

Rail disruption from floods five times worse in 10 years

ELLA SAMPSON

ella.sampson@clearskypublishing.co.uk



RAIL passengers in the South West are facing nearly five times as much disruption from flooding as they did a decade ago, new figures suggest.

Analysis of Network Rail data shows that flood-related delays across the region have surged by 386 per cent compared with the mid-2010s.

The figures come as users of the Tarka Line, which connects Barnstaple and Exeter, continue to count the cost of increasingly volatile weather.

Earlier this year, the vital commuter link was forced to close for 24 consecutive days following extreme rainfall from Storm Chandra. The closure left thousands of North Devon residents reliant on replacement bus services as engineers worked to repair trackbeds washed away by the River Creedy.

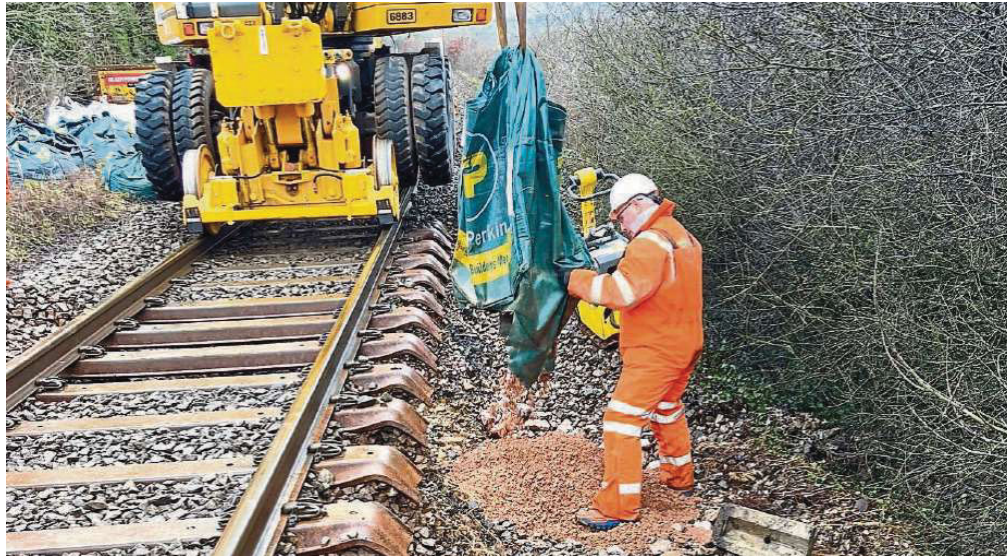
The figures were uncovered by Round Our Way, a non-profit group that highlights how weather changes are affecting local communities.

The data shows a "rising tide" of cancellations across the region. Round Our Way warned that the South West's rail network is "buckling" under the pressure of floods, landslips, and extreme rainfall.

On average, travellers in the region now face 2,862 minutes of flood delays every year. In the mid-2010s, that yearly average was nearly five times lower, at just 589 minutes.

"The rail network appears to be under persistent weather stress," said Sofie Jenkinson, co-director of Round Our Way.

The group has suggested that the UK is not ready for climate change. It said: "We are not prepared for the impact that climate change is al-



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ready having on ordinary Brits' way of life."

In a flood disruption hotspot map generated by the research organisation, stations at Barnstaple, Eggesford, Crediton, Okehampton and Exeter St David's were all flagged up as points of concern.

For many in the South West, the statistics simply confirm what they see on the platform display boards.

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The Met Office notes that the last decade has been 10 per cent wetter

than the period between 1961 and 1990.

To maintain transparency, the report's authors outlined how the figures were reached. The data was provided by Network Rail following a Freedom of Information request covering April 2014 to December 2025. Researchers focused specifically on incidents coded as "I10A X2", defined by the rail industry as severe flooding beyond the design capability of the infrastructure.

The study used "Passenger Delay Minutes" (PDM), a standard industry measure that calculates the total time lost by all passengers on a disrupted service.

The 386 per cent increase was found by comparing the annual average of delays from 2014-2017 against the most recent three-year

period (2022-2025). According to the analysis, several locations in the South West have recorded 25 or more flood incidents since 2014, including: Tiverton Parkway, Liskeard, Bristol Temple Meads, Swindon and Chippenham.

Ms Jenkinson said the "significant rise" in delays raised concerns about the safety of the UK's "creaking rail infrastructure".

She added: "We are all sadly getting very familiar with the impact climate change-driven extreme weather is having on the country. This is worrying but it is also fixable."

"Politicians need to show leadership to better prepare us for weather extremes and challenge the companies profiting from pollution which creates these impacts in the first place."

MP: railway to Bideford is 'essential'

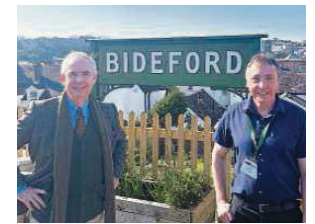
TORRIDGE MP Sir Geoffrey Cox KC has described a rail link to Bideford as essential, warning that local infrastructure must receive urgent investment to keep pace with a housing boom, writes Ella Sampson.

On Friday, March 20, Sir Geoffrey met the "indefatigable" team from Railfuture, including Tim Steer, a long-standing campaigner and chair of the organisation's Devon and Cornwall branch. The meeting focused on the "renewed case" for extending the Tarka Line from its current terminus at Barnstaple into Bideford.

The MP argued that the project is no longer a luxury but a necessity, given that the Bideford catchment area is expected to accommodate nearly 5,000 new homes over the next five years.

The push for the extension is centered on the rapid population growth in the town and its surrounding villages. Sir Geoffrey stated that it is "essential" that transport infrastructure receives the attention it requires to relieve pressure on the A39 and A386.

"We must relieve pressure on local bus links and roads, particularly the A39 and A386, and ensure residents have reliable, sus-



MP Sir Geoffrey Cox and Tim Steer

tainable transport to Barnstaple, Exeter, and a direct onward connection to London and elsewhere," the MP said.

A restored link is expected to serve as a vital route for students travelling to regional colleges, patients accessing healthcare appointments and the tourism economy bringing visitors into Torrington during the peak season.

Sir Geoffrey, who advocated for the reopening of the Dartmoor Line to Okehampton, pointed to that project's success as a clear indicator of what can be achieved. Since its reinstatement, the Okehampton line has carried more than 250,000 passengers a year.

The MP also noted his continued support for reconnecting Tavistock to the rail network, suggesting that Bideford is the next logical step in regional connectivity.

After his discussions with Mr Steer and the Railfuture team, Sir Geoffrey confirmed he will soon meet with the region's new combined authority. He stated that he will "urge them, and the government, to recognise the strategic value of enhancing the Tarka Line and to support its extension to Bideford in the years ahead."

Church helps bring Easter story alive

SOUTH Molton was treated to a live action version of the Easter story at the weekend as Jesus made his entry into the town on a donkey.

The Easter Passion Play was organised by South Molton Baptist Church and performed live in the streets on Saturday evening by church members and Christians from other local churches.

The cast of more than 40 covered a range of ages from 11 to 90 and even featured a live donkey. The church has performed a live Nativity for the past 10 years and felt it was the right time to continue that tradition with an Easter production.

Christine Carter, a retired drama teacher, had the vision for directing the performance, beginning with the triumphant entry of Jesus into Jerusalem, known as Palm Sunday, leading on into the celebration of the Passover and culminating in the betrayal by Judas, Jesus' arrest and Pe-



Recreating the entry of Jesus into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday with a live action Easter Passion Play in South Molton organised by South Molton Baptist Church.

Picture: Trevor Brayley

ter's denial of ever knowing Jesus.

There is more to come, with people encouraged to join a live Walk of Witness this Good Friday (April 3) at South Molton Pannier Market, beginning at 10am.

Christine said: "It's been a privilege to bring this so important message to our community. We have been blessed in preparing it and we hope it will prove to be a blessing to all who joined us."

Helen Jarvis, who produced the Passion Play, added: "What an incredible evening we shared together, remembering the events of Holy Week, such a special and poignant way to approach this Easter and celebrate the Resurrection of Jesus. South Molton Town Band accompanied the hymns beautifully and the Benita project provided us all with delicious hot food. Special thanks to Marcus and his donkey, Romeo, who played his part impeccably."