

'Mosh pit' chaos on Exeter to Barnstaple commute from hell

Passengers say overcrowding has reached dangerous levels, with reports of shoving, injuries and “mosh pit” conditions

DevonLive

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Commuters say they're being pushed, shoved and even injured during the evening rush-hour train from Exeter to Barnstaple, as overcrowding on the line reaches boiling point.

The 5.15pm Great Western Railway (GWR) service leaving Exeter Central has become so crammed that passengers describe the experience as “almost violent”, with some claiming the scramble to board has left people injured.

Tim Steer, chair of Railfuture's Devon and Cornwall branch, said passengers have been forming groups to jostle their way onto the train.

“This is getting to the point where it's a health and safety problem,” Tim said. “We need to see the new Class 175s introduced as five or six-carriage units to cope with capacity.”



Exeter to Barnstaple Line woes – Tim Steer

He added that the mix of college students and workers on the service had led to “alpha” groups pushing their way to the front, creating challenges for station staff.

Tim said Railfuture is working to speed up the deployment of longer trains on the Barnstaple to Exeter line, warning that the three- and four-carriage trains currently in use are “already proving there is a problem”.

“The newly acquired Class 175s will be brought into service next year, and we are hoping driver training can be completed quickly,” he said. “If we just have the same capacity with new trains, the problem hasn’t been solved.”

Passengers also shared their experiences of the overcrowded service.



Exeter to Barnstaple Line woes

Dylan Goldsbury, who has taken the train since September 2023, said: “Half the time you don’t really get a seat, it gets really rammed. Not enough carriages. But as long as I’m with my friends, it is a good time.”

Sasha Farcus, a regular commuter for over a year, described a chaotic boarding process: “Sometimes it’s quite busy and almost violent to get on the train. I saw a girl get her head split open by being flung into the door.”

Another passenger, David Waldon, likened the crush to a music festival: “There’s like festivals here, the mosh pits. Getting on at peak times is like that, but there’s no music and no one’s having any fun.”



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A spokesperson for GWR acknowledged the issue, saying both the railway operator and Exeter College were “victims of our own success” due to the rising number of students travelling between Exeter and North Devon.

“If all Exeter College students wanted to travel on the same day, we would need a nine-car IET to get them all seated,” the spokesperson said. “With non-Exeter College travellers using the route as well, we are well over capacity on some services during peak times.”



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GWR confirmed it cannot currently run more trains due to capacity limits on the branch line, and platform lengths prevent the use of longer trains.

“We are, however, supportive of campaigns to upgrade the infrastructure of the North Devon Line,” the spokesperson added. “In the short term, the solution is more trains or carriages with selective door opening, and we hope the introduction of Class 175 trains will provide some respite in the fullness of time.”