Devon Metro Strategic Narrative and Vision



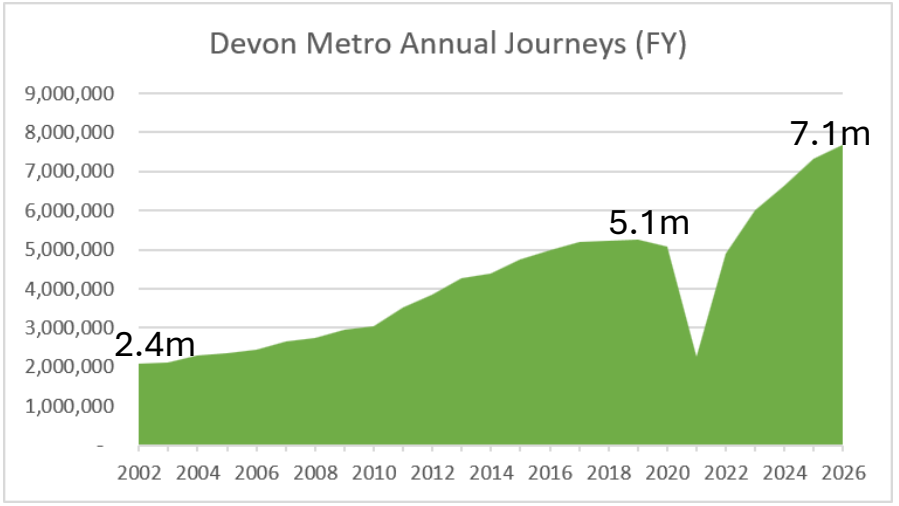


Northern Devon Railway Development Alliance Autumn Workshop

9 November 2026

Context: A strong ‘track’ record of delivery

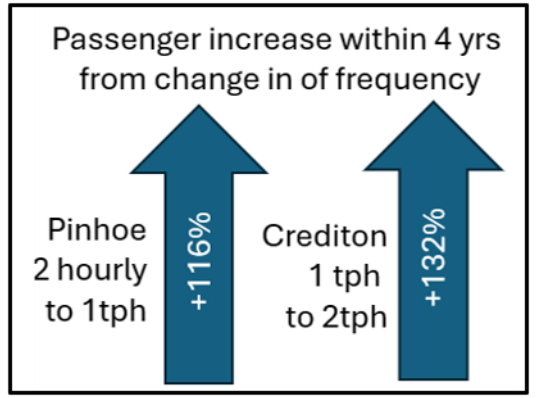
- 5 stations (re-)opened since 2015
  - Links to new development
  - Access to employment
  - Removing trips from Strategic Road Network
- Partnership working to deliver integrated transport schemes
- Very strong post-COVID recovery
- Very strong patronage growth following service improvements











Devon and Torbay Local Transport Plan 4

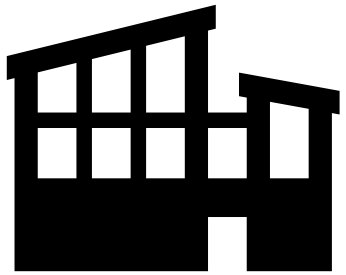
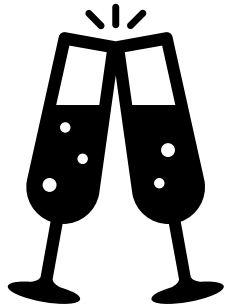
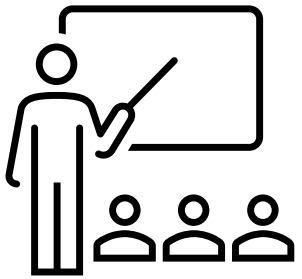


10 - EXETER ACTION PLAN

OBJECTIVE	THEME	MEASURE
Easier Travel	Devon Metro	Half hourly rail frequency to East Devon towns on Waterloo line.
Easier Travel	Devon Metro	Half hourly rail frequency to Barnstaple.
Easier Travel	Devon Metro	15-minute service frequency to Digby & Sowton/Newcourt
Easier Travel	Devon Metro	Safeguard land and investigate delivery of Monkerton railway station

Overarching narrative for Devon Metro

Connecting existing communities and future growth areas across Devon, including Barnstaple, Greater Exeter, and Marlcombe new town, with cross-city rail services playing a central role in linking housing, education, employment and leisure destinations.


Now One train per hour → **Future** Every 30 minutes

North Devon Line

Strengthening the North Devon to Exeter rail link to improve access to education, healthcare, jobs and leisure opportunities, with journey times under one hour.

Now One train per hour → **Future** Every 30 minutes

East Devon Line

Enhance rail connectivity by introducing a local service between East Devon and Exeter, supporting growth through improved access to employment, education and leisure opportunities.

Now Every 30 minutes → **Future** Every 15 minutes Exeter-D&S and direct Barnstaple to D&S service

Avocet Line

Delivering a turn-up-and-go service for Exeter, supporting its role as a regional centre and enhancing rail connectivity to key destinations outside the city centre.

Based on ***Devon Metro Strategic Narrative*** (WSP, August 2026)

North Devon Line

Narrative: Strengthening the North Devon to Exeter rail link to improve access to education, healthcare, jobs and leisure opportunities, with Barnstaple – Exeter journey times under one hour.

Aims

- **Doubling service frequency** from one to two trains per hour
- **Cross-Exeter links** to Digby & Sowton
- Barnstaple to Exeter **within an hour**'s rail journey time
- Meeting the current and future **passenger demand**

Outcomes and benefits

Better access to employment opportunities

- Connecting North Devon residents to skilled jobs elsewhere in Devon
- Boosting economic opportunity in North Devon

Opportunities for young people

- Improving access to Exeter College and the University of Exeter
- Improving access to North Devon College
- Enabling young people to participate in a wider range of extracurricular opportunities

Access to leisure and tourism

- Supporting sustainable tourism
- Enabling Exeter evening and nighttime economy
- Enhancing access to North Devon's beaches and attractions

Improved access to healthcare

- Strengthening access to RD&E Hospital
- Removing transport barriers to accessing healthcare
- Better access to clinical education centres in Exeter and Plymouth

Improved resilience and reliability

- Tackling crowding and improving the passenger experience
- Additional infrastructure to improve resilience when issues arise
- Restoring confidence in travel by rail

Based on ***Devon Metro Strategic Narrative*** (WSP, August 2026)

East Devon Line

Narrative: Enhance rail connectivity by introducing a local service between East Devon and Exeter, supporting growth through improved access to employment, education and leisure opportunities.

Aims

- Introduce an **Exeter-Axminster shuttle** every hour (potentially extending to Okehampton)
- **Two trains per hour** between Exeter and Axminster (with existing Exeter – London Waterloo service)

Outcomes and benefits

Reducing congestion and enabling modal shift

- Enabling those that can travel by rail to do so, and reducing pressure on the roads for those who can't
- Creating well-connected new developments at settlements along the rail line

Unlocking skills and economic development

- Improving access to existing and potential employment across East Devon and Exeter
- Better connectivity to key employment centres, including Exeter Science Park and SkyPark.

Removing barriers to education

- Ensuring young people across East Devon can access Exeter College
- Enabling young people to participate in a wider range of extracurricular opportunities within Exeter

Access to Devon's beaches and entertainment

- East Devon residents can access Exeter's evening and nighttime economy
- Enhancing public transport access to coastal areas including Sidmouth and Seaton through integrated rail and bus links

Protecting local rail journeys from issues elsewhere

- Ability to continue running Exeter – Axminster services in event of disruption further east
- Restoring confidence in travel by rail

Based on ***Devon Metro Strategic Narrative*** (WSP, August 2026)

Avocet Line

Narrative: A turn-up-and-go service for Exeter, supporting its role as a regional centre and enhancing rail connectivity to key destinations outside the city centre.

Aims

- **Double the frequency from two to four trains per hour between Exeter St Davids and Digby & Sowton**
- Create a '**turn-up-and-go'** service across Exeter city centre
- Direct onward services to **Mid and North Devon**

Outcomes and benefits

Metro-style service across Exeter

- Improved rail service frequency to key employment destinations, particularly Sowton Industrial Estate
- Increased rail frequency across the city supports delivery of 13,000–14,000 new homes in Exeter

Relieve pressure on the highway network

- Enabling those that can travel by rail to do so, and reducing pressure on the roads for those who can't
- Rail investment unlocks sustainable growth of new developments

Improving capacity for travel to Sandy Park

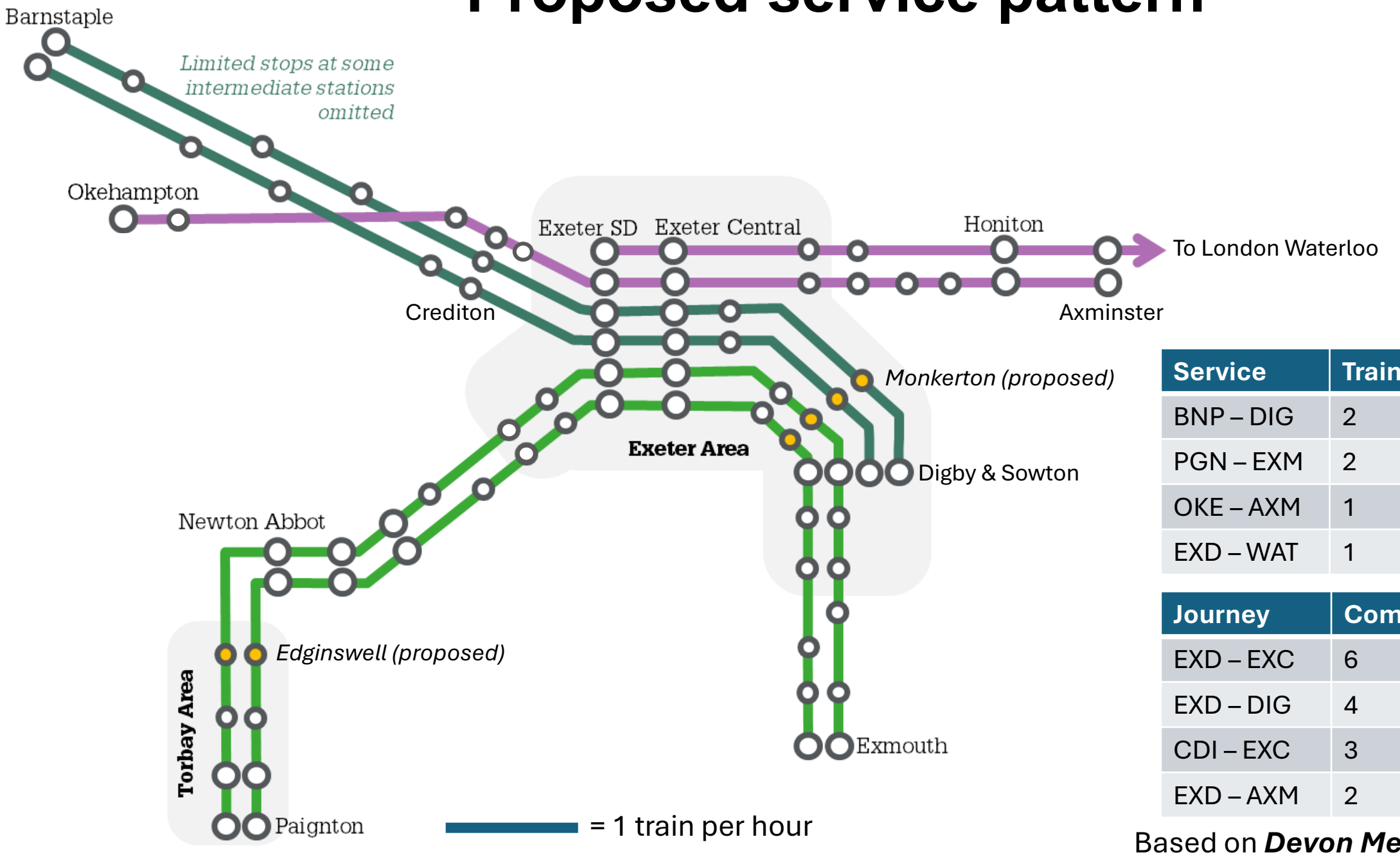
- Reduce overcrowding on event days at Sandy Park
- Makes the railway work better for communities close to Digby & Sowton station
- Ensuring more journeys can be made by public transport with improved connections

Digby & Sowton as a key rail gateway for Marlcombe

- Connecting the new town to the rail network via a high-frequency bus link
- New local developments can be delivered more sustainably

Based on ***Devon Metro Strategic Narrative*** (WSP, August 2026)

Proposed service pattern



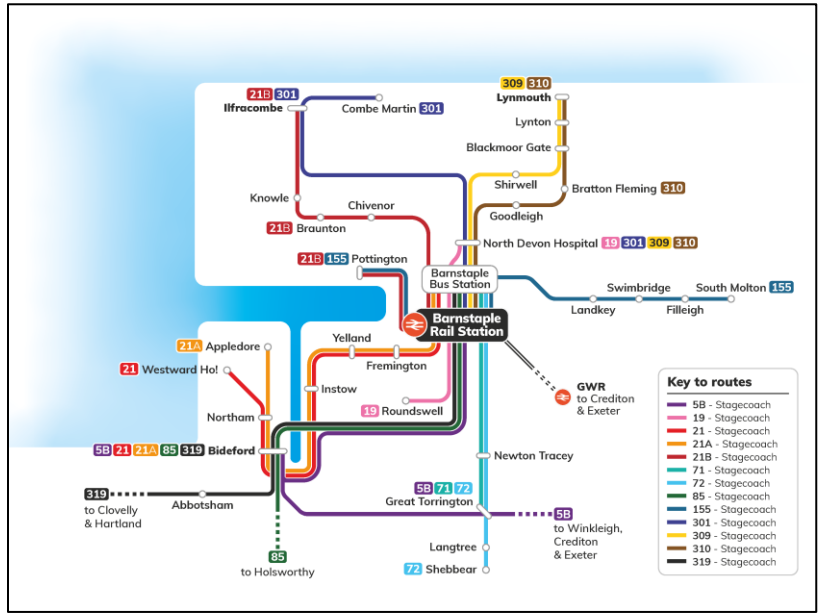
Service	Trains per hour
BNP – DIG	2
PGN – EXM	2
OKE – AXM	1
EXD – WAT	1

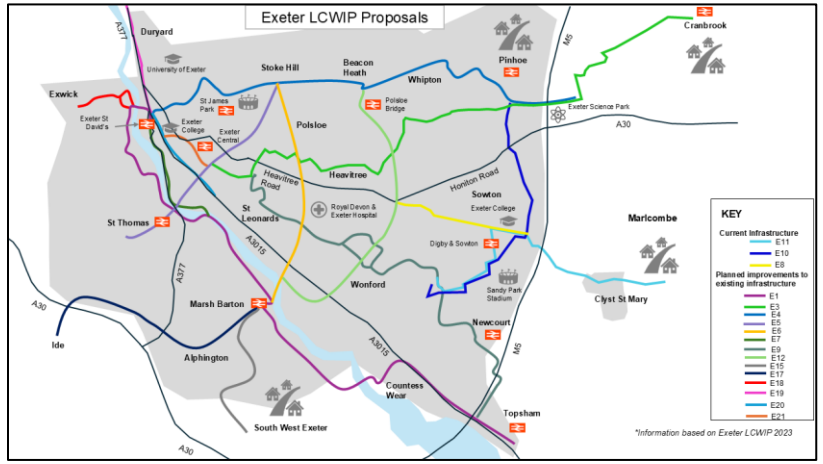
Journey	Combined frequency
EXD – EXC	6
EXD – DIG	4
CDI – EXC	3
EXD – AXM	2

Based on ***Devon Metro Vision*** (GWR)

An integrated transport network

Devon Metro is more than a rail enhancement proposal – it is a vision for an integrated transport network that better connects communities across Devon





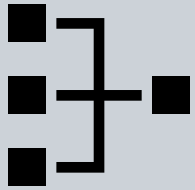
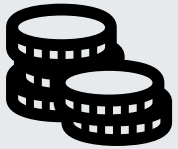
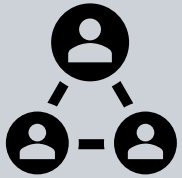






Next step: **Strategic Outline Business Case**

- Consider impacts of overall package – greater than sum of its parts
- Capture potentially transformative impacts of proposals
- Consider phasing and opportunities arising from other activities (e.g. track renewals, resignalling)
- Strategic narratives for lines vary, but all considered important to meet current and future challenges

1. Economic Narrative, Theory of Change 	**2. Strategic Case and Options** 
3. Transport and Economic Modelling 	**4. Commercial, Financial, Management Cases** 
5. Stakeholder Engagement 	**6. SOBC Production and Management** 