

3,000 people back call for investment in rail line

Trains have not run on the Tarka Line since Storm Chandra hit last month.



NORTH Devon MP Ian Roome has formally presented a petition to parliament calling for action and investment to future-proof the Tarka Line and improve reliability for passengers across the area who rely on the main service.

The petition, signed by more than 3,000 residents, follows months of disruption on the line, including repeated flooding and cancellations that have inconvenienced commuters, students and families who rely on the rail link between Barnstaple and Exeter.

Life Dem MP Mr Roome said the scale of support demonstrates the strength of local feeling and the need for a clear plan and investment to make the line more resilient to extreme weather and growing demand.

During his speech in parliament on Thursday, he said rail passengers had "suffered overcrowding and repeated service disruption due to flooding despite a record-breaking one million rail journeys per year between Barnstaple and Exeter".

"Following Storm Chandra all trains have been cancelled. North Devon's rail link has been shut for over a week and will not resume for several more days," he added.

"The petitioners request that the House of Commons urges the government to ask Network Rail and Great Western Railway to prioritise the Tarka Line for improvements and to work together to make rail travel in North Devon more resilient."

Mr Roome is urging residents who have been affected by disruption to continue sharing their experiences to strengthen the case for investment.

"Demand for the service has continuously grown and it's one of the busiest branch lines anywhere in the South West - it's a lifeline for commuters getting to work, students travelling to col-

ALISON STEPHENSON
Local Democracy Reporter

lege, people attending appointments," he said.

Mr Roome said he would be meeting with Network Rail in press for a clear plan for the Tarka Line, with proper investment to strengthen the route against flooding and extreme weather and "ensure North Devon isn't left behind".

North Devon Council's deputy leader Peter Leaver (Lib Dem, Barnstaple with Westacott) said the council was working closely with operators and partners to improve reliability, but was "increasingly clear" that major investment is needed to keep up with demand and make the line more resilient, especially in the face of extreme weather and climate change.

"That's why this petition really matters, and we hope it builds on the case we've been making for investment."

Tim Street, Rillington's regional Devon and Cornwall chair, said: "Getting to and from work, education, health and other appointments such as job interviews, public events and even social activities, all are being thrown into chaos because our rail line is not a fit-for-purpose lifeline, something which can be depended on as it must be."



MP Ian Roome presents the petition to parliament.

Delivery driver 'dumped parcels in a field'

AN Eri delivery driver dumped his parcels in a Devon field because he ran out of time to finish his deliveries, according to a local MP.

South Devon's Liberal Democrat MP Caroline Voaden told a Westminster debate on postal services that people were turning to private companies because they no longer trusted Royal Mail with their deliveries. But going private brought its own problems, she said.

Ms Voaden said some local people had been receiving hospital appointment notices after the day of their appointment, meaning they missed vital medical care.

And, she said, bank cards and PINs were arriving at the same time, when they are supposed to be delivered separately for security reasons.

She went on: "An Eri driver dumped loads of parcels in a field because it was impossible for him to get around the route in the time given by his employer."

"People are using private delivery services because they do not trust Royal Mail, and we are seeing serious failings. Royal Mail has questions to answer about the sustainability of its network."

A spokesperson for Eri said the

company delivered more than 800 million parcels each year.

"We set the industry standard for right first-time deliveries," the spokesperson said. "Detailed data analysis ensures we can accurately predict how long a route will take to deliver, and we have invested in technology, like geo-fenced deliveries and AI-powered tracking, to ensure parcels arrive safely and on time."

"We're the only delivery company to mandate a photo for proof of delivery, and we have robust performance monitoring for our couriers."

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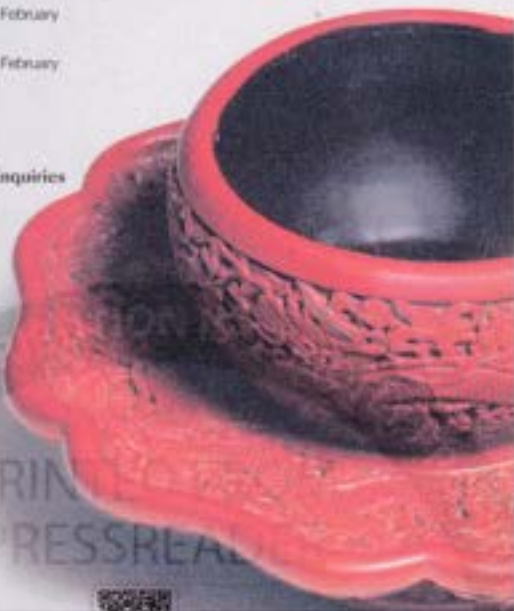
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