

Northern Devon Railway Development Alliance



Modernising the Exeter to Barnstaple Railway Line Reinstating Bideford Train Services

Second annual convention, Friday 7 March 2025 – Barnstaple, North Devon

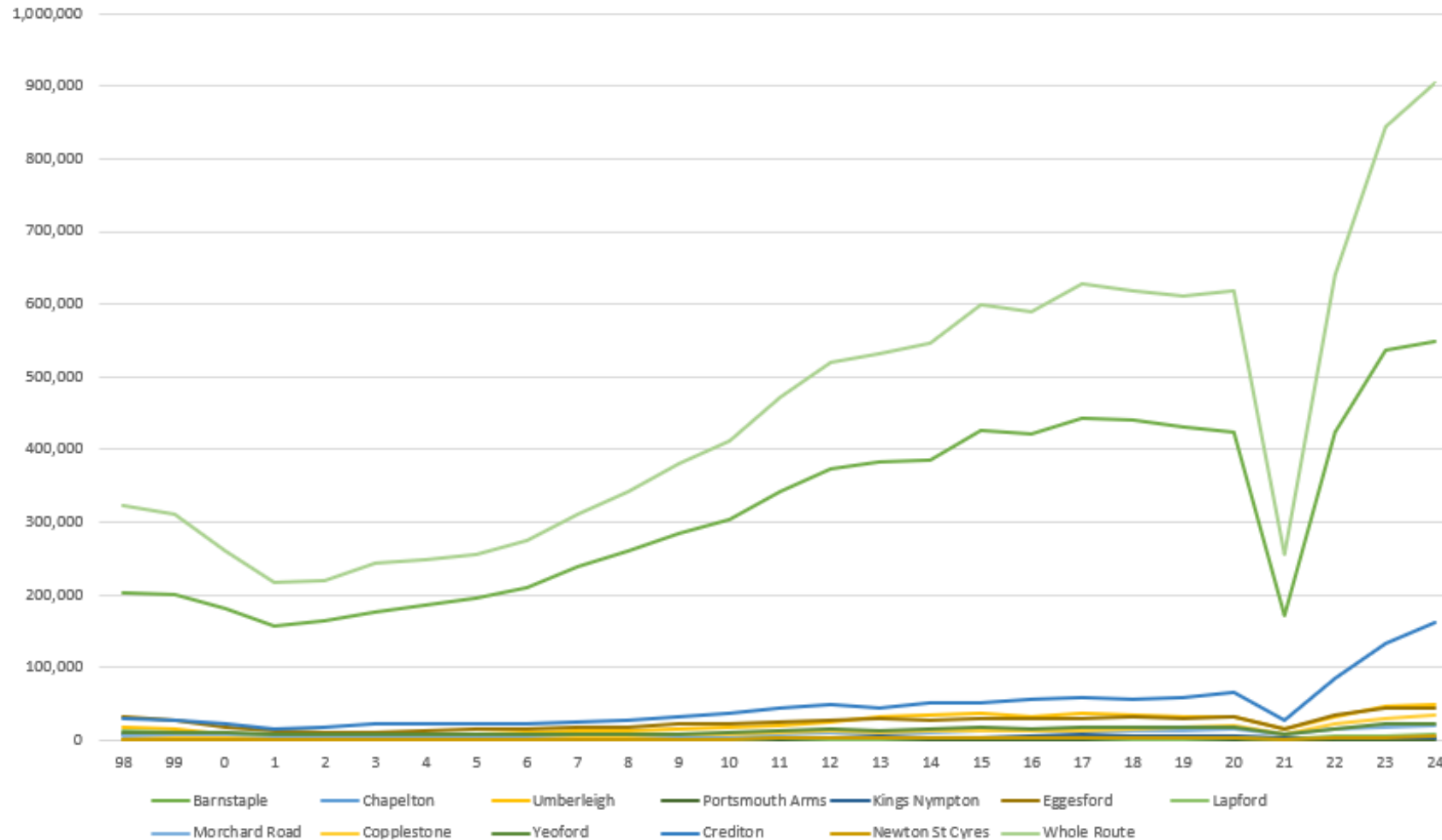
Peter West OBE



Progress Since March 2024

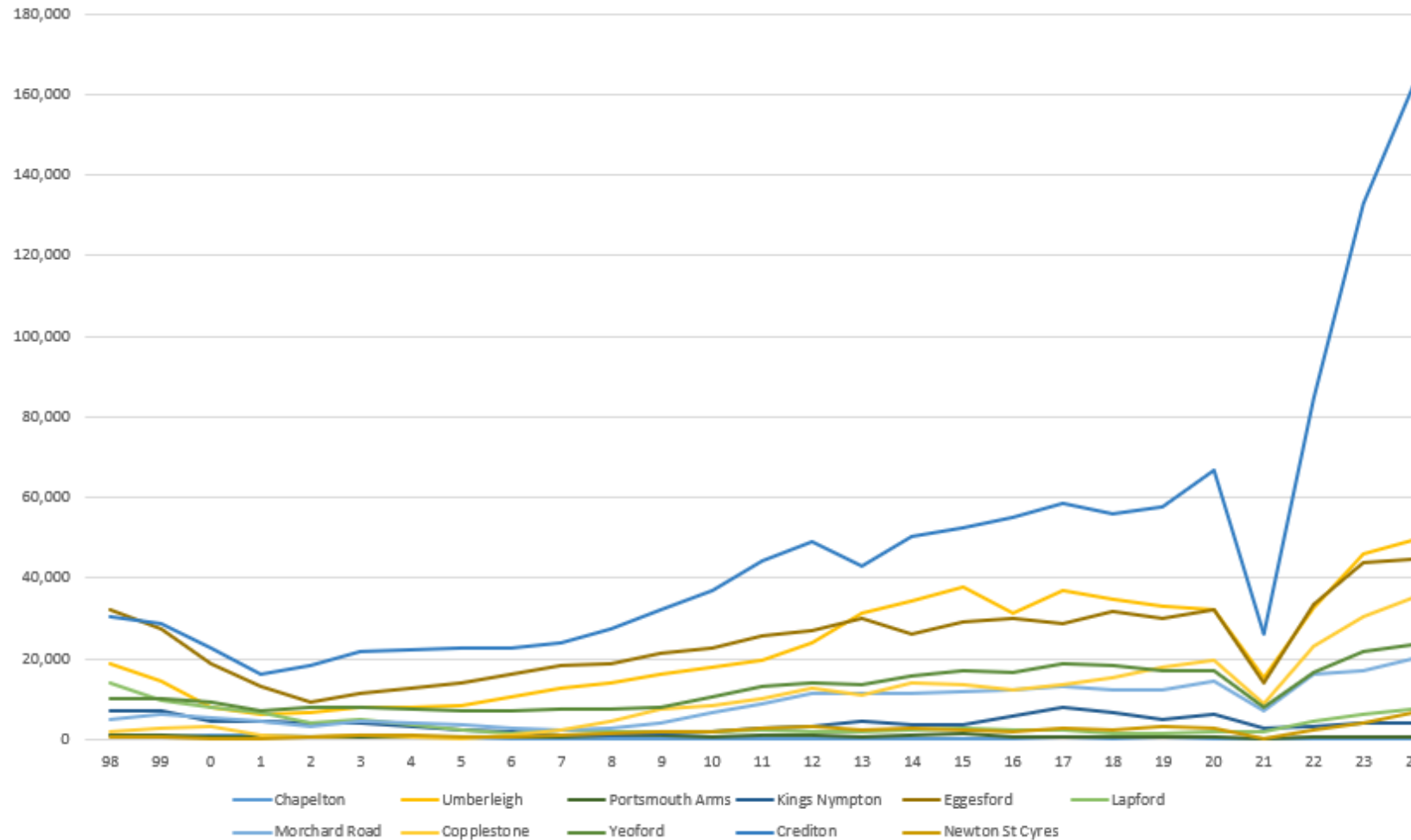
- Barnstaple line usage continues strong growth, far above pre-COVID levels, bucking national trend
- Network Rail has succeeded in getting funding for its development work on Barnstaple line modernisation - against strong competition for the money
- GWR has continued to work on resolving issues with its South West train fleet
- Early-stage business case work for the separate Barnstaple line modernisation and Bideford train service reinstatement schemes suggests strong strategic cases
- The draft Devon and Torbay Local Transport Plan includes two-hourly Exeter – Barnstaple services
- Peninsula Transport has included both schemes in the priorities in its draft *Draft Strategic Implementation Plan 2025-2050*
- Funding for Bideford study confirmed, SLC Rail appointed and work close to concluding

Station Usage: ORR Statistics - Barnstable Line Stations



Exeter – Barnstaple Line – Intermediate Station Usage

Station Usage: ORR Statistics - Barnstable Line Intermediate Stations





Exeter – Barnstaple Line Modernisation Network Rail-Funded Development Work

- Identify constraints on the location of new loops between Coleford and Barnstaple
- Create designs for double track and associated station changes between Coleford and Newton St Cyres
- Create designs for reinstating Coleford Junction
- Assess the impact of line speed and infrastructure changes on level crossings
- Options for the renewal of Eggesford level crossing
- Options for enhanced and efficient signalling of the line



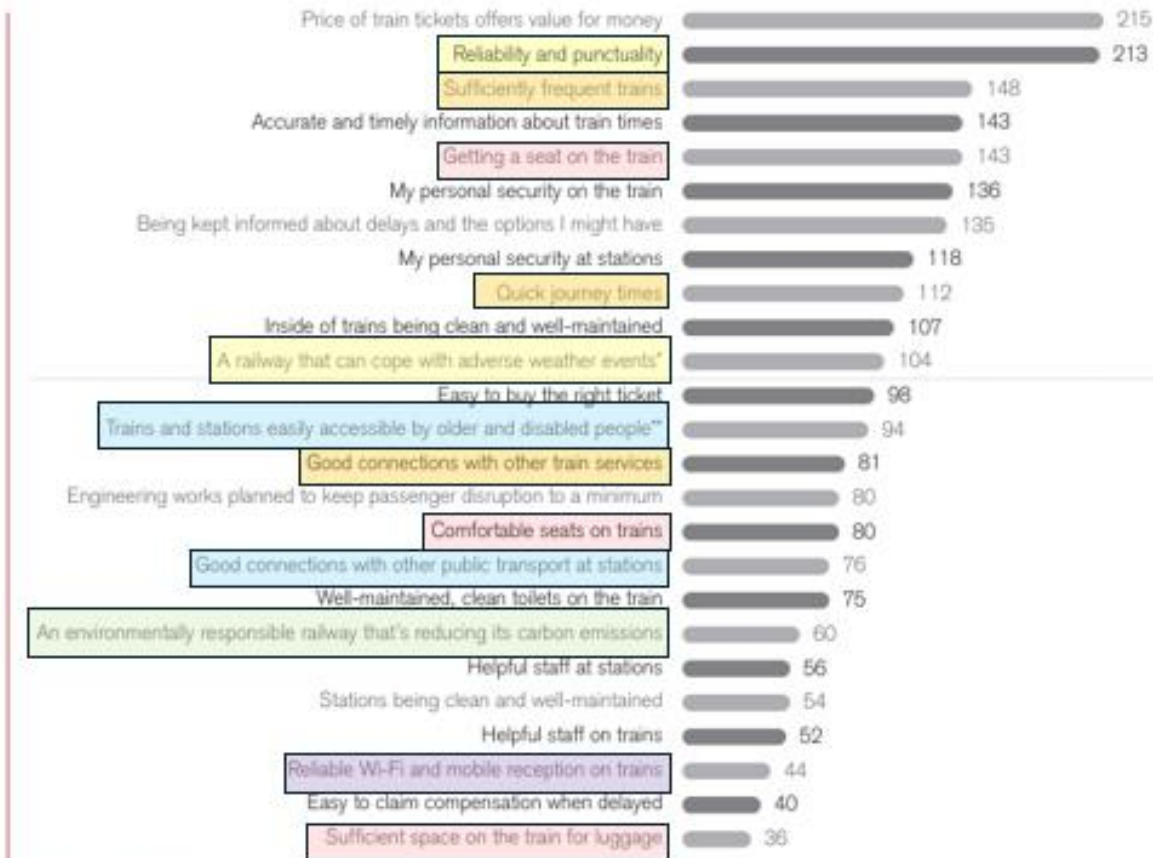
Exeter – Barnstaple Line Modernisation Strategic Analysis - SWOT

Strengths <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Strong, long-term growth, with usage well above the best pre-COVID levels: clear relevance for the Northern Devon and Mid Devon areas• Serves Exeter: a city with a strong rail market for its size, with several well-located stations• Recent improvements in train services: more Sunday services and longer trains• High levels of rail connectivity to other parts of the country at Exeter St Davids	Weaknesses <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Poor operational performance• Slow journey times for the distance• Crowding on some trains dissuading would-be users• Perceived by many as not providing good connections to the long-distance rail network• Poor accessibility of some intermediate stations for pedestrians and car users• Extended journey times by connecting bus in spite of good physical integration
Opportunities <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Yet further usage growth from faster, more frequent, more punctual/reliable trains• Higher frequency and short journey times improve longer-distance connectivity• Better accessibility of some intermediate stations helps capture new markets• More devolution of decision-making and funding raises likelihood of financing for schemes such as Barnstaple with high socio-economic value• Separate scheme to reinstate trains to Bideford provides substantial new traffic	Threats <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Unlikely to be seen as a rail enhancement priority nationally given the large numbers of strong competing schemes• Continued centralisation of decision-making and tight fiscal constraint lead to a continued second rank status for the route ('patch and repair')• Rail institutional structures continue to militate against a whole route modernisation approach bringing together investment in route infrastructure, stations and trains



Exeter – Barnstaple Line Modernisation – Passenger Priorities

What matters to passengers

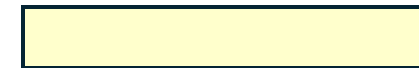


Sample size **12,565**

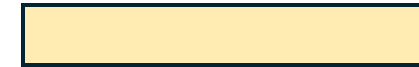
* A railway that can cope with adverse weather events for example snow, wind, flooding and extreme heat

** Trains and stations easily accessible by older and disabled people and those with pushchairs, bicycles, luggage.

Transport Focus Research



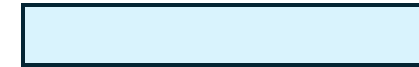
Punctuality - reliability



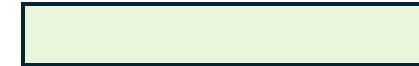
Frequency – journey times



Capacity - comfort



Accessibility



Environmental



Digital: wi-fi, mobile connectivity



Exeter-Barnstaple Modernisation: Draft Problem Statement

- Poor socio-economic conditions in Northern/Mid Devon
- Long journey times for all modes results in physical peripherality
- The current timetable is a compromise that satisfies nobody fully
- Poor rail punctuality and reliability affects the wider rail network and deters passengers, including from more sustainable bus-rail intermodal journeys
- Insufficient train capacity for busiest times now and future growth
- Intermediate stations are difficult to access and use and constrain usage growth
- The route has not entered the digital age
- The old diesel trains are environmentally unfriendly



Exeter – Barnstaple Line Modernisation - Draft Objectives

- 1) Provide a more punctual, more reliable train service for the Exeter to Barnstaple and Exeter to Okehampton lines
- 2) Provide additional capacity to the rail network between Exeter and Barnstaple to provide for current and expected future demand growth, including if the route is extended to Bideford
- 3) Improve socio-economic conditions in the Northern Devon and Mid Devon areas by reducing the negative impacts of peripherality, assisting in lifting productivity, prosperity and economic growth
- 4) Enable more sustainable active and public transport modes to take an increased share of overall transport demand, itself growing as local population and housing increase, to contribute towards decarbonising transport on the Northern Devon - Exeter corridor
- 5) Enhance access to employment opportunities, education and healthcare in Exeter and beyond for Northern Devon and Mid Devon residents and facilitate access to 'hard-to-recruit' jobs for people outside these areas
- 6) Improve visitor access by sustainable public transport to the natural environment, in particular the Tarka Trail, the South West Coast Path, the Two Moors Way and coastal areas



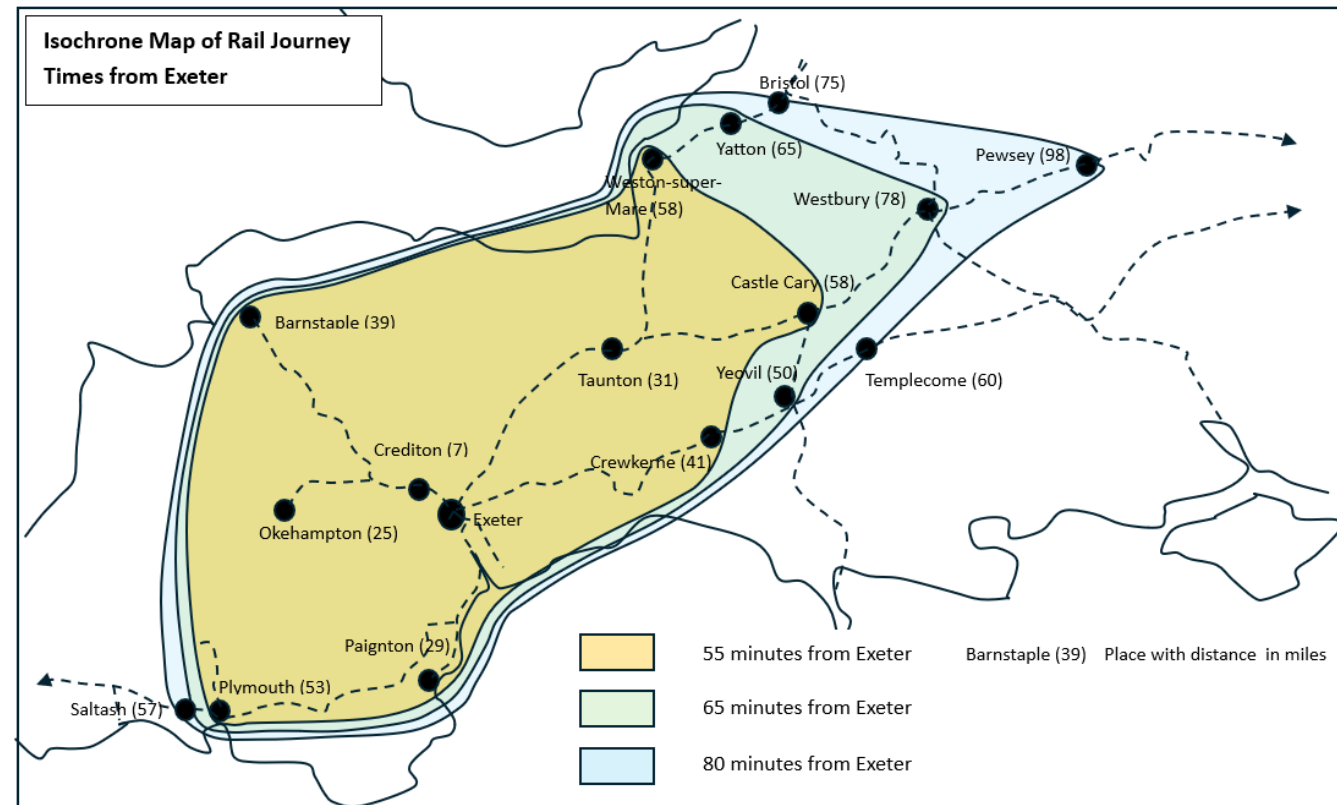
Exeter – Barnstaple Line Modernisation – Potential Improvement Outcomes

- Materially faster typical journey times: Barnstaple - Exeter St Davids no more than 55 minutes and potentially significant further journey time savings
- Train service frequency doubled from hourly to two trains per hour between Barnstaple and Exeter (three trains per hour for Crediton)
- Significantly improved punctuality and reliability for both Barnstaple and Okehampton train services, with reduced knock-on delay to other parts of the national network
- Train service capacity substantially increased, both for continuing growth on the Barnstaple-Exeter route and for any reinstatement of the Bideford line
- Intermediate stations easier/safer to access by car/EV/active travel modes and for disabled people
- Stations and the train service brought into the digital age with wi-fi where not present, better mobile connectivity along the route and digital ticketing
- Modern, faster accelerating, more comfortable, more environmentally-friendly trains replace today's old diesel trains



Exeter – Barnstaple Line Modernisation - Journey Time

- Exeter St Davids to Barnstaple is 39¼ miles by rail
- Slowest: 1 hour 20 minutes (29 mph)
- Typical: 1 hour 6 minutes (36 mph)
- Fastest: 55 minutes (43 mph)





Exeter – Barnstaple Line Modernisation: Usability/Accessibility

- Poor parking provision at intermediate stations
- No EV charging, including at Barnstaple
- Poor safety of pedestrian routes at some intermediate stations
- Many stations do not have level access
- Unclear pedestrian route to Barnstaple town centre
- Good bus interchange at Barnstaple and Crediton
- Rail routes to Bideford, Ilfracombe, etc, closed
- No digital ticketing such as Pay-As-You-Go
- Poor wi-fi / mobile reception on-train
- No wi-fi at intermediate stations





Are These Schemes Financially Realistic?

- Northumberland line train service reinstatement: £299m for an 18-mile upgraded freight line with 6 stations, train services started December 2024, with some stations opening later (promoter: Northumberland County Council)
- Leven branch reopening in Scotland: £117m for six miles of double track and two new stations, with an hourly train service on former freight line, started on 2 June 2024 (promoter: Transport Scotland)
- Mid Cornwall Metro: £57m for modernising the Par to Newquay line with hourly through train service to Falmouth via Truro, a second platform at Newquay - implemented in phases, next phase this May (promoter: Cornwall Council)
- Cambridge South station: £93m for a third station in Cambridge serving a large science park, with four platforms, additional and road layout alterations, due to open in 2025 (promoter: Network Rail)
- Beaulieu Park station: £160m for a second station in Chelmsford, with 3 platforms, 700 parking spaces, 500 cycle spaces, due to open in 2025 (promoters: Essex County Council, Chelmsford City Council and private developers)
- Portishead train service reinstatement: £152m for Bristol to Portishead train services, with two new stations, three miles of new track and upgrading existing freight line including a new double track passing place, planned to open 2027 (promoter: West of England Combined Authority)



Bideford Train Service Reinstatement - Draft Objectives

- 1) Improve socio-economic conditions in the Bideford and wider Torridge area by reducing the negative impacts of peripherality, assisting in lifting productivity, prosperity and economic growth
- 2) Add low-carbon capacity, choice, resilience and reliability to the area's transport network to contribute towards decarbonising transport on the Torridge/North Devon - Exeter corridor
- 3) Enable more sustainable active and public transport modes to take an increased share of overall transport demand, itself growing as the local population and housing increase
- 4) Enhance access to employment opportunities, education and healthcare in Exeter and beyond for Bideford and Torridge residents and facilitate access to 'hard-to-recruit' jobs in Bideford and Torridge for people outside these areas
- 5) Improve visitor access by sustainable public transport to the natural environment, in particular the Tarka Trail, the South West Coast Path and coastal areas