



Bideford could be in top 25% of Britain's mainline railway stations, study suggests

The extension of rail services to Bideford came under scrutiny on Wednesday 3rd September when five funding partners in the Northern Devon Railway Development Alliance developing a strategic business case for the scheme came together in a workshop in Bideford. Selected representatives invited from Devon County Council, Torridge District Council (which had contributed via their UK Shared Prosperity Fund allocation), Bideford and Barnstaple Town Councils, and Railfuture received presentations on a Preliminary Strategic Business Case drafted by the Alliance's independent adviser Peter West OBE CMILT, and specially-commissioned Economic Appraisal and Engineering Feasibility reports from SLC Rail.

Delegates reviewed evidence of the scheme's potential strategic and economic viability, and of its engineering feasibility in a way which would maintain a continuous walking / wheeling / jogging / cycling route between Bideford and Barnstaple. With Bideford identified in so many official studies and statistics as suffering economically from the effects of its peripherality through poor transport connectivity, and Barnstaple one of just three urban areas in the South West suffering from particularly severe traffic congestion, the need for additional transport capacity and choice to improve the area's connectivity and economic integration is ever-strengthening, and the supporting evidence compelling.

"New through rail services for Bideford to and from Exeter, via Barnstaple, offer real hope of a more prosperous and sustainable future" said Roger Blake, Acting Convener for the two dozen-strong Northern Devon Railway Development Alliance of stakeholder organisations. "No community which has had its train services restored has ever regretted it." Local campaigner Tim Steer, now Chair of Railfuture's Devon & Cornwall regional branch, added "Our independent specialist's professional assessment of Bideford station's future use, based on projected housing and population growth and a modernised North Devon Line with shorter journey times and two trains every hour, could see Bideford in the top 25% of Britain's mainline railway stations, putting this area on the map as a well-connected place to live, work and visit."

Now that the commitment to exploring the feasibility of extending rail services to Bideford is enshrined in the new Devon & Torbay Combined County Authority's Local Transport Plan 2025-40, and in Peninsula Transport's Strategic Implementation Plan 2025-50 - as a Strategic Scheme (long-term) in the Delivery Plan - a key next step will be for a formally adopted business case to be developed, where necessary building on the forthcoming changes to central government guidance announced in HM Treasury's Green Book Review 2025. SLC Rail's Strategy Director Ian Baxter noted that Railfuture deserved credit for sponsoring the development of the scheme thus far. However, it had matured to the stage where sponsorship now needed to come from a local authority such as the County Council or the new Combined County Authority.

~ More information on Railfuture's website at <https://www.railfuture.org.uk/Devon-and-Cornwall-Branch#Campaigns>

~ Follow the Northern Devon Railway Development Alliance on Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/950297745918116> and Railfuture on X/Twitter: twitter.com/RailfutureDC

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