

## Key advocate for Bideford rail link, Tim Steer, resigns after years of dedicated service

After 3.5 years of tireless campaigning, Tim Steer steps down. What's next for Bideford's rail link?

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Devon Live

10:06, 18 SEP 2024



**Tim Steer at Bideford Railway Station** (Image: Tim Steer)

After three and a half years of tireless campaigning to bring the [Bideford](#) rail link back to life and improve the [North Devon](#) line, Tim Steer, co-vice chair of the Tarka Rail Association, has officially announced his resignation from the position.

In his own words, Tim reflects on his personal journey with the Tarka Rail Association, a campaign he has spearheaded, and the accomplishments achieved along the way.

While his decision to step down may come as a surprise to some, it is one based on careful reflection, personal reassessment, and perhaps a touch of exhaustion after leading such a passionate, grassroots movement for change.

Tim's work with the Association started with a personal mission: to restore the rail link to Bideford, a town which lost its railway in 1965.

“It all began in March 2021,” Tim reminisces, “when Bideford Railway Heritage Centre, of which I am a director, acquired and returned to the town the Bideford locomotive name and number plates.”

This event catalysed conversations, particularly with former Mayor David Ratcliff, about not just preserving historical artifacts but also reviving the railway itself.

Tim was resolute in his belief that restoring the railway would provide economic and social benefits to the region.

“All restored railways have delivered incredible social and economic benefits,” Tim says, citing examples such as [Okehampton](#) and its successful rail restoration, which has shown how re-establishing rail links can bring much-needed rejuvenation to a town.

“The public are now wanting to make the modal shift back to using rail services,” he argues, clearly hopeful that the people of Bideford and Northern Devon would see the same benefits.



**Tim Steer talks at Bideford Town Council**

However, the journey was not without its challenges. Tim encountered opposition, particularly in the form of local conspiracies and misconceptions.

“One conspiracy that I have heard,” he recalls with frustration, “is that a line to Bideford would drain the area from the residents and become a satellite ghost town. This is completely false.”

He passionately counters this idea, pointing to towns like [Barnstaple](#), which continues to thrive despite its connectivity to the North Devon line. “Has this happened to Okehampton?” he asks rhetorically, shutting down the claim with facts from the field.

Another criticism Tim faced was the idea that the proposed railway would infringe upon the beloved Tarka Trail, a scenic route cherished by locals and visitors alike.

“Nobody can be that certain,” he says, recognising the importance of the trail while also highlighting the need for further engineering studies. He points to government policy, which supports the coexistence of both rail and active travel routes, reassuring the public that both can thrive side by side.

Tim’s tireless work did not go unrecognised. Through his ACE Rail presentations, he won support from local councils and residents alike. He proudly recounts how the work to restore Bideford’s rail link has now been absorbed into the Northern Devon Railway Development Alliance, a powerful coalition of supporters.



This included Bideford Town Council, Barnstaple Town Council, [Torridge District Council](#), and Great Western Railway itself, whose managing director publicly endorsed upgrading the North Devon line as a key part of the South West Vision plan.



**Bideford mayor David Ratcliff, Tim Steer, Tarka Rail Association, Annette Wheatley, Barnstaple in Bloom, Andy Hedges, Tarka Rail Association, Barnstaple town mayor Alan Rennles**

But despite these wins, the time has come for Tim to step aside. His resignation is not one of defeat but of confidence in the team and campaign that will carry on.

“We can all discuss how the railway will look, but I am completely confident that all the study work now being undertaken is being done by transport professionals,” he says, placing his trust in those continuing the fight. Though no longer vice chair, Tim’s involvement in the railway movement may not be completely over, as he hints at a possible return to writing columns about transport—albeit in a different capacity.

Tim’s departure from the Association marks the end of a significant chapter in his campaign, but his words resonate with a sense of optimism for the future. He reflects on those who have helped, noting with sadness the passing of key figures like Mayor Ratcliff and Councillor Peter Christie. “Their contributions will not be forgotten,” he adds, reminding readers that community-driven projects like this are built on collaboration and a shared passion for progress.

In his farewell address, Tim leaves with heartfelt gratitude for the support he has received, writing: “Thank you for your comments, letters, and everyone who gave me support.”

His journey was undoubtedly a difficult one, but his tireless dedication to the cause has laid the groundwork for others to continue. He departs from his role knowing that the dream of reconnecting Bideford to the rail network is not a distant fantasy but a project well underway, with committed professionals at the helm.

While the people of Bideford may no longer have Tim in his vice chair role, the spirit of his campaign continues to inspire. As Tim eloquently puts it: “Is there any community with a restored train service which now regrets it as having been a dreadful idea?”

With the socio-economic benefits of railway restoration so clearly outlined, the answer, it seems, is no. Tim’s departure is a pause, not an end, to the vision he helped bring to the fore.