



It's been a very active six months since issue no.106, so much so that the 'ACE Rail' tab on the Centre's website has needed to be updated! Thanks to Railfuture's national Infrastructure & Networks Director Roger Blake, who is also Acting Convener of the newly-formed Northern Devon Railway Development Alliance (NDRDA) which absorbed the ACE Rail campaign in late-2023, for supplying the material and to the Centre's Clive Fairchild for making the website changes.

Our activities in continuing to develop the ACE Rail campaign under the auspices of the Alliance can perhaps be grouped under different themes, to illustrate the breadth of what's involved. Full details can be found in Railfuture's website here: <https://www.railfuture.org.uk/Bideford-and-Barnstaple-to-Exeter> and in the form of a campaign diary via the link at the end of that page.

Parliamentary: In December the new MP for Exeter Steve Race initiated a Westminster Hall debate about rail services in Devon. He mentioned a briefing which he'd had from two of the Alliance's advisers, and the new MP for North Devon Ian Roome was then among the contributors; both are now recorded for posterity in Hansard! This level of profile for the proposed modernisation and extension of the North Devon Line is immensely valuable for the campaign.

Local support: The NDRDA now has over two dozen partner and stakeholder organisations, thanks in part to seven more Parish Councils along the North Devon Line joining in recent months. They are Chittlehamholt Satterleigh & Warkleigh, King's Nympton, Chulmleigh, Lapford, Burrington, Chawleigh, and Bishop's Tawton. Tawstock Parish Council has reiterated: *"The support to the re-installment of the Bideford to Barnstaple rail link for passengers and other services, as proposed by ACE Rail and that it be included the policy aim within the revised joint local plan be re-affirmed."*

Community and stakeholder engagement: As the Alliance's 'local ambassador' I have given two more presentations about its work, one to Westward Ho! Ladies Club and another to Rotary Club of Barnstaple Link. The main event has been the second annual convention of the NDRDA, held in Barnstaple with over two dozen representatives of partner and stakeholder organisations present and the first to witness the new campaign banner (below). After introductory welcomes by Barnstaple Mayor Janet Coates and by GWR's Managing Director Mark Hopwood CBE by video, presentations covered the next Devon & Torbay Local Transport Plan and Peninsula Transport's first Strategic Implementation Plan, the development of draft Strategic Outline Business Cases for the modernisation and the Bideford extension of the North Devon Line, Network Rail's draft plans to modernise the line for twice-hourly services and shorter journey times, an independent professional Economic Case for the Bideford extension and by Navantia UK as new owners of the Appledore shipyard on the importance of better transport links for their business growth.

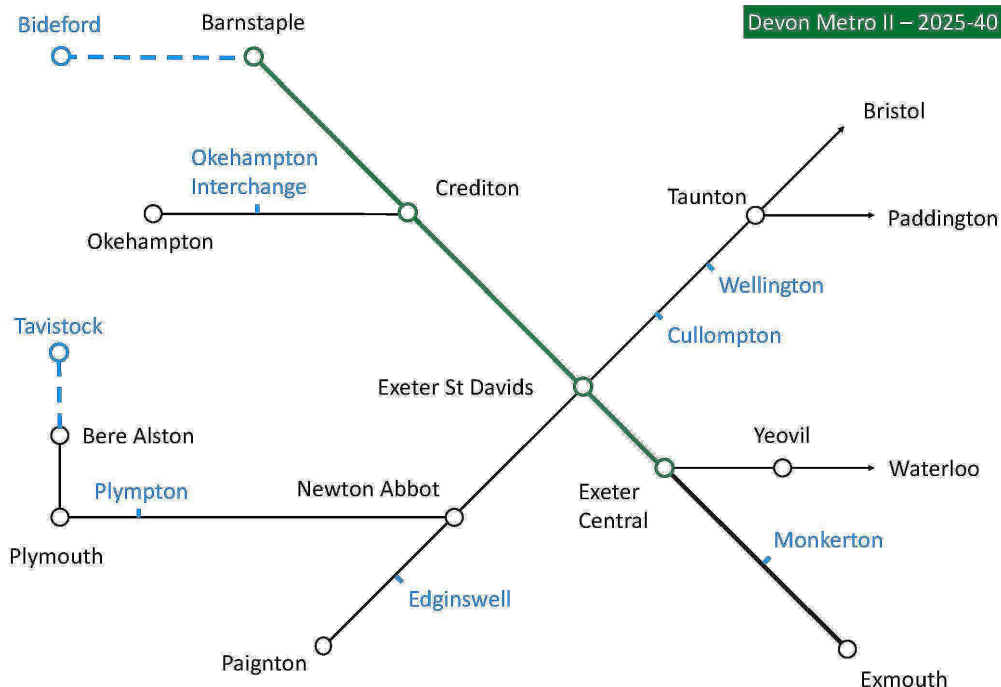
Northern Devon Railway Development Alliance

Modernising the North Devon (Tarka) Line - fit for the 21st Century

Find out more, then register your support:



www.railfuture.org.uk/Devon-Metro



ACE Rail: Reconnecting Bideford to the rail network

railfuture

Campaigning for a bigger better railway

The new banner unveiled at the NDRDA's second annual convention in March 2025

Transport policy: Railfuture's Devon & Cornwall regional branch, of which the ACE Rail campaign is an affiliated member, has made two consultation responses to draft transport policy plans and then seen them formally adopted. One was for the draft Devon & Torbay Local Transport Plan 2025-40 which Devon County Council's Cabinet has since endorsed, subject to some essential minor amendments prompted by Railfuture on behalf of the NDRDA to ensure inclusion of the Bideford extension from Barnstaple. The other was Peninsula Transport's draft Strategic Implementation Plan which the Peninsula Transport Board has adopted and which also includes the Bideford extension from Barnstaple.

Evidence: There have been four key data sets. The Global Traffic Scorecard for 2024 shows Barnstaple as one of only three places in the whole South West peninsula with chronic traffic congestion (Exeter and Plymouth being the other two) – which by implication a new rail link between the two towns could help to alleviate. Railfuture published data for journeys in calendar year 2024 on the North Devon Line which showed a near 12% increase over 2023, and then published data for journeys on the North Devon Line in 2024-25 showing a second consecutive annual increase of 11%. One of the presentations at the NDRDA's Barnstaple event included the first independent professional assessment of the annual use of Bideford station in a notional 2030, with no more housing growth than already in the current Local Plan to 2031; at 458k it would be only slightly less busy than Torquay in 2023/24, and only 10% of users would be abstracted from Barnstaple and Umberleigh so 90% of Bideford station users would be 'new to rail.'

Media: There has been one radio interview, one press release, and five press stories. BRHC member and NDRDA Acting Convener Roger Blake was interviewed by BBC Radio Devon on New Year's Day, and the Secretary of Railfuture's Devon & Cornwall regional branch was quoted in a Devon Live article *"Next steps in hugely ambitious Devon rail revival"* and again in a North Devon Journal article *"Rail campaign continues focus on dual goal for line improvements."* Railfuture's Devon & Cornwall regional branch issued a press release ahead of the second annual convention of the NDRDA to be held in Barnstaple captioned *"Making the North Devon Line a 21st-century railway"* and the North Devon Gazette immediately reported *"Alliance meets to plan future of North Devon rail line."* Devon Live then had an article *"Calls to bring back historic Devon railway station"* referring to Bideford, which was later officially reported to be the most-viewed Devon Live article in April! A North Devon Journal then had its front-page with a photo of people gathered for the NDRDA convention (below) and inside article *"Full speed ahead for railway line improvements."*

By Tim Steer, with Roger Blake from Railfuture

