

Campaigners step up push to reconnect Tavistock with national rail network

TavyRail joins Railfuture as campaigners push to reopen Tavistock to Bere Alston rail line, with Devon County Council and Restoring Your Railway programme supporting proposals to improve Plymouth Metro connections and sustainable transport in West Devon



The former Tavistock North station. (Photo: Nigel Cox / Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 2.0)

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02 Feb 2026 11:00 AM

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A local rail campaign group has formally joined the national rail advocacy organisation Railfuture, in a renewed bid to restore a rail link between Tavistock and Plymouth via Bere Alston.

Tavistock has been without a rail service for more than half a century.

The town's last passenger trains ran in 1968 when the Tavistock North station closed under nationwide rail reductions in the 1960s.

A separate station, Tavistock South, had ceased passenger services in 1962 and completely closed for goods traffic by 1964.

Campaigning for a reinstated rail link has been under discussion for years, involving Devon County Council and local community groups.

Devon County Council first included the Tavistock rail proposal in its planning strategy in 2011, and subsequent funding bids were submitted under the Government's Restoring Your Railway programme, with a Strategic Outline Business Case lodged towards the end of 2022.

Local officials describe the effort as a long-held ambition for the town, with discussions and preparatory work stretching back for more than a decade.

Railfuture, an independent volunteer organisation campaigning for improved rail services for passengers and freight across the UK, represents around 20,000 members and is not funded by train companies, political parties, or trade unions.

The group has supported other rail campaigns in the South West, including the reopening of the Dartmoor line between Exeter and Okehampton, and continues to advocate for sustainable transport development across Devon and Cornwall.

Tim Steer, chair of Railfuture's Devon and Cornwall regional branch, said: "We are delighted to announce that TavyRail has become affiliated to Railfuture. We have helped other rail campaign groups in Devon and Cornwall including the Northern Devon Railway Development Alliance and Connect Bude with help and funding and the organisation have also congratulated OkeRail in 2022 with a judges special award after the years of campaigning to reopen the Dartmoor line from Exeter to Okehampton.

"The Tavistock to Bere Alston line would connect the growing conurbation to Plymouth city. The Plymouth Metro is developing quickly to accommodate the need to improve sustainable transport links to the city including a need to reopen a station at Plympton. The Ministry Of Defence has announced contracts that will bring billions to Plymouth and create new jobs for businesses, skilled labour and apprentices. Devon County Council included the Tavistock rail link in the Local Transport Plan 2025-2040 as did Peninsula Transport who included the line in their Strategic Implementation Plan 2025 -2050. These formal transport documents show that the Tavistock line will now need to go through formal Department for Transport's Transport Appraisal Guidance business case development.

"Railfuture understands that under the last government, the Tavistock line has had a formal Strategic Outline Business Case and now they seek the funds for an Outline Business Case before the Full Business Case. Railways are a sign of good sustainable investment for the UK, when a railway is axed from any town it is well known that the community falls into deprivation but when a railway line to an area is restored then it once again has prosperity"

TavyRail chair Richard Searight said congestion on routes into Plymouth is already affecting commuters: "There is escalating transport need in Plymouth as the A386 faces ever increasing congestion - especially as the dockyard scales up to fulfil the expected £4 billion defence requirement. Crucially, some people are having to go in an hour early just to get a parking space now before the scale up happens!"

Campaigners say restoring the Tavistock line could provide a sustainable alternative to heavily congested roads, support local employment and housing growth, and improve public transport connections across West Devon.

Railfuture's involvement is expected to bring additional expertise, advocacy, and access to national networks of transport campaigners to assist in the next stages of the project.