

Northern Devon Railway Development Alliance
3 September 2025

Extending Barnstaple Train Services to Bideford

Preliminary Strategic Business Case: Some Key Points

Peter West OBE

3 September 2025

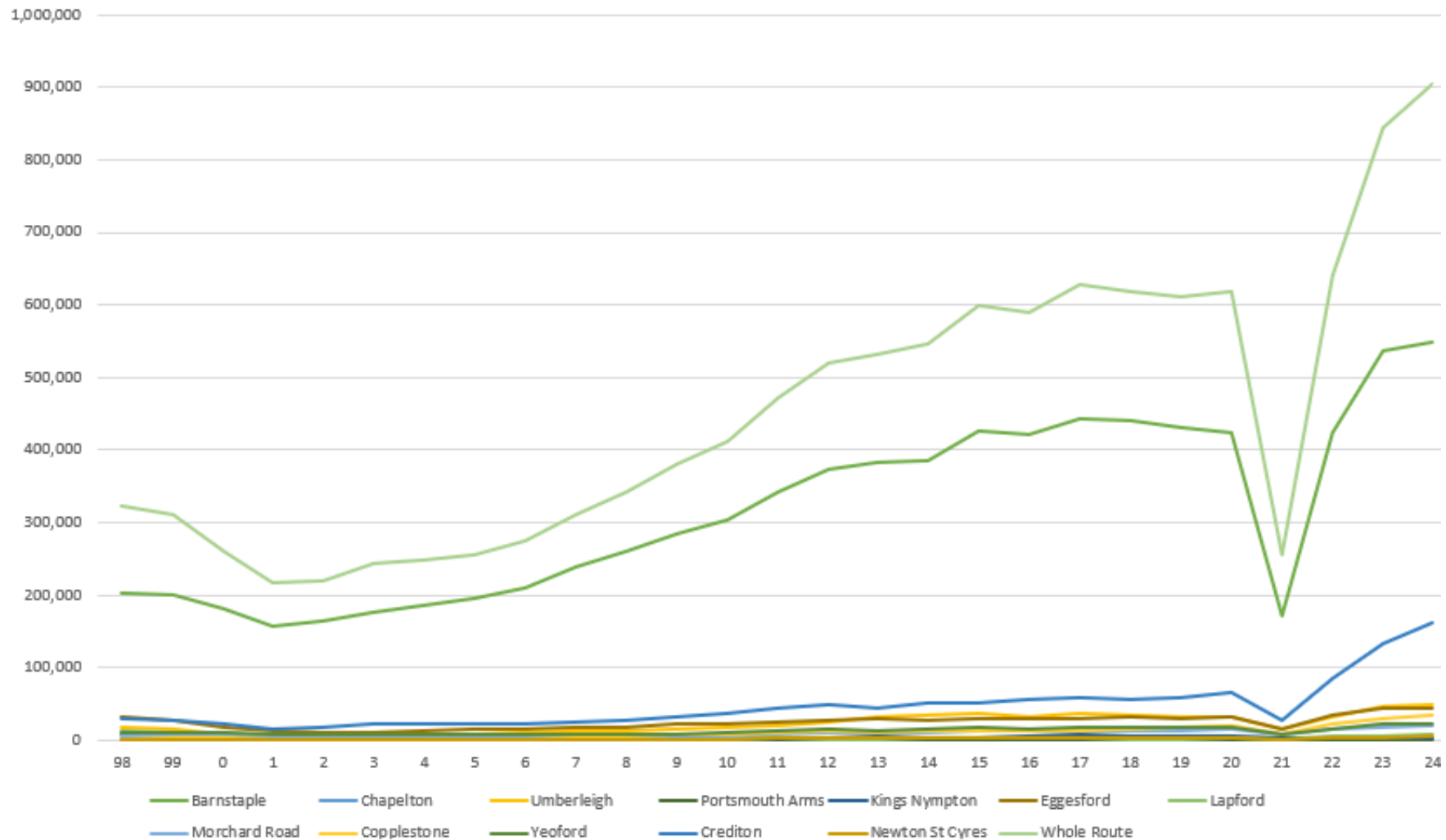
Progress Since March 2024

- Barnstaple line usage continues strong growth, far above pre-COVID levels, bucking national trend
- Network Rail has completed its initial development work on Barnstaple line modernisation
- GWR has acquired 26 100 mph Class 175 diesel trains, including for use on the Barnstaple line
- GWR continues to work on a longer-term replacement for its South West diesel train fleet - DfT has said it will be considered as part of a wider procurement with SWR and Chiltern
- New rail schemes in Devon continue, with Okehampton Interchange new station under construction
- Preliminary business case work for the Bideford train service reinstatement and the Barnstaple line modernisation schemes suggests both have strong strategic cases
- The *Devon and Torbay Local Transport Plan 4* adopted in July 2025 includes both the Bideford train service extension and two trains per hour Exeter – Barnstaple services
- Peninsula Transport's *Strategic Implementation Plan 2025-2050* adopted in May 2025 includes both schemes among the priorities listed
- SLC Rail's Bideford extension economic / engineering study is complete

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Exeter – Barnstaple Line Modernisation – Rail Usage

Station Usage: ORR Statistics - Barnstaple Line Stations



The chart displays the number of council tax bands A and B properties in 11 Dorset districts from 1998 to 2024. The Y-axis represents the number of properties, ranging from 0 to 180,000. The X-axis represents the year. The districts are: Chapelton, Umberleigh, Portsmouth Arms, Kings Nympton, Eggesford, Lapford, Morchard Road, Coplestone, Yeoford, Crediton, and Newton St Cyres. Chapelton shows a significant increase, peaking around 160,000 in 2024. Umberleigh and Eggesford also show increases, reaching around 40,000 and 45,000 respectively by 2024. Most other districts remain relatively stable, with values generally below 20,000.

Year	Chapelton	Umberleigh	Portsmouth Arms	Kings Nympton	Eggesford	Lapford	Morchard Road	Coplestone	Yeoford	Crediton	Newton St Cyres
98	30,000	18,000	10,000	5,000	32,000	15,000	2,000	1,000	10,000	5,000	1,000
99	28,000	15,000	10,000	5,000	28,000	12,000	2,000	1,000	10,000	5,000	1,000
0	25,000	10,000	8,000	5,000	20,000	10,000	2,000	1,000	8,000	5,000	1,000
1	15,000	5,000	8,000	5,000	12,000	8,000	2,000	1,000	8,000	5,000	1,000
2	18,000	5,000	8,000	5,000	10,000	8,000	2,000	1,000	8,000	5,000	1,000
3	22,000	5,000	8,000	5,000	12,000	8,000	2,000	1,000	8,000	5,000	1,000
4	22,000	5,000	8,000	5,000	12,000	8,000	2,000	1,000	8,000	5,000	1,000
5	22,000	8,000	8,000	5,000	15,000	8,000	2,000	1,000	8,000	5,000	1,000
6	22,000	10,000	8,000	5,000	18,000	8,000	2,000	1,000	8,000	5,000	1,000
7	24,000	12,000	8,000	5,000	20,000	8,000	2,000	1,000	8,000	5,000	1,000
8	28,000	15,000	8,000	5,000	20,000	8,000	2,000	1,000	8,000	5,000	1,000
9	32,000	18,000	8,000	5,000	22,000	8,000	2,000	1,000	8,000	5,000	1,000
10	38,000	20,000	8,000	5,000	22,000	8,000	2,000	1,000	8,000	5,000	1,000
11	45,000	25,000	8,000	5,000	25,000	8,000	2,000	1,000	8,000	5,000	1,000
12	48,000	28,000	8,000	5,000	28,000	8,000	2,000	1,000	8,000	5,000	1,000
13	42,000	30,000	8,000	5,000	28,000	8,000	2,000	1,000	8,000	5,000	1,000
14	50,000	35,000	8,000	5,000	25,000	8,000	2,000	1,000	8,000	5,000	1,000
15	52,000	38,000	8,000	5,000	28,000	8,000	2,000	1,000	8,000	5,000	1,000
16	55,000	32,000	8,000	5,000	28,000	8,000	2,000	1,000	8,000	5,000	1,000
17	58,000	38,000	8,000	5,000	28,000	8,000	2,000	1,000	8,000	5,000	1,000
18	55,000	35,000	8,000	5,000	32,000	8,000	2,000	1,000	8,000	5,000	1,000
19	58,000	32,000	8,000	5,000	30,000	8,000	2,000	1,000	8,000	5,000	1,000
20	65,000	32,000	8,000	5,000	32,000	8,000	2,000	1,000	8,000	5,000	1,000
21	25,000	10,000	8,000	5,000	15,000	8,000	2,000	1,000	8,000	5,000	1,000
22	85,000	22,000	8,000	5,000	35,000	8,000	2,000	1,000	8,000	5,000	1,000
23	135,000	30,000	8,000	5,000	42,000	8,000	2,000	1,000	8,000		

Potential Levels of Passenger Usage at Bideford

- SLC Rail's calculations suggest Bideford would be no sleepy country branch line
- The strongest usage scenario could see Bideford usage between St Ives and Digby & Sowton, higher than Okehampton and comparable to Clacton-on-Sea in Essex
- Even the lower usage scenarios place Bideford well up the usage league table
- A key conclusion is that the existing Barnstaple line would need to be able to offer very considerably more capacity than now in order to cope with this level of usage
- That conclusion is reinforced by the likely continuing strong growth on the Barnstaple line and the fact that many trains are crowded already

“Borders Railway breathing new life into local economies”

 31 August 2018

The Herald Summary

“It’s nearly three years since the line opened, and already independent research has shown that the route is a major factor in attracting residents, workers and tourists.”

“Led by public sector agencies, and working with the private sector, the Blueprint group is aiming to maximise the economic and social benefits of the railway.”

Fast Facts from the Article

- “71% of tourists chose to visit the region as a result of the railway line”
- “25% of tourists said they would not have made the trip had the line not been in place”
- “17% of people have moved house since the re-opening of the line with 58% saying the reopening of the line was a factor in their decision”
- “29% of people who moved house said that they would not have moved to their current address in the absence of the railway”
- “52% of people who have moved employment said the re-opening of the line had been a factor in their decision”

“Borders Railway breathing new life into local economies”

The Herald 31 August 2018

Quotes from Owners of Borders Start-Ups

“Andy Drane, partner at Edinburgh-based legal firm Davidson Chalmers ... said: “With so many SMEs in the Scottish Borders and so much potential for growth, the decision to open in the region was easy once we knew that the line was opening. As well as being better-able to service our existing clients and saving travel time for our staff, we have been instructed by several other Borders-based businesses who would not otherwise have chosen us if we hadn’t had a presence.”

“Lynn Mann, owner of SuperNature Oils says the railway was significant in helping to establish and grow her business.”

Quotes from Owners of Growing Borders Companies

“Giles Etherington, owner of Brand Satellite, a brand consultancy based in Melrose, says the line has made it easy to travel for business meetings, with the added bonus that work can be done on the train.”

“Husband and wife team Annika and Gavin Meiklejohn of craft beer brand Tempest Brewing Co said being a six minute walk from Tweedbank Station has helped them to attract staff from the Central Belt that wouldn’t have considered the company previously due to its location.”

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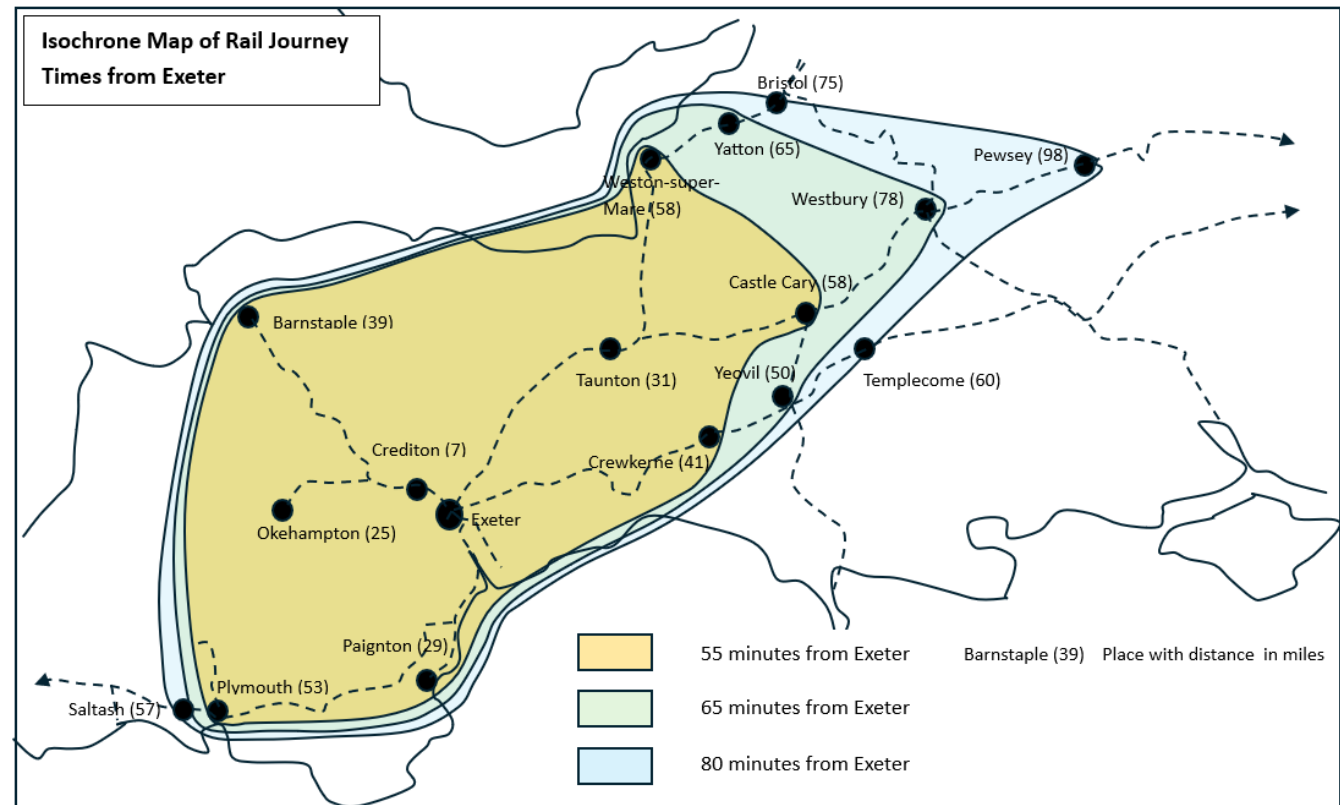
Sample Bideford – Exeter Timetables

BIDEFORD AND BARNSTAPLE TO EXETER																				
Notes																FX	FO	FX		
MONDAYS TO FRIDAYS	Bideford	d	0609	0706	0819	0919	1019	1119	1219	1319	1419	1519	1615	1717	1822	1926	2025	2025	2125	2215
	Instow	d	0613	0710	0823	0923	1023	1123	1223	1323	1423	1523	1619	1721	1826	1930	2029	2029	2129	2229
	Barnstaple	a	0624	0721	0834	0934	1034	1134	1234	1334	1434	1534	1630	1732	1837	1941	2040	2040	2140	2240
	Barnstaple	d	0625	0722	0835	0935	1035	1135	1235	1335	1435	1535	1631	1733	1838	1942	2041	2041	2141	2241
	Exeter St Davids	a	0730	0835	0943	1041	1141	1240	1341	1441	1541	1640	1743	1851	1946	2053	2153	2157	2251	2243
	Exeter Central	a	0735	0839	0947	1045	1145	1245	1346	1446	1545	1645	1751	1856	1951	PGN	-	2202	-	-

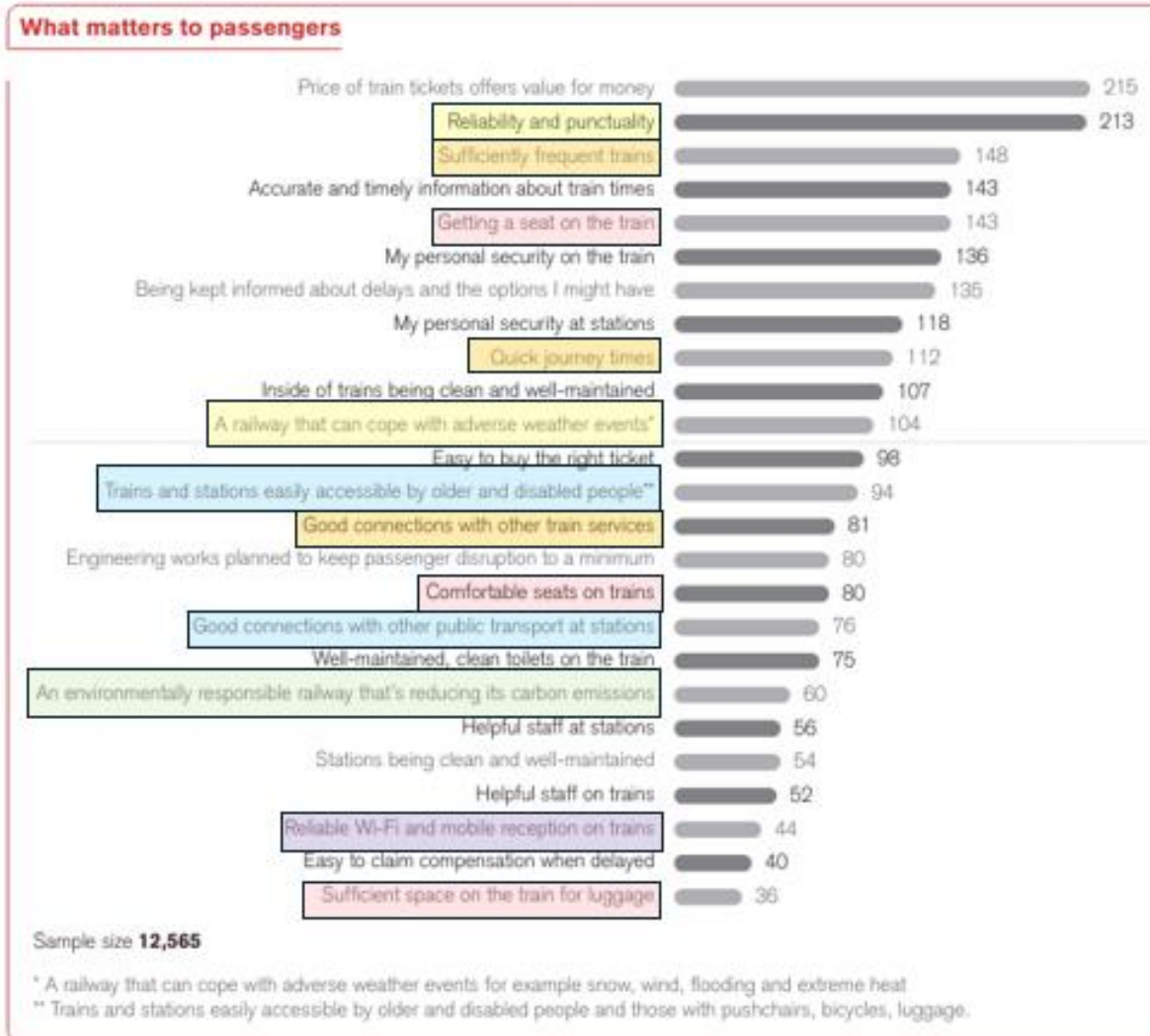
EXETER TO BARNSTAPLE AND BIDEFORD																				
Notes																		EXM	FO	
MONDAYS TO FRIDAYS	Exeter Central	d	-	-	-	0804	0914	1014	1114	1214	1312	1414	1514	1613	1715	1815	1917	2019	2122	2250
	Exeter St Davids	d	0522	0612	0707	0810	0919	1019	1119	1219	1319	1419	1519	1618	1719	1821	1922	2023	2127	2255
	Barnstaple	a	0619	0717	0825	0928	1028	1125	1225	1328	1427	1525	1625	1728	1833	1931	2032	2133	2237	0004
	Barnstaple	d	0622	0720	0828	0931	1031	1128	1228	1331	1430	1528	1628	1731	1836	1934	2035	2136	2240	0007
	Instow	a	0633	0731	0839	0942	1042	1139	1239	1342	1441	1539	1639	1742	1847	1945	2046	2147	2251	0018
	Bideford	a	0637	0735	0843	0946	1046	1143	1243	1346	1445	1543	1643	1746	1851	1949	2050	2151	2255	0022

Exeter – Barnstaple Line Modernisation - Journey Time

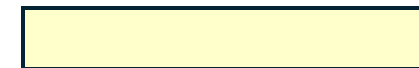
- Exeter St Davids to Barnstaple is 39¼ miles by rail
- Slowest: 1 hour 20 minutes (29 mph)
- Typical: 1 hour 6 minutes (36 mph)
- Fastest: 55 minutes (43 mph)



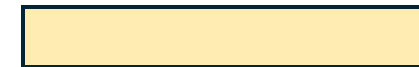
Passenger Priorities



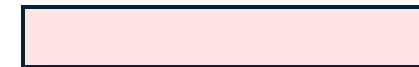
Transport Focus Research



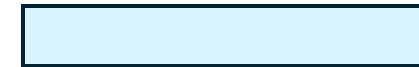
Punctuality - reliability



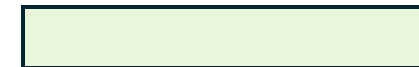
Frequency - journey times



Capacity - comfort



Accessibility



Environmental



Digital: wi-fi, mobile connectivity

Are Rail Investment Schemes Financially Realistic?

- Northumberland Line: £299m to reinstate train services on an 18-mile upgraded freight line with 6 stations, train services started December 2024, with some stations later (Northumberland County Council)
- Leven Line: £117m to reinstate train services on six miles of double track and two new stations, with an hourly Edinburgh – Leven train service on a former freight line, started on 2 June 2024 (Transport Scotland)
- Mid Cornwall Metro: £57m for modernising the Par to Newquay line with an hourly through train service to Falmouth via Truro, a second platform at Newquay - implemented in phases (Cornwall Council)
- Cambridge South station: £93m for a third station in Cambridge serving a large science park, with four platforms, additional and road layout alterations, due to open in 2025 (Network Rail)
- Beaulieu Park station: £160m for a second station in Chelmsford, with 3 platforms, 700 parking spaces, 500 cycle spaces, due to open in 2025 (Essex County/Chelmsford City Councils, private developers)
- Portishead Line: £182m to reinstate Bristol to Portishead train services, with two new stations, three miles of new track and upgrading an existing freight line including a new double track passing place, planned to open 2027 (West of England Combined Authority)

Bideford Train Service Reinstatement - Draft Objectives

- 1) Improve socio-economic conditions in the Bideford and wider Torridge areas by reducing the negative impacts of peripherality, assisting in lifting productivity, prosperity and local economic growth
- 2) Add low-carbon capacity, choice, resilience and reliability to the area's transport network to contribute towards decarbonising transport on the Torridge / North Devon - Exeter corridor
- 3) Enable rail and more sustainable active and public transport modes to take an increased share of overall transport demand, supporting and mitigating the impacts of current and expected future demand growth, including where driven by increasing local population and planned housing expansion
- 4) Enhance access to employment opportunities, education and healthcare in Exeter and beyond for Bideford and Torridge residents and facilitate access to 'hard-to-recruit' jobs in Bideford and Torridge for people outside these areas
- 5) Improve visitor access by sustainable public transport to the natural environment, including the Tarka Trail, the South West Coast Path, the North Devon National Landscape and other coastal areas