

“Why Barnstaple-Bideford, not Barnstaple-Tiverton?”

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Northern Devon Railway Development Alliance



North Devon (Tarka) Line top destinations - 2022-23

(with ORR estimates of station entries and exits)

From Barnstaple (536,940)

Exeter Central	33.00%
Digby & Sowton	17.59%
Exeter St. David's	10.72%
London Paddington	8.36%
Plymouth	3.38%
Bristol Temple Meads	2.69%
Crediton	1.47%
Umberleigh	1.45%
Eggesford	1.40%

From Crediton (133,176)

Exeter Central	38.47%
Exeter St. David's	14.89%
Okehampton	6.78%
Barnstaple	5.92%
Digby & Sowton	5.86%
Exmouth	2.86%
Yeoford	2.53%
Copplestone	2.15%
London Paddington	1.81%

North Devon (Tarka) line top destinations by Railfuture

Before the car became affordable, Barnstaple had three railway stations.

Victoria Road station was the line that ran from Barnstaple to Taunton with a stop at Morebath Junction (if you wanted to change to services for Tiverton).

The Taunton line was used until 1970 and then lay redundant until becoming redeveloped in 1988 to become the North Devon link road (A361).

Tiverton Parkway is a very well used railway station in Mid Devon, in fact, its carpark is often full which must make a lot of the car-using public anxious on arrival: this Parkway is however, not as well used as Barnstaple station.

In December 2023, the Non-ministerial Government department Office of Rail and Road published the most used and least used railway stations in Devon.

Exeter Central topped the most used station chart with 2.61 million entries and exits.

Surprisingly, Barnstaple was tenth place with 536,940 users and Tiverton Parkway came in at eleventh place with 524,190 users: lets look at why these two stations have achieved such high numbers.

For a station that is located near A roads and motorways, Tiverton Parkway is used by passengers wanting to join the rail network to London Paddington with 32.01% of station entries; the second destination is Bristol Temple Meads at 11.16%, and all the rest across the whole of Britain are each less than 10%.

By contrast the top destination station from Barnstaple is Exeter Central (at 33% of departing passengers), second-to-top is Digby & Sowton (on 17.59%), and third is Exeter St. David's (at 10.72%).

So 61.31% of all Barnstaple's departing passengers are destined for just those three Exeter stations. The City of Exeter as a whole is the final destination for 62.58% of all rail passengers leaving Barnstaple and as their final destinations, exiting the rail network not interchanging within it such as at St. David's.

There are many reasons Exeter is a top destination for the residents of North Devon and Torridge: employment, top-rated college and university facilities for students, shopping and of course the football and rugby matches.

Government schemes coming forward for re-opened or new railway lines or stations must show community population growth, regardless of historic decisions, they must serve a population cluster of at least 25,000 people to have reasonable prospects of being both viable and affordable; it's all about adding significant-sized but still disconnected communities to the rail network; joining up places which are already on the network is not part of that government plan - unless they also pick up large disconnected population clusters along the way.

The good news is the Link Road upgrade engineering works are going to improve journeys to and from Tiverton Parkway; these works are now in the final stages and the project is set to be complete this summer.

What the residents of North Devon and Torridge need now is a dedicated bus to the parkway so to ease the car capacity challenges and offer them a sustainable transport solution to go with the link road upgrade.

There was some social media discussions about restoring a rail link from Barnstaple to Tiverton: that unfortunately is a much larger scale engineering proposition than the Barnstaple to Bideford rail link project.

The old Taunton line route is largely now the Link road and it would require purchasing approximately 40 miles of new land and then the associated civil engineering works would bring this work into figures so high that a fast train from Barnstaple to Exeter that connects to Tiverton services would be a justifiable and economical alternative.