

## **Press release – June 2025**

### **Railfuture's Devon and Cornwall regional branch elects Tim Steer as its new Chair**

Tim from Barnstaple in North Devon has become well-known over the past four years as a persuasive advocate for improving, modernising and extending the North Devon (Tarka) line which runs between Barnstaple and Exeter. His work as the ACE Rail (Atlantic Coast – Exeter railway) campaign lead since mid-2021 has gained public and official recognition – and considerable media exposure – for his campaign and him as its local ambassador. It earned him Railfuture's Gold Award for Best New Group in 2022 and then the Gold Awards for Best Social Media and the coveted Campaigner of the Year for 2023.



*How it all began: Tim (2<sup>nd</sup> from left) in December 2021 when Railfuture's Roger Blake (3<sup>rd</sup> from left) and West Devon's Cllr Kev Ball (1<sup>st</sup> left) - a member of the successful OkeRail campaign - met Mayor of Bideford David Ratcliff (4<sup>th</sup> left), local councillor Peter Christie (1<sup>st</sup> right) and Bideford Railway Heritage Centre volunteers for early discussions about restoring Bideford's mainline rail services [photo credit: Rob Dark, BRHC]*

He personally initiated the ACE Rail campaign to extend North Devon line services to Bideford, in the deprived district of Torridge and the largest town in the South West without its own railway, based on upgrading the North Devon line. Tim's work has laid the foundations for the Northern Devon Railway Development Alliance, instigated in late-2023. It's a group of over two dozen partner and stakeholder organisations which has absorbed the ACE Rail campaign and with independent specialist advisers is developing strategic business cases for both the modernisation and extension of North Devon line services.

Tim, now a Rotarian, is the Chair of Friends Of Barnstaple Railway Station, which is a member of the national Community Rail Network and a local group which has been winning awards for four consecutive years for enhancing the station. He has also until recently been a director of Bideford Railway Heritage Centre, and a Vice-Chair for the former Tarka Rail Association representing North Devon line users. He now sets his award-winning work on helping other rail campaigns throughout Devon and Cornwall.

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Tim says: "I am delighted and honoured to say that I have been elected as Railfuture's Devon and Cornwall regional branch Chair, so thank you to those who nominated and seconded me, and to all members who support the campaign work that I do. Some may already know that I co-write the Devon and Cornwall page in Railfuture's quarterly house magazine *Railwatch*, and may have seen my short videos on Facebook.

"Barnstaple born and bred, and as a former Director for Bideford Railway Heritage Centre and also a Vice-Chair of the former Tarka Rail Association, I was up to now very North Devon and Torridge centric. My ACE Rail campaign which started in mid-2021 has been to upgrade the existing North Devon line so that users get a better faster service that is doubled in frequency, and then to extend the line's services to Bideford in the nationally-known deprived area of Torridge.

*Photo from reporter Lewis Clarke of 23 delegates at the NDRDA's 2<sup>nd</sup> annual convention in Barnstaple in March.*



*ACE Rail campaign lead Tim Steer is front centre with two Mayors to his right – host Janet Coates for Barnstaple Town Council then Rachel Clarke for Bideford Town Council – plus Chair of Torridge District Council Doug Bushby behind Tim's right shoulder and Mid-Devon District Council Cabinet member Steve Keable behind Tim's left shoulder. Railfuture's Policy Director Ian Brown CBE is 5<sup>th</sup> from right, Railfuture member and NDRDA strategic adviser Peter West OBE is at his right, and behind Peter's left shoulder is Railfuture's Infrastructure & Networks Director and NDRDA's Acting Convener Roger Blake. Three other delegates had to leave before the group photo was taken.*

"This work is now being taken forward by the Northern Devon Railway Development Alliance that I helped initiate in late-December 2023. The professionally-drafted business cases will prove that building a better railway for the area will improve community prosperity and help lead the area out of deprivation. What the Bideford line will look like and where exactly it will go is now in the hands of independent specialist advisers and representatives of over two dozen partner and stakeholder organisations in the still-growing Alliance.

"I've also set up the Friends Of Barnstaple Railway Station (FOBRS), a member of the national Community Rail Network, and I will continue the award-winning work to enhance the station as their Chair as well.

"As new Chair for Devon & Cornwall, I will now look at all rail campaigns across the region and am ready to support them. In addition I want Railfuture's membership to grow so that it represents students, parents, employers and their employees, patients and other rail users, future as well as existing. I will represent Cornwall as well as Devon and help passenger and freight campaigns get through the national Transport Appraisal Guidance and other processes to become new regional campaigns that the public and their elected representatives can get behind. For too long, I feel, railways campaigns have often been seen as the sole preserve of train enthusiasts, so instead my emphasis will be actively campaigning to represent the wider public who already use and want to use the railway.

"Please inform other rail user and campaign groups and potential members so I can represent them too."

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