Western Railway on the Tarka line continue to break all records since the current service began in 2001. In the first seven four-week periods of calendar 2023, ridership was 11.5% ahead of the comparable

period in 2019. In 2022/23 annual ridership exceeded 700,000 for the first time ever. The Tarka line may be perceived as the operator's longest branch line, but for the communities which it serves it is Northern Devon's main line." Then less than two months later the first nine four-week periods saw the half-million passenger journeys threshold passed earlier than in any other previous equivalent period.

The association's ACE Rail campaign project lead, Tim Steer, was invited by the mayor of Barnstaple to join the annual Fair Proclamation in the Guildhall to reply to "The Toast to the Prosperity of Barnstaple" proposed by the district council's head of place, property and regeneration. Later he addressed a meeting of Torridge District Council as the council considered its draft strategic plan for 2023-28, which was then launched for a public consultation. Railfuture Devon and Cornwall responded to the consultation, and Tarka Rail Association and Bideford Railway Heritage Centre were among those following suit with a similar approach.

All requested that "Support further work on developing the business case for restoring a Bideford-Barnstaple rail link, to allow the strategic economic and environmental case and the implications of reopening to be more fully evaluated" be included in the council's committed actions over the next five years.

More information on the branch website:

www.railfuture.org.uk/Devon+and+Cornwall+Branch

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TAVISTOCK-PLYMOUTH TO BE RESTORED: The good news came through after the Tavistock Carnival in September, when the Tavistock sign, featured in sign-maker Colin Burges' letter in *Railwatch* 177, was displayed and held up by TavyRail chairman Richard Searight

Picture: Nikola Haigh

Railwatch is for Railfuture members, the rail industry and anyone interested in railways