



The ACE Rail campaign is no longer!

This is not goodbye, as the campaign has been absorbed into the Northern Devon Railway Development Alliance and moves it into the tier status of sustainable transport project. Thanks to Bideford Town Council – the founder of the NDRDA, we now have various stakeholders who wish to see the rail link to Bideford turned into a reality. The alliance has been joined by Barnstaple Town Council, Tarka Rail Association, Railfuture and Northam Town Council as well as members from other organisations and councils. In attendance was representatives from national and global shipbuilder Harland and Wolff, Petroc college, officers from Torridge District Council, North Devon Council, Barnstaple, Bideford and Northam Town Councils, Tarka Rail Association, Great Western Railway, Network Rail and the Torridge Levelling up place board. Since the inaugural meeting, Torridge District Council has officially joined the NDRDA.

The official press release.

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 number plates 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 Bamstaple. 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 Bamstaple, and to upgrade the existing Tarka Line between Bamstaple 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 raillinks, 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."

Tim Steer Tarka Rail Association – vice chair

Lewis Clark with mayors cllr Louisa York L and cllr Jamie Mckenzie R with Tim Steer in the middle. Various stakeholders behind.





Peter Christie

By Lewis Andrews

We are sad to report the passing of Councillor Peter Christie in March aged 73.

Peter served on both Torridge District Council and Bideford Town Council where he was Bideford Town Mayor three times and Britain's first Green Party mayor.

He was the author of around 40 books on local history, a wealth of knowledge and owner of a huge resource of historical photos and information. He wrote a regular column in the North Devon Journal and would always mention this magazine each time it was published.

He was a very keen supporter of our Group for many years and as a Trustee on the Bideford Bridge Trust he assisted in providing financial support to the Group for decades. It was his help that enabled the Group to purchase the Bideford Loco nameplate, scroll and shield a few years ago. Over the years he has formally opened the museum, interactive display and replica ticket office in our Parcels Van - see top photo - and again joined us when we displayed the newly acquired "Bideford" items - see lower photo with Peter third from the left.

Just weeks before he passed away, he phoned me and offered the Group all his railway and heritage books. We spent many hours chatting about local history before loading numerous boxes into my car.

It's fair to say that there is nobody to fill his shoes in the town and his loss will be greatly felt within the area.

Peter Christie is third from the left of the photo



Councillor Peter Christie



I am sorry to hear that Torridge District Council vice chair and supporter of [ACE Rail](#) Peter Christie had last night passed away. Peter can be seen here holding a Bideford rail ticket on the far right side of this photo below.

Peter was responsible for a lot of local history, community work, among other things, he was a Bideford mayor and town councillor.

Town and District Councillor, former Mayor of Bideford and Bideford Bridge Trustee.

He was a huge supporter of the [Bideford Railway Heritage Centre](#), all history and heritage projects.

He opened our Museum, unveiled various plaques at the station and assisted in funding to bring back the Bideford Loco nameplate back to the town, being there to unveil it.

Only a week before Christmas he donated all his railway books to our group.

A kind and hardworking man, he will be hugely missed by us and everyone in the area.

