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The 14:20 Waterloo to Exeter calls at Whimble on Saturday 22nd July 2017.

This should be the location of a new passing loop. To accommodate the new track the widened platform would be narrowed back to its original width, approximately where the light and CCTV poles are shown.

CHAIRMAN'S INTRODUCTION

I wrote about the need for more passing places between Exeter and Yeovil Junction in our last newsletter of December 2016. Nothing changes! We still don't have them and incidents continue to happen. How useful they would have been for diverting all the delayed trains, rather than just a few, following the recent fatality on the railway north of Taunton on 7th November. Railfuture will continue to press for improvements to the Waterloo line to allow more trains to run.

Similarly we will continue to press for the complete reopening of the Exeter to Plymouth via Okehampton line. It is needed every time the sea disrupts train services through Dawlish, when the line is closed for planned engineering work and to increase line capacity west of Exeter. We cannot campaign for more trains to Dawlish and Teignmouth without recognising that this uses up line capacity, that could otherwise be used for developing more long distance services and freight. The Okehampton route is the best option we have and with an Okehampton Parkway station rail access to West Devon and North Cornwall could be greatly improved.

Whether or not any more of the former Southern Railway network should be reopened is open to question. However, the Barnstaple to Bideford line has always been on our list of reopenings and Launceston should be back on the network at some point. Barnstaple to Ilfracombe is more problematic with the bridge gone over the River Taw and other lost sections of trackbed. Light rail may be the solution, but we are not having to pursue this directly as the TawLink group are campaigning for just this between Barnstaple and Braunton. We have invited them to speak at our **Branch Meeting in Crediton on 25th November**. Please see p.12 for details.

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Railfuture's Salisbury to Exeter Report Discussion

We are aware that Network Rail have been asked to do some timetable studies on the Waterloo-Exeter line. We believe these may involve some non-stop service patterns, together with the idea of splitting Waterloo to Exeter trains into fast and stopping services at Salisbury. However, we already know from our own research that this would need really long lengths of double track west of Wilton and elsewhere along the line. Funding for all this is unlikely.

Our judgement is that we should concentrate on simple small scale schemes to increase capacity for more trains. This could be done by enhancing the existing timetable, and building on the timetable reliability achieved to date. Our ideas are set out in a short report produced by (1) "Railfuture Devon and Cornwall", (2) "Railfuture Wessex" and (3) "Salisbury to Exeter Rail Users Group" and with the title '**Salisbury to Exeter Route Capacity Enhancements. A Proposal by Railfuture**'. It is available as a pdf file on the Railfuture website at <http://railfuture.org.uk/branches> (click the *Campaigns* link). A map and timetable graph are included.

We are calling for an extension of the Tisbury loop in both directions to allow a half hourly service between Waterloo and Yeovil Junction. The XX:50 trains from Waterloo to Salisbury and XX:47 from Salisbury to Waterloo are those which call at all stations between Basingstoke and Salisbury. Unlike our Waterloo to Exeter trains, the theoretical Tisbury loop passing point moves off the double track towards Salisbury. A short extension of double track to Dinton would be sufficient.

The westward extension of the Tisbury loop into the actual station, would let the Waterloo to Exeter service pass its counterpart a little further west. Avoiding the stop in both the loop and station saves a few minutes and can be used to improve passing reliability at Gillingham. Of course the loop at Gillingham could be extended westward to enable trains to reach Exeter a bit earlier, but this would also mean extending the Axminster loop towards Seaton Junction. At the moment this would add too much cost to our proposal.

At the Exeter end of the line we have updated our proposals outlined a few years ago in the April 2011 Railwatch, '**What now for the Exeter to Salisbury line?**'

Between Axminster and Pinhoe we propose a loop at Whimble which together with the Honiton station loop doubles the capacity of the line to 3 trains per hour. As at present there would be an XX:25 departure from Exeter St. Davids to London Waterloo, Then XX:48 from Exeter St. Davids to Axminster and returning from there at XX:43. Intermediate stops are at Exeter Central, Cranbrook, alternating between Whimble and Feniton and then Honiton. A slightly earlier Exeter departure would allow Pinhoe to be served.

The current capability to divert Paddington services from the Taunton route every 2 hours both ways is maintained, but the Whimble loop allows an 11 minute later departure from Exeter St. Davids at XX:11 instead of on the hour. Westbound from Yeovil Junction is at XX:54 arriving at Exeter St Davids at XX:55. Apart from Exeter Central which is optional these trains must stop to pass at Honiton, Axminster and Chard Junction.

The paths have potential to be used for normal service trains between Exeter and Yeovil Pen Mill which has onward connections to the Bristol to Weymouth line. The local area around Chard Junction could also gain a passenger service if a new down platform was provided. The Whimble loop would also allow a 2 hourly Exeter St. Davids (XX:05) to Honiton shuttle service. This would be useful for additional peak time services with stops at Pinhoe and Cranbrook.

Our proposed Whimble loop would start one mile east of the station on the straight track leading from Bridge 499 (Photo 1).

After half a mile and at bridge 502 (Photo 2 at 162 miles 55 chains from Waterloo) most of the

track is on the former down side all the way to



Photo 1 view west of the site for a new Whimble East Junction from Bridge 499.

the suggested end point just to the east of Cranbrook station. This together with there being only one overbridge (502) makes Whimble a favourable location for track doubling. Photo 3 shows the trackbed west from Whimble station. The loop would be about 3¾ miles. Work was done on the Whimble Loop by Parsons Brinkerhoff for SELCA, Devon County Council & Somerset County Council in 2004, although for a different timetable/passing configuration (**Pre-Feasibility Report For Exeter to Waterloo Line Devon and Somerset Loop Lines**, 24th December 2004, Doc Ref: TUE80790A-SNP-100).

Additional Taunton line diversions could run hourly when necessary, by taking over the stops of the Exeter to Axminster shuttle service. Passing would be at Chard Junction and on a new loop about 4 miles east of Crewkerne station (around mile post 125 to mile post 129), although consideration might be given to also completing the 2 miles of double track from Yeovil Junction to Sutton Bingham. If the paths were developed for service trains from Exeter to Yeovil, timings would allow connections to or continuation as the next Yeovil to Waterloo service.



Photo 2. Half a mile on from Bridge 499 the line swings substantially on to the old down side formation. View east from Bridge 502

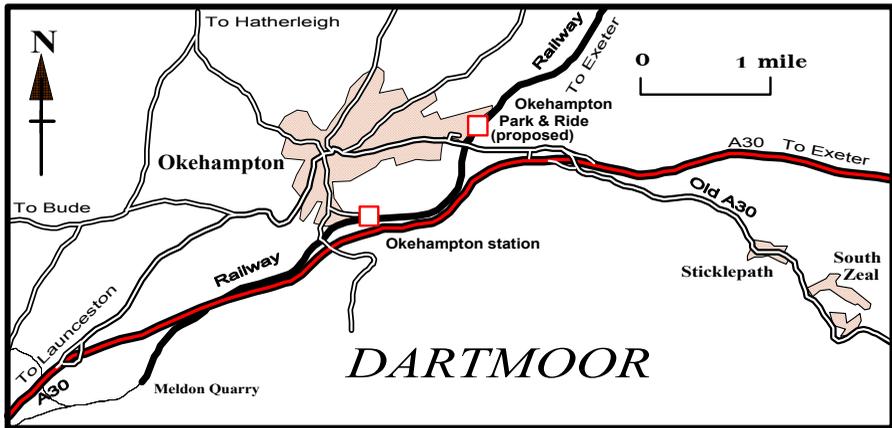


Photo 3. West from Whimble station. The existing former down line could become the through line and the old up line restored for trains stopping at the station.

Okehampton Parkway: background & discussion

The idea for an Okehampton park and ride station has been evolving slowly for a number of years. We first mentioned it in Section 7.6 of our March 2000 rail strategy and again in the 2010 December Railwatch. Meanwhile new housing and industrial units have extended Okehampton east to the proposed station site itself. So for many in Okehampton the Parkway station might be a better location to catch the train into Exeter, although we would expect a new train service to run to the original station as well.

The parkway station would be on the existing line near Fatherford Farm and about 1¼ miles from the existing Okehampton station. It is not far from where the railway passes under the B3260 which is the original A30 road out of the town. It would have good access from the A30 trunk road from North Cornwall and other West Devon roads, as shown by the sketch map below.



Location and road links to the proposed Okehampton Parkway station. Based on an original map from the South West Rail Strategy March 2000.

A key advantage of the parkway station would be easy links to existing bus services. Buses would not have to deviate very much to serve Okehampton Parkway, in contrast to the 1½ mile diversion to run via the existing station. Service 6/6A passes by on the main road and would give options for connecting to Bude, Launceston and also back towards Sticklepath. Service 46 from Tavistock terminates in

Okehampton by running in an anticlockwise loop around residential roads on the east side of the town. An extension of just over half a mile would take it to the proposed station as well.

An alternative site for a parkway station could be in the Sourton area where good road links also exist. This idea originated from the former Rail Passenger Committee for Western England in their publication, '**WESTERN ADVANCE A plan for the growth of rail passenger services serving Western England 2004-2029**'. It was envisaged as a short extension of the existing line at Meldon prior to any possible reopening beyond to Tavistock. However, the best choice has probably slipped in favour of the eastern site. It serves the eastern growth of the town, avoids any issues relating to reusing Meldon Viaduct and relatively more work has been done towards it.

The Tavistock Times Gazette reported on 20th September 2017 that a preliminary investigation has been done for a 300 space car park on the east side of the proposed Okehampton Parkway station. New road access would be from Exeter Road. The station platform would be built on the space provided by the former up line (picture below). A former farm overbridge (Number 605) would link the platform to the car park. There would also be access from the industrial estate on the west side. We assume the platform would become an island type if the line was ever doubled. Expensive but possible.



Photo 4. Looking north from farm overbridge 605. The platform would be on the left side. On the right the flooded section up to the middle of the picture is thought to be level track. Beyond, it is 1 in 88 down towards Crediton. (2012 photo)

The Okehampton Parkway station platform cannot avoid tight 30 chain (600 m) radii curvature. Although this is less tight than at Bere Alston station (20 chains or 400 m), it would probably need special safety approval, gauge clearance for each type of train used and perhaps platform CCTV for the safe dispatch of long trains. Non stop speed through the station might be kept at 55 to 60 mph, so as to avoid steeply canted track (the tilt to compensate for lateral forces) and the consequent high step between platform and train.

Level track to the north of Bridge 605 could accommodate a 3 coach platform (photo 4). The down 1 in 88 gradient limits further platform extension towards Crediton. Although a runaway train is unlikely, if it did it could run for 12 miles to Coleford Junction and overturn at 100 mph on the 20 chain (400 m) radius curve.

Fortunately the Fatherford cutting (photo 5), between Bridge 605 and Exeter Road bridge 606, could accommodate a southward platform extension for 6 carriages. The platform could have direct pedestrian access to Exeter Road. If it extended on to the down 1 in 100 grade there is unlikely to be a serious safety issue, as it is only a short half mile drop before the line ascends ¾ mile up to the existing Okehampton station.

Overall assessment: we should support Okehampton Parkway.

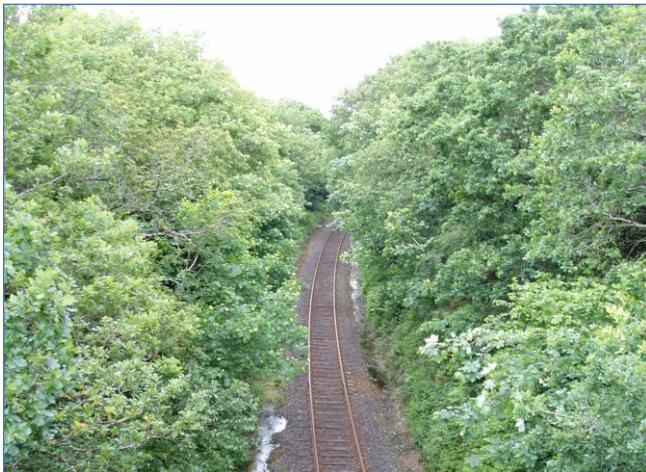


Photo 5. Taken in 2012 looking north from the Exeter Road overbridge number 606.

The platform would be on the left side here within Fatherford cutting. This is at or close to the summit with some level track.

A Look at the Bude Branch

The railway to Bude saw its last trains on Saturday 1st October 1966, but the town, Halwill Junction and Holsworthy are fortunate to have retained a bus service close to being a true rail replacement service. The bus was originally operated by Jennings, more recently First Bus and now Stagecoach. The bus service has improved over the years particularly for outbound journeys from Exeter. However, the bus takes about 2 hours from Bude to Exeter which is much slower than a rail service could be. It is hardly surprising that people in North Cornwall feel cut-off.

When it was open the railway had a line speed restriction of 55mph from Meldon Junction (near Okehampton) to Bridgerule and 50mph for the final 5½ miles into Bude. However, in theory the track could have accommodated express train speeds at least if continuously welded. Between Meldon and Halwill Junction some sections could be run at 70 mph or higher. Between Halwill Junction and Bude 65mph would be possible. A 1 hour 10 minute Exeter St. Davids to Bude journey time would be possible with intermediate stops at Crediton, Okehampton Parkway, Okehampton, Halwill Junction, Holsworthy and Bridgerule.

Recently a new group has been formed with the aim of reopening the line to Bude. They are called The Bude and Holsworthy Railway Action Group (BHRAG), but that is about all we know about them. Their biggest challenge will be the 28¼ miles of line to restore from Meldon Junction,



Photo 6. An example of a removed overbridge at Derril, near Pyworthy which is 2 miles west of Holsworthy. View to north 21/8/17.

obstructions on the trackbed and low population. This is why the line has not been listed by us for re-opening. But long lengths of trackbed are still intact and the Holsworthy and Derriton Viaducts remain. We would never say never.



Photo 7. Derriton Viaduct west of the Holsworthy station site stands, but is used for a short section of foot and cycle path. View to west 21/8/17.

The key obstructions other than the cost of repurchasing the trackbed and replacing some of the bridges are:

- The A30 Okehampton bypass has cut through the trackbed,
- The Bowerland cutting that follows has been landfilled,
- Ashbury station is intact although in private ownership,
- The Hollacombe railway cutting has been landfilled,
- Halwill Junction station site has been covered with new houses, but a platform could be built further east and a slight northward deviation made around the housing,
- Dunsland Cross station is in private ownership,
- A Waitrose supermarket is on the Holsworthy station site, but there is space for a level single track 4 coach platform built on and east from the Chapel Street underbridge,
- Houses are built on the line of route between Holsworthy station and Derriton viaduct, but they could be avoided.
- Near Bude the A39 road has taken over part of the trackbed,
- Within Bude there are houses on the station site, although a new station could be built short of them or on the former Wharf branch if restored.

In our March 2000 rail strategy we stated,

'It is anticipated that the economic case for reopening will remain weak for the foreseeable future, but given the existence of much of the major infra-structure should the line be dismissed? In other rural areas in the United Kingdom the line would be considered a social necessity.

This needs to be studied further and given the relatively high engineering quality of the route the trackbed should be preserved for possible future railway use. There are some problems on the route from Okehampton to Bude, but none are of sufficient magnitude to preclude reopening. However, it is understood that a footpath is planned for the trackbed from Halwill Junction to Holsworthy and that Sustrans have gained ownership of the viaducts at Holsworthy. It is not clear whether this will hinder any future plans for reopening.'

The way forward for the new group may be to follow the lead provided by the Lynton and Barnstaple Railway. The key might be to buy one of the railway stations as a base, if by chance they come on to the market.



Photo 8. Alongside the Waitrose store on the Holsworthy station site. If built just a few feet to the left there would have been room for a single track line. View towards Halwill Junction as if at the far west end of the down platform.

However, building a new embankment to the right of the fence would enable the railway to reach the Derriton Viaduct and just avoid trackbed housing. Both photos 19/10/2015.



Photo 9. Ashbury station view towards Halwill Junction. Steps down to through up platform, but shelter and far end signal box are gone.

Next Railfuture Devon and Cornwall Meetings

SATURDAY 25th NOVEMBER 2017 AUTUMN MEETING AT THE BONIFACE CENTRE, CREDITON. Let us know if you plan to come.

13:45 Doors open

14:00 Introduction & overview from Gerard Duddridge.

14:10 Oke-Rail up date from Micheal Ireland

14:35 Tarka Rail Association

15:00 Tea and coffee break

15:25 TawLink

15:50 Talk from Chris Irwin

16:15 Final questions

16:30 End of meeting

Boniface Centre,
Church Lane,
Credton, Devon,
EX17 2AH

Walk for about 10 minutes from the station towards the town centre. It is on the right hand (east) side of Credton Parish Church.

Also at Credton - "Presentation of the 2017 RUG Awards 'Best Newsletter' Gold Award to the Tarka Rail Association for its magazine."

OUR BRANCH AGM will be held on **Saturday 28th April 2018**

13:30 -16:15, at the Unitarian Church, Notte Street, Plymouth.



Photo 10. New rail grinding machine from America under test on 6th May 2017 at Okehampton station, prior to getting approvals and safety checks for mainline work. Only one of two in this country. Photo by Brinly Meldon.

Planned Footpath at Tiverton Parkway

The half mile approach road to Tiverton Parkway station is part of the original A373 road and now bypassed by the North Devon Link Road. As a country road it has no footpath or lighting. On 13th September 2017 Devon County Council approved a scheme to add a quarter of a mile of lit footpath from where it currently ends on the east side of Sampford Peverell village to the new extended car park.

So Near Yet so Far

For around 3 weeks in May, sewerage works for new student accommodation blocked nearly all the bus routes into Exeter St. David's station. From the city centre and North Devon direction also the short stay parking for setting down passengers and two of the 3 station car parks. A yellow sign said (photo 12), 'For station drop offs please follow diversion via town centre'. Leaving aside that Exeter is a city, this meant an extra 2½ miles taking 15 or more minutes. Passengers missing their trains were of no concern to the utility company or Devon County Council. We requested a 30 minutes free parking period on a nearby road, but they were rather too concerned about their parking money 'revenue protection' as they called it.



Photo 11. Exeter St. Davids station entrance. Photo 12. Coned off exit opposite.

Bus passengers did little better, as only the bus from Bude & Okehampton could go into the station. The station forecourt could so easily have been made 2 way to allow buses into the station at what is normally only an exit (photo 12) . The bus company were happy to do this, but were not allowed to by the railway. Our letter to Great Western was acknowledged, passed on and ignored.

Disruptions

Dawlish

Bad weather conditions relating to the so called storm Brian disrupted CrossCountry Voyagers on Friday 20th October 2017. An amended timetable cut CrossCountry trains from 19:15 except for the HST worked 13:07 Edinburgh - Plymouth and 15:08 (Voyager) Edinburgh – Plymouth. Some trains operated separately west of Newton Abbot with reliance on GWR services for connections. So another case when the Exeter to Plymouth via Okehampton line would have been really useful.

Between Cogload and Taunton on 7/11/17

At around 18:00 on Tuesday 7th November 2017 there was a fatality on the railway line to the north of Taunton . For the trains there were many serious delays on both the Bristol and Castle Cary routes.

The 16:57 from Plymouth to Paddington, due to leave Exeter St. Davids at 18:03, was we believe diverted via Honiton. It was 71 minutes late at Castle Cary and 89 minutes late into Paddington. The 15:59 from Penzance to Paddington was also diverted over the Honiton line. The 19:55 Exeter to Paddington did not run, as it originates as the 16:36 Paddington to Exeter which was 93 minutes late at Taunton and cancelled. Services from Paddington to the west also had long delays. Only the 19:45 and 20:35 from Paddington to Plymouth ran close to normal (11 and 18 minutes late at Exeter).

Diversion of the 15:59 Penzance to Paddington on 7/11/2017

It is possible to trace the approximate path of the 15:59 from Penzance over the Honiton route. It would normally have left Exeter St. Davids at 19:06, but had to wait at Pinhoe for the 16:20 from Waterloo to clear the single line from Honiton. This arrived just 1 minute late at 19:37 and so the Paddington train took up the path of the up 19:25 Exeter to Waterloo. The single line is split into 2 sections at Feniton, so the Waterloo bound train was able to follow on after about 9 minutes. It stayed this late to Crewkerne, but was 7 minutes late at Yeovil Junction and 5 minutes late at Gillingham.

Both trains crossed the 17:20 from Waterloo (running about 8 minutes late), the Paddington train presumably at Chard Junction and the up 16:25 Exeter to Waterloo train as normal at Axminster. The diverted 19:03 Paddington train should have passed Castle Cary at around 19:54, but is thought to have passed at around 20:43 and was 52 minutes late at London Paddington.

This delay of around 50 minutes to the 15:59 from Penzance is to be expected and we were given a figure of 49 minutes⁽¹⁾ late passing Castle Cary. This figure is probably accounted for as follows: -

- Even if a diverted train can run non-stop from Exeter St. Davids to Yeovil Junction, it may take 10 minutes longer to reach Castle Cary than on the normal route via Taunton.
- In the case of the diverted 19:06, to this must be added around an extra 4 minutes for the reversal at Exeter St. Davids.
- Then add 21 minutes awaiting a path beyond Pinhoe and 14 minutes to stop and pass both the 16:20 from Waterloo at Pinhoe and the 17:20 from Waterloo at Chard Junction (running 8 minutes late).

How a Whimble Loop would have helped on 7/11/17

Although sending out a diverted Paddington train in front of the scheduled Waterloo service keeps trains running, it can result in about 9 minutes of cumulative delay every time it is done.

In the current example, Railfuture's proposed loop at Whimble would have been used to let the 15:59 from Penzance pass the 16:20 from Waterloo to Exeter. So it would have left Pinhoe earlier.

The Paddington bound train would not have been any quicker to Castle Cary, as it would still be constrained by single track beyond Chard Junction. However, the 19:25 Exeter to Waterloo would have run to time in its correct path. Down trains from Waterloo would also have been able to pass at the correct place and on-time and so to the next up trains whether to Waterloo or Paddington.

(1) Information from Dave Tozer

Picture Gallery



1) On 17th July 2017 a class 142 units heads out of Barnstaple with the 14:43 to Exeter and Exmouth. Photo from behind St John's church Bishop's Tawton and towards Tower Park. The village never had a station, but does have an hourly bus service to Barnstaple. This section of line from Barnstaple to Umberleigh was once double track. Exeter bound trains are scheduled with an 8 minute journey time to Umberleigh. The section is straight and has potential for 90 mph running, giving a 7 minute journey time with suitable trains.

2) No prospect of doubling here except for the road (A361 North Devon Link Road). This is the Swimbridge station site on the (3/10/66) closed line from Barnstaple to Taunton .

3) On 10th July 2017 the 13:35 from Exeter St. Davids heads east across Axminster level crossing and on time to London Waterloo. July was the last full month of the South West Trains franchise held by Stagecoach.