

New North Devon Railway Development Alliance is formed



By Mark Wilson

Photo : Network Rail

Today Friday 1st March 2024, the North [Devon](#) Railway Alliance was launched in one of Bideford's most known historic landmarks the Royal Hotel.

Organised by [Railfuture](#), the aim of this alliance is in the long term, to reopen the [Barnstaple](#) to Bideford section of line that was closed by Dr Richard Beeching in 1965.

The alliance also has aims to upgrade the existing [Tarka Line](#), between Barnstaple and [Exeter](#) St David's, including track upgrades, installing new signals and infrastructure maintenance.

Those in attendance at the Royal Hotel included 13 different stakeholder organisations, which between them made up over thirty representatives in total.

They committed jointly to develop upon plans made by the local council which were previously passed and funded already, to put to the government an extremely strong case to support the reconnection of the line, to benefit the 40,000 residents of Torridge, which also has a station on the Barnstaple to Bideford line.

The new Alliance's statement of purpose is "To secure a new rail link between Bideford and Barnstaple and upgrade of the North Devon (Tarka) Line between Exeter and Barnstaple, championing their transformational benefits for communities and businesses and advocating to decision-makers the economic, social and environmental case for developing and investing in the project."

Like most lines that closed in the 1960s Bideford has struggled economically, though its fortunes will be greatly turned around if the line is reinstated.

The local area will also benefit with an up take in tourism. There is historical military interest, as Winston Churchill and Dwight D. Eisenhower met in Bideford as part of the planning and preparation of D-Day which was taking place further up the Devon coast.

For those into literature, The Appledore Book Festival takes place annually, plus it's also where Rudyard Kipling was schooled and Charles Kingsley wrote 'Westward Ho!'

Not to mention that local ship building in the area still continues 170 years on from when it first started at Appledore shipyard now under the owners Harland & Wolff.

Bideford's station is preserved with a museum in the signal box and a café in the station building.

Three years ago the then Mayor of Bideford welcomed the arrival of the name and numberplates off West Country 4-6-2 No. 34019 'Bideford' and expressed that he really wanted to see the return of the railway to the town.

The local 'ACE Rail' campaign set up by the Tarka Rail Association is supported by 'Railfuture' and it has been building up local support which has helped in the creation of today's new alliance.

Torrige & West Devon MP the Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey Cox KC said in a statement "You are embarking on a very worthwhile cause. There is substantial support in Torrige for exploring the viability and economic case for this important railway connection to Barnstaple. Housing and population growth are likely to require improved communication links in the future. Such a link would no doubt require the upgrading of the line between Barnstaple and Exeter, and that too would have incalculable benefits for Torrige."

North Devon MP Selaine Saxby, like Sir Geoffrey unable to be present, also issued a statement saying "I wholeheartedly support the Northern Devon Railway Development Alliance's ambition to restore the rail link between Bideford and Barnstaple, and to upgrade the existing Tarka Line between Barnstaple and Exeter. The proposal to re-establish the old railway line between Barnstaple and Bideford, although not necessarily a replica of the former route, would be a huge advantage for locals and tourists alike."

[Devon County Council](#)'s Andrea Davis, Cabinet Member for Climate Change, [Environment](#) and Transport added "Devon County Council and Peninsula Transport are committed to decarbonising the transport system, improving connectivity and giving genuine transport choice for our residents, visitors and businesses. In Devon we have a track record for re-opening rail links, opening stations and integrating transport modes. Improving connectivity for residents in Northern Devon, supporting new development with transport infrastructure and creating healthy, connected communities for the future is key to our future wellbeing and prosperity."

Comments

03.04.24 - Some interesting comments. Re-opening the Barnstaple to Bideford rail link with heavy rail rather than light rail would be superb as then it would be possible to get excursion trains to call. Extending the re-opened route in the future should also be looked into. However, the cyclists and walkers don't contribute anything so I'm not really bothered about preserving any facility for them; they can use other routes away from the railway. Insofar as the allegation that the West Country has been neglected by the Conservative government I would suggest that this is nonsense. For one thing the previous Labour government didn't exactly do anything for the West Country either. At least Okehampton has re-opened to passengers during the current administration. **MJLfrom Bristol**

02.04.24 - Great to see more people realising of the importance of re-opening the Bideford to Barnstaple railway with so many houses being built around the area is crazy that we don't have a railway link, just look at the traffic jams every morning now. Dr Beeching had no idea if the damage he caused axing so many railway

lines in the 60's or sadly a vision not able to conceive the possibility of so many cars which would jam the roads, railway lines will always be the environmentally friendly better choice and more aesthetically pleasing than rows of frustrated drivers, maybe housing developers building all of these houses should be asked to contribute towards reinstating the Bideford to Barnstaple line for a start and maybe even Torrington direction in the near future. **Stephen rucki**

13.03.24 - This is a project with interest in community wellbeing when you consider not only the pollution of air by constant streams of vehicles during rush hour travel periods, but also the stress suffered by drivers and residents sustaining the noise and air pollution. The route should not be reinstated on what is now an asset to people's wellbeing, the Tarka Trail. An integrated public transport plan linking bus and car to the light rail route would involve transport hubs and speed/shorten journey times .

If tram or light rail systems were considered the cost would be less than conventional gauge rail infrastructure and the route could be integrated with the urban development along the A39 and the old Bideford Road .

This concept was included in the Fremington Neighbourhood Plan which has yet to be published and voted on. **Ian Crawford - ex Parish Councillor**

05.03.25 - I remember the lines to Bideford Great Torrington and Ilfracombe being axed by dear Dr Beeching it would make economic and leisure sense to reopen all of the above once again. **David J Page-Newby**

05.03.24 - David, to be fair to Beeching, the Ilfracombe line was closed in 1970, some five years after his tenure ended. But the resort would have thrived if only it had kept its railway. **Andrew**

05.03.24 - I remember the lines being open in the 70's and it makes sense to restore the railway links to Bideford Ilfracombe and Great Torrington economically and for leisure travellers so please transport minister Mr Mark Harper as well as the reconnection from Taunton to Bishop's Lydeard Somerset. **Mr David J Page-Newby**

04.03-24 - What load a load if hogwash. What about the loss terrific public amenity currently enjoyed by the thousands of locals and tourists for walking, dog walking, cycling between Barnstaple and Bideford. No carbon footprint there! **Aquila**

04.03.24 - Aquila, I strongly suspect (and would hope) that continued provision would be made for walkers and cyclists. But only a railway will get people out of their cars and that's the carbon footprint which needs addressing. **Andrew**

03.03-24 - Would be great to see this happen, but unfortunately will need costly discussions, talks and all that goes with it. Just build the railway the trackbed is there. **Frank Atkinson**

05.03.24 - The article did state that re-establishing the link to Barnstaple would not necessarily be a replica of the former route. I hope losing the Tarka Trail section would not be an option. **Jon**

03.03.24 - Note to transport ministers (of all persuasions). These are the sort of new railway lines that people actually want to see built (or rebuilt), not so much your super expensive high speed ones. **Andrew**

03.03.24 - Strongly in favor - Provided some parallel cycle route can be maintained – this is a very good idea! The proposal might minimise traffic and pollution, be good for climate change reasons, provide better links for commuters, shoppers and visitors, help develop the area economically and boost tourism-etc etc.

(Former North Devon resident who used the line once Before it was shortsightedly removed.) **David Lock**

03.03.24 - I am so pleased my vision is coming true! I am that Mayor and would like to thank Tim Steer for our first meeting and to everybody who has put the hard work in and I hope we can now turn Bideford around and indeed the whole of West Country, deserted for too long!!

Kind regards, Ex-Mayor and Bideford Town Councillor, **David Ratcliff**

02.03.24 - The very best of luck to the group. The West Country has been badly neglected by this government with investment in its railway system. When you think of the number of Conservative MPs in the area they really should have kicked up for more money to be spent West of Taunton to correct errors like closing the line to Biddeford and Ilfracombe. We've just had money for creating the West Midlands Rail Hub and I would have been more than happy to see some of that spent in the West Country. Perhaps a future Labour government will correct the errors made by Harold Wilson's government in closing lines in the West. **David Dalton**