



**It is 150 years since the railway reached Bideford at the station which is now our Heritage Centre, so what better way to celebrate than to inform you that, 40 years after the very last trains left, a restored railway service to the town is being taken seriously by local authorities! (You read that correctly).**

When I gave my first presentation to Bideford town council in January with the prospects of suggesting why Bideford needs to be reconnected, I received a full council of support. This then led to the formation of Bideford town council – ACE Rail Group with me becoming the lead; our meetings in the Bideford mayor's parlour are most informative. When in February we had a big discussion on 'Why Bideford?' a member of the executive team from Okehampton's OkeRail team came to help the councillors and I, and we all took away some very important details from that meeting.

Did you know that Torridge district (Bideford) has the second-lowest pay in Devon and the fourth-lowest in the whole United Kingdom? Little wonder that Torridge would love to see the railway return to boost their economy! Greater Bideford (Bideford town, Northam, Appledore and Westward Ho!) is now recognised as the largest urban population without a railway service. Railfuture who are supporting us recently discussed Bideford with Network Rail and GWR senior management, where Torridge is known as part of the 'rail desert' in north Devon and Cornwall where there is absolutely no rail service to this coastal area of the country.

I have given my presentations to Tawstock parish council and North Devon District Council who have now passed a motion to support ACE Rail and its inclusion in the forthcoming joint Local Plan. I have also included cross-party talks, so the North Devon Green party and the North Devon Liberal Democrats are now supporting the project. Being all-party is paramount in understanding why restoring Bideford back to the national network matters, and that is why I have included Devon County Council's cabinet lead for Climate, Environment and Transport Andrea Davis, who is also Chair of the sub-national transport body Peninsula Transport, in all my reported progress.

On 20<sup>th</sup> April 2022 BRHC had a very special day. Andrea Davis arrived to see our station and what restoration work we had already achieved, and she saw how we had a system of active travel Tarka trail cyclists and walkers safely using the trail next to our operational railway line. To greet Andrea we had Torridge District Council chair Doug Bushby, Devon County Councillor for Bideford East Linda Hellyer, Bideford town mayor David Ratcliff, and Railfuture's director of infrastructure and networks Roger Blake. This show of support was only topped by the fact that it was a sunny day. Andrea Davis was quoted by a reporter saying "*With the summer coming, it's going to show that if you reopen railways, it boosts towns like Bideford, like Okehampton, which desperately need a bit of economic activity. It opens up more pathways for residents to get to the opportunities that are further away. We need to get behind Tim, get behind the Tarka Rail Association and move this forward because this will be transformational for North Devon.*"

I have had meetings with Tarka Rail Association, with Devon County Council, Network Rail and GWR management included. TRA now support ACE Rail and offer me guidance. If you were to visit a Tarka line railway station any time soon (Exeter to Barnstaple) you will find notice boards with this message *“There is now a campaign organised by ACE Rail which the Tarka Rail Association is supporting to re-connect Bideford to the national rail network. This would benefit the Tarka line as many passengers’ journeys start and finish in the surrounding area of this town and would probably require much needed infrastructure enhancements on the Tarka Line as well to support the extension. It has a fast-growing population catchment of more than 50,000 people in winter and over 80,000 in summer. It is the largest population centre in Devon without access to a train service. Traffic congestion between Barnstaple and Bideford is a big problem and this would be a solution to this.”*

Railfuture have been outstanding in offering me help and we recognise the left behind community of Greater Bideford as the largest population of all towns in Devon without a railway. That is why ACE Rail is now affiliated with Railfuture.

It lastly brings me to the great honour I have in saying that I have received letters of support from Sir Geoffrey Cox QC MP for Torridge & West Devon, and he wrote (on my behalf) to Secretary of State for Transport, the Rt. Hon. Grant Shapps MP. I have now received further directions from him on how to move this project forward and guidance for funding, so together with Railfuture I can now release this joint statement:

Transport Secretary Grant Shapps has now replied to Torridge MP Sir Geoffrey Cox’s request for his advice on how the ACE Rail scheme (Atlantic Coast-Exeter Railway) might be taken forward. The Transport Secretary has confirmed that the Restoring Your Railway Ideas Fund is closed “for the foreseeable future”, and recognises the support of Railfuture and local councils.

He then draws attention to the Levelling Up Fund which can be used to upgrade local transport, The Rt Hon Secretary believes that local authorities and Local Enterprise Partnerships are best placed to decide on and take forward transport schemes that will most benefit their local area, and advises us to continue to work with the local councils to take this scheme forward.

There is a chart somewhere in Network Rail with vast urban populations that need a restored railway service but it is up to local authorities to recognise the need for sustainable transport first. With Okehampton’s restored Dartmoor line now operating with an hourly service, will Bideford now move up the ranks on that chart?

## **I wish to give thanks to two fine mayors who have represented both Bideford and Barnstaple.**

I was delighted to recently invite Bideford town mayor David Ratcliff and Barnstaple town mayor to Barnstaple railway station platform 2. This platform used to be (and will once again) for Bideford bound passengers. This year, the Tarka Rail Association and Barnstaple in Bloom have been granted permission by Network Rail and GWR to restore the platform. This symbolises that the ACE Rail community rail project will be to re-join and support the left behind community of Bideford. With the Tarka line extended back to Bideford these two great towns can enjoy future economic prosperity with a green sustainable public transport service.

**Cllr Alan Rennles Barnstaple Town Mayor 2019 – 2022**

**Cllr David Ratcliff Bideford Town Mayor 2007 – 2008 & 2021- 2022**





Front row Karen Harley, BRHC, Linda Hellyer, Devon County Councillor for Bideford East, Bideford mayor David Ratcliff, Cabinet DCC lead for environment, climate and transport Andrea Davis, Torridge District Council chair Doug Busby. Back row is Steve Trowbridge BRHC, Clive Fairchild BRHC, Roger Blake, Director of infrastructure and extensions for Railfuture, Tim Steer, Director and station manager for BRHC, John Skidmore, BRHC .



## Farewell to passenger trains

**T**HERE was a civic farewell at Bideford railway station on Saturday evening for the last regular passenger train on the up line to Barnstaple.

The Mayor (Mrs. Ethelwynne Brown), escorted by the Stationmaster (Mr. H. J. Mock), went into the signal box where, under the supervision of the signalman, Mr. Fred Harvey, she pulled the lever to signal the train to Bideford from Torrington. Before the arrival of the train she thanked the railway staff past and present for their services to the public. She hoped those men out of jobs as a result of the closing of the line to passenger traffic would quickly be found others.

All hearts, she thought, must be sad at the closing of the line to passenger traffic.

The Mayor, who was accompanied by the Mayoress (Mrs. Phyllis Galliford) and the Town Clerk (Mr. Leslie Galliford), spoke to the driver, Mr. Leonard Snow, and his second man, Mr. Cyril Nott, both of Barnstaple, and then waved the well-filled train out of the station.

On the return journey from Barnstaple a few farewell detonators were exploded by the train and an effigy of Dr. Beeching made its appearance, but generally there was not so much interest in attendance of the public as might have been expected.

### STEAM SPECIAL

Although the last public passenger train ran on Saturday there was in fact a further passenger train on the following day but it was a private one organised by the Southern Counties Touring Society, on similar lines to one they chartered three weeks earlier. It was hauled by a steam locomotive (number 80039) and this was probably the last appearance such form of transport will make in this area.

At each of the stations between Barnstaple and Torrington there will be a general run-down of personnel, apart from the signalmen who will remain to ensure a safe passage for the goods trains which, unless any extra trains are put on for any specific purpose, will be the only traffic in future on the Barnstaple-Torrington line.

A major alteration in the signalling apparatus will be necessary before the signalmen, too, vanish from the scene.

**What a difference, first an article from 1965 Bideford town mayor Mrs Ethelwynne Brown pulls the Bideford signal box leaver to signal the last passenger train. Now, to contrast it take a look at Devon council's cabinet member for climate change, environment and transport, Andrea Davis as she pulls the very same lever.**



**Article thanks to Rob Dark and picture of Andrea Davis and Clive by Tim Steer.**