

## draft Devon & Torbay Local Transport Plan 4 - 2025-40

### consultation response by Railfuture Devon & Cornwall regional branch

#### Section 1: The Vision

The Local Transport Plan is based on a vision for transport in Devon and Torbay. **To what extent do you support the vision below?**

Our vision is that “*Transport will facilitate sustainable growth and support reaching net zero carbon by 2050 at the latest. Well-integrated, accessible and inclusive transport will improve travel choice and benefit the health and wellbeing of everyone.*”

**Strongly support**

#### Section 2: The Objectives

To help the Local Transport Plan achieve the vision, a set of six objectives have been developed. These are stated below, **please tell us how important these objectives are to you.**

**Decarbonisation:** Reaching net zero by 2050 at the latest by reducing the need to travel, increasing digital access, and shifting trips to sustainable transport and fuels.

**Very important**

**Reliable and Resilient:** Protecting and enhancing the strategic road and rail links that connect Devon and Torbay to the rest of the country.

**Very important**

**Easier Travel:** Providing well-integrated, inclusive and reliable transport options for all residents and visitors in both rural and urban communities.

**Very important**

**Unlock Development:** Supporting clean growth by providing new transport choices within and to new developments and using technology to improve existing infrastructure.

**Very important**

**Greater Places for People:** Enhancing the attractiveness of streets by reducing negative impacts from vehicles, regenerating the public realm, and facilitating safe active travel movements.

**Very important**

**The Place to be Naturally Active:** Expanding the multi-use trail network, delivering a network of quieter lanes and improving facilities and safety in urban areas to enable people to be more active and experience our outstanding natural environment.

**Very important**

Which of the objectives is **the most important** to you?

**Easier travel**

## Do you have any other comments about the Vision and Objectives (Sections 1 & 2) of the new Local Transport Plan?

The **Vision** correctly declares that “Transport will facilitate sustainable growth ...” It could however mean either that transport will facilitate the sustainability of growth which is generated by other means, or alternatively that transport will itself facilitate growth while ensuring that such growth is sustainable. In order to avoid it being read as a constructive ambiguity, we advise that clarity of interpretation would be beneficial so that the final Local Transport Plan recognises that proposed transport interventions with high social and / or transport value, but which do not themselves generate economic growth, are also legitimate and worthwhile propositions.

The potential scale of potential population and housing growth over the next 15 years, and the associated travel demands generated by it, cannot be over-stated and must therefore not be under-estimated. Although the exact scale of housing growth over the longer term is inevitably uncertain, the recent MHCLG consultation on proposed changes to the National Planning Policy Framework pointed to potential increases above and beyond current plans – of near-30% for Exeter and East Devon, around two-thirds for Mid-Devon and Torbay, and around 80% for South Hams / West Devon and for North Devon / Torridge. Across all the local planning authority areas in Devon and Torbay, that growth could amount to almost 110k new homes by 2040. Such a scale of growth in homes and, by implication, jobs and all the associated journeys of a larger population – the equivalent of an extra Exeter and Torbay combined – will require a commensurate scale of investment in sustainable transport modes, including rail, if that growth is itself to be sustainable.

The **Objectives** well reflect the policy areas where interventions are required to realise the Vision, although they may not capture the scale of interventions, and the level of ambition required to deliver them, over the full 15-year period to 2040.

~ ‘Decarbonisation’ refers to “*shifting trips to sustainable transport*”

~ ‘Reliable and resilient’ mentions “*enhancing the strategic ... rail links that connect Devon and Torbay*”

~ ‘Easier travel’ includes “*reliable transport options*”

~ ‘Unlock development’ speaks of “*providing new transport choices*”

All six Objectives might from the outset be brought together more explicitly in a pair of triplets: the challenges of **Congestion / Car-dependency / Car-bon** which are to be addressed by greater transport **Capacity / Choice / Connectivity**.

## Section 3: Strategies and Action Plans

### Connecting Devon and Torbay

To what extent do you support the proposed strategy for **Connecting Devon and Torbay**?

(Pages 13-19 of the LTP4 draft)

#### **Strongly support**

Do you have any other comments about the strategy for **Connecting Devon and Torbay** (Section 4) in the Local Transport Plan?

We welcome the referenced Peninsula Rail Task Force identification of three priorities for improving the railway in the South West: better journey times, greater resilience and increased capacity and comfort for passengers. These are necessary responses to the South West’s challenges of peripherality, at all three geographic levels – national, regional and local. The national in relation to the rest of mainland Britain is self-evident, the regional is apparent through extended distances and journey times even to neighbouring metropolitan centres such as Bristol as well as between major centres within the South West region, while the local disadvantages large end-of-branch line communities such as Torbay and Barnstaple-Bideford. We recommend that the final LTP should include its own general statement likewise explicitly recognising the problem of slow journey times by rail in many parts of the historic county area compared to the distance, acknowledging that there are not easy answers in many places (e.g. the Devon Banks, between Newton Abbott and Plymouth). It should also recognise that more modern faster-accelerating trains will help to reduce journey times (and that the two local transport authorities should therefore lobby in favour of expediting GWR’s ‘Project Churchward’ to deliver those new trains, given how multiple decades-old and increasingly unreliable the existing local / regional trains are) and that infrastructure modernisation - such as for the North Devon (Tarka) Line between Exeter and Barnstaple - should aim explicitly to address the issue of peripherality wherever possible.

We are wholly supportive of the first three Key elements of the strategy for Connecting Devon and Torbay, in 'Reliable and resilient network':

- *Completion of the South West resilience works on the railway between Dawlish and Teignmouth.*
- *Enhancements on the Exeter to London Waterloo Line to increase diversionary capacity and service frequency to East Devon.*
- *Work with the rail industry to make the case for enhancements to the North Devon Line to address overcrowding and improved connectivity.*

and the first and third Key elements of the strategy, in 'Easier travel':

- *Lobby for enhanced mobile connectivity on trains and improved rail rolling stock.*
- *Seek additional long distance rail services to and from Devon and Torbay.*

However, we must advise very strongly against pursuing the second point of the strategy, in 'Easier travel':

- *Extension of existing London Waterloo to Exeter service further into Devon (Okehampton and Barnstaple are mentioned), which we consider to be more of 'a solution in search of a problem' and bound to import additional and significant performance risk to wider parts of the Devon and Torbay rail network beyond Exeter already highly vulnerable to disruption on mainly single-track lines. The Exeter-Salisbury-London Waterloo service is itself vulnerable to serious performance risk with its extensive single-track sections west of Salisbury. Over the 2025-40 period the improved connectivity presumed to be sought by the proposal will in our view be better secured through a programme of improvements to service frequencies within the framework of the established, reputable and successful Devon Metro network, such as doubling frequency on the Barnstaple line and extending services into the Exmouth line to serve Digby & Sowton as one of the Barnstaple line's stations' most-preferred destinations, and potentially extending in increments across Somerset to Yeovil (which may match ambitions to extend the Devon & Cornwall rail-card). If it is Barnstaple's twice-hourly services which are to be extended into the Exmouth line then in order to provide the desired connectivity improvement across Exeter with the line towards Yeovil (in due course) it is Okehampton's regular hourly services which should be extended eastwards, by increments. It is regular, predictable, repeating patterns of train services which attract passengers, rather than occasional off-pattern through services, reflected in sound aspirations such as the 15-minute Exeter metro.*

We therefore recommend substitution with a more generic Key element appropriate to the strategy for Easier travel: *Reduced rail journey times through train fleet and line infrastructure modernisations.*

For the seventh of the Key elements of the strategy for Connecting Devon and Torbay, in 'Easier travel':

- *Simplify fare structure and introduce integrated ticketing for public transport* we recommend the addition of *including the introduction / extension of PAYG across the Devon and Torbay rail network.*

For the second of the Key elements of the strategy, in 'Decarbonisation'

- *Support the delivery of EV charging and alternative fuel stations across the Major Road Network and Strategic Road Network* we recommend the addition of *and rail station car parks.*

## **Exeter**

To what extent do you support the proposed strategy for **Exeter**? (Pages 20-28 of the LTP4 draft)

### **Strongly support**

Do you have any other comments about the strategy for **Exeter** (Section 5) in the Local Transport Plan?

Specifically for rail services, in support of the aspirations to "make the 'Devon Metro' rail network more attractive by improving connectivity between Exeter and surrounding towns" we additionally advocate the inclusion of:

- an earlier first service from Barnstaple on Sundays, enabling arrival in Exeter before 10am;
- an hourly frequency between Exeter and Bideford by extending the faster of the proposed two hourly services to and from Barnstaple via a new rail link, through a Torrridge and North Devon Connectivity Programme being developed by the Northern Devon Railway Development Alliance in close collaboration with rail industry and other representative partner organisations;
- extending the proposed half hourly frequency between Exeter and East Devon further eastwards across Somerset in increments via Crewkerne to Yeovil, securing greater benefits in connectivity between Exeter and surrounding towns than from extending unreliable London Waterloo – Exeter services further westwards.

## Torbay

To what extent do you support the proposed strategy for **Torbay**? (Pages 29-37 of the LTP4 draft)

### **Strongly support**

Do you have any other comments about the strategy for **Torbay** (Section 6) in the Local Transport Plan?

For 'Easier travel / Improving travel choice' we advocate a similar approach for Teignbridge as in South Hams: "While mainline rail services end at Paignton Newton Abbott, the infrastructure continues southwards northwards with an area of sidings and steam trains operating as far as Kingswear Heathfield in the South Hams Teignbridge district of Devon. While there are no immediate plans to bring this line into (passenger) use, we would support longer term proposals that might enable the Kingswear Heathfield line to reconnect to the national rail network" (including a new station at Heathfield, and one possibly west of Kingsteignton).

See complementary comment in next section "For easier travel in the Heart of Teignbridge growth area ..."

## Growth Areas

To what extent do you support the proposed strategy for **Growth Areas**? (Pages 38- 47 of the LTP4 draft)

### **Strongly support**

Do you have any other comments about the strategy for **Growth Areas** (Section 7) in the Local Transport Plan?

A transformational scheme to help unlock allocations for housing and jobs in the Barnstaple, Bideford and Northam growth area, and improve connectivity both within and between the area and the rest of the county and beyond, will be the extension of North Devon (Tarka) Line services on a new rail link from Exeter to Bideford. It will also facilitate easier travel by building on the faster journey time of the proposed second hourly service between Exeter and Barnstaple. The "greater capacity for communities along the line" from the combination of an additional hourly service and faster journeys will help to redress the below-average per capita use of the line's smaller stations, contributing to decarbonisation through a more attractive and sustainable transport choice. Network Rail's April 2024 report "*Connecting Communities: framework assessment of new station opportunities on Western Route*" identified Bideford as one of the top-performing potential re-openings of the 23 largest population clusters not previously studied in the Route's area (such as Tavistock and Cullompton) and identified as worthy of being examined further in one of just five Case Studies; of the 23, Bideford had scored 2nd for the strength of its strategic case, after Plympton.

Bideford in particular will become an even greater place for people, and a better place to be naturally active, as further changes to help improve the walking and cycling environment are stimulated by the potential for the return of rail services to the town, currently presumed to be at the former station closed to passengers in October 1965.

For easier travel in the Heart of Teignbridge growth area we specifically endorse "*The Teignbridge Local Plan continues to safeguard the use of the Heathfield Branch Line as a movement corridor between Newton Abbot and Heathfield. While there are no immediate plans to bring the line into use, we will engage with the rail industry and third-party promoters to explore opportunities for passenger or freight movements to return in future.*"

## Rural Devon and Market & Coastal Towns

To what extent do you support the proposed strategy for **Rural Devon and Market & Coastal Towns**? (Pages 48-58 of the LTP4 draft)

### **Strongly support**

Do you have any other comments about the strategy for **Rural Devon and Market & Coastal Towns** (Section 8) in the Local Transport Plan?

A key element of the strategy for rural Devon, in respect of Easier travel, is recognition of the benefits for the smaller communities along and beyond the existing rail corridor of modernising the North Devon (Tarka) Line with a second hourly service and faster journeys. We endorse "*We will continue to work with rail partners and stakeholders to enhance the Devon Metro rail network. These schemes will provide hubs for new and easier travel to jobs, services and to Dartmoor National Park. This includes restoring rail services between Tavistock and Plymouth and upgrading access and interchange facilities at stations. We will*

prioritise stations where trains cross (making it easier to coordinate buses with train times in both directions) and that serve a wider catchment, such as Okehampton and Umberleigh.” We particularly commend the additional need for a creative intervention package at the North Devon (Tarka) Line’s Eggesford station, which has witnessed a near-36% increase in footfall in just three years from its best-ever pre-pandemic usage in 2019-20 to 2022-23, in order to address a combination of hazards around the unreliable level crossing situated right by a crossroads on the A377 and extremely limited – and hazardous – car parking for station users. This may ultimately require consideration of a new rail and river bridge and associated highway works in order to enable closure of the level crossing to motor vehicles, with the creation of a new sideroad junction in a safer location elsewhere along the A377 and the provision of adequate station car parking and other modern facilities as a fit-for-purpose 21<sup>st</sup>-century interchange hub.

As it is shown in this section, Figure 23 on page 53 of the consultation draft needs in the final LTP4 document to reflect the GWR / Network Rail map ‘Working together for our communities’ published in March 2024 which shows “Bideford (Proposed line reinstatement)” just as it does for Tavistock:



As it is referenced again in this section as a ‘New opportunity’ for Easier travel we must re-state our opposition, already expressed in response to Question 7 for section 4, to “Extend the London Waterloo to Exeter St. David’s service further into Devon” as well as reference our reasons and proposed alternative approach. Official data for 2022-23, from the Office of Rail and Road, shows that the top destination from Exeter St. David's is London Paddington with 19.35% of all journeys from that station; London Waterloo by contrast is in 21st place on 0.99%. From Exeter Central, Paddington is ranked 31st on 0.71% of all journeys and Waterloo 37th on 0.44% of its journeys. On the basis of such evidence we have to doubt that through Waterloo journeys beyond Exeter will make any material positive difference, given too the likely prospect of importing and exporting the service performance risk across Exeter and into other parts of Devon’s rail network already mentioned in our comment on the subject in page 3 above.

### Asset Management and Road Safety

To what extent do you support the proposed strategy for **Asset Management and Road Safety**? (Pages 59-64 of the LTP4 draft)

**Strongly support**

Do you have any other comments about the strategy for **Asset Management and Road Safety** (Section 9) in the Local Transport Plan?

For 'Reliable and resilient network' (rail as well as road) and 'Greater places for people' (around all rail stations) we applaud the planned bus-rail integration enhancements package at Barnstaple railway station as a model of good practice, and commend for consideration a package of improvements around Eggesford station as mentioned in response to Question 11 for Section 8 above.

#### **Section 4: Overall...**

To what extent do you support Devon and Torbay having a new Local Transport Plan?

#### **Strongly support**

Do you have any additional feedback regarding the Devon and Torbay Local Transport Plan?

For the Action Plans:

Section 10: Our action plan for connecting Devon and Torbay

- under Reliable and Resilient Network / Strategic Connectivity: Rail, add New rail link to Bideford;
- under Easier Travel / Strategic Connectivity: Rail, add Further eastwards extension of Devon Metro to Yeovil.
- under Easier Travel / Strategic Connectivity: Rail, and / or under Decarbonisation / Digital services, add Introduction / extension of PAYG (given the emphasis on 'metro' services and in particular since it is already in Cornwall and is being extended to Plymouth through the Mid-Cornwall Metro scheme).
- under Decarbonisation, add Sub-Theme 'Transition to lower-emission fuels' and add EV charging in station car parks (to help spread EV usage and also encourage car-rail journeys rather than car throughout).

Section 11: Our action plan for Exeter

- under Easier Travel / Devon Metro, add Hourly frequency between Exeter and Bideford.

Section 12: Our action plan for Torbay

- under Easier Travel / New Opportunities, add Engage with the rail industry and third-party promoters to explore opportunities for passenger or freight movements to return to the Heathfield branch line.

Section 13: Our action plan for growth areas

- under Easier travel / New sustainable travel choices, add New rail services to Bideford.

Section 14: Our action plan for rural Devon and market and coastal towns

- under Easier travel / Developing the Devon Metro, add Twice hourly rail frequency and shorter journey times on Tarka Line from Barnstaple to Exeter.

Section 15: Our action plan for asset management and road safety

- under Greater Place for People / Safer Travel, add Engage with the rail industry, third-party funders and other stakeholders to explore opportunities for a package of measures on the A377 at the North Devon (Tarka) Line's Eggesford station and level crossing in order, amongst other objectives, to improve road (and rail) safety.

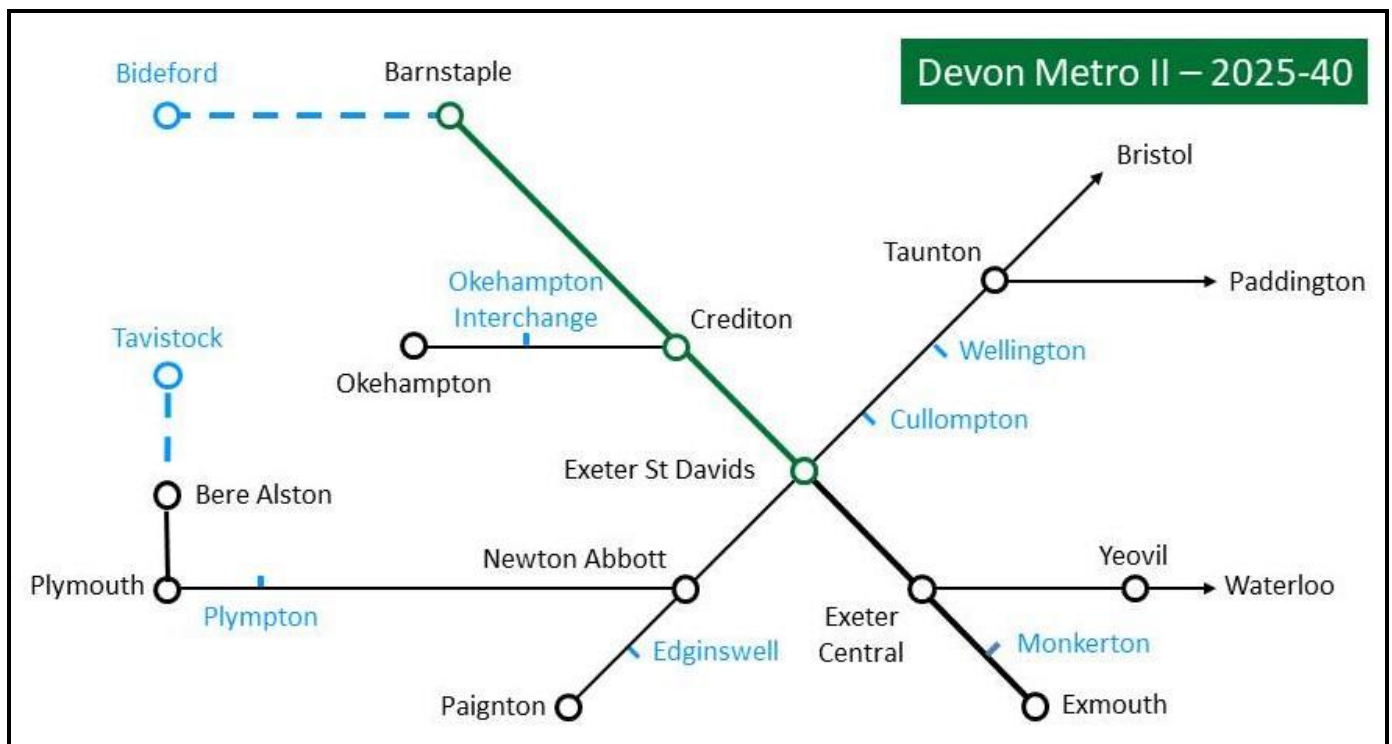
Do you have any further comments about transport in Devon and Torbay generally?

For Railfuture, as Britain's leading, longest-established, independent national voluntary organisation campaigning exclusively for a better railway across a bigger network for passenger and freight users, to support economic growth, environmental improvement and better-connected communities – 'the number one advocate for the railway and rail users' – we take comfort that, contrary to national headlines about passenger rail usage still struggling to recover to pre-pandemic levels, the South West region as a whole has shown one of the lowest levels of decline when comparing official Regional Rail Usage data for 2019-20 and 2022-23; seven other regions of Britain are faring considerably worse, only three slightly better. It is especially satisfying to note that the 'Devon' group of routes (which includes Torbay) was the sole area sub-group of routes in the whole of Britain outside London to show actual post-pandemic rail journey growth over that period, and 'Cornwall' was the best sub-group in the whole of Britain, including London, for the smallest post-pandemic decline.

Comparing individual branch lines in Devon and Cornwall across the same three-year period, the North Devon (Tarka) Line to Barnstaple out-stripped the other six lines with a 36.5% increase in station footfall. Since such records began in 1997-98 station usage on the North Devon (Tarka) Line has almost trebled, while passenger journeys since 2009-10 have doubled. All this growth has been achieved with little more than 'patch and mend' expenditure on infrastructure maintenance and some limited renewals and crossing safety measures, and the similarly welcome introduction of more modern trains and improvement of the service offer on Sundays.

The Devon & Torbay record of sustained success with rail development is probably unmatched by any other county or unitary authority in England, and was recognised as such by Railfuture's Vice-Presidents in 2023 with the annual Judges' Special Award for Devon County Council. This proven record of successful delivery is the firmest of foundations for the authorities to continue to be bold and ambitious over the coming Local Transport Plan period, taking full advantage of whatever new opportunities there may be in the new County Combined Authority structure with its devolved powers and funding, and advocating the case for a programme of investment at sub-national and national levels, secure in the knowledge of support from respected stakeholder groups such as the Northern Devon Railway Development Alliance.

Devon Metro 2 (2025-40) – below – will like Devon Metro 1 (2011-26) continue to face the triple challenges of **Congestion**, **Car-dependency** and **Car-bon**; they will likewise need to be addressed by the trio of greater sustainable transport **Capacity**, **Choice** and **Connectivity** – very much with rail development doing the 'heavy-lifting' for the continued growth in travel demand which cannot be accommodated by bus and active travel improvements. While Devon Metro 1 provided the framework to support the completion of one re-opened passenger rail service (Dartmoor Line) and four new stations (Cranbrook, Marsh Barton, Newcourt, and Okehampton Interchange opening in 2026), Devon Metro 2 can provide the framework to support the completion of two re-opened passenger rail services with new stations (to Tavistock and to Bideford) and three other new stations (Cullompton, Edginswell, Monkerton) – plus Wellington and Plympton in neighbouring Peninsula Transport / Peninsula Rail Task Force authorities – and significant service improvements on both the East and North Devon lines.



End of questionnaire.