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Above - Okehampton Station on the November 20th 2021 reopening day.

CHAIRMAN'S INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the Devon and Cornwall Branch newsletter which also covers some dated items not published in 2020-2021 due to the pandemic.

Most significant has been the return of regular train services between Exeter and Okehampton and some trains connecting with bus service 118 from Okehampton station to Lydford and Tavistock. Passenger numbers are now double those forecast. The reopening also benefits Crediton with 2 trains per hour into Exeter. The reopening on 20th November was busy, as seen on our cover photograph. Our thanks to the Crediton ringers for marking the occasion by ringing the bells for 20 minutes at the Parish church. A short excerpt of the ringing can be found on the Railfuture website (<https://www.railfuture.org.uk/display2870>). Also, thanks to Mark Hopwood from GWR for sending the Dartmoor line poster.

Work has continued on the sea wall strengthening at Dawlish and is now nearing completion around Dawlish station. Platforms are currently under construction for the new Marsh Barton industrial estate station in Exeter. Cullompton and Wellington remain at the planning stage, but with a possible target date of May 2025 for reopening.



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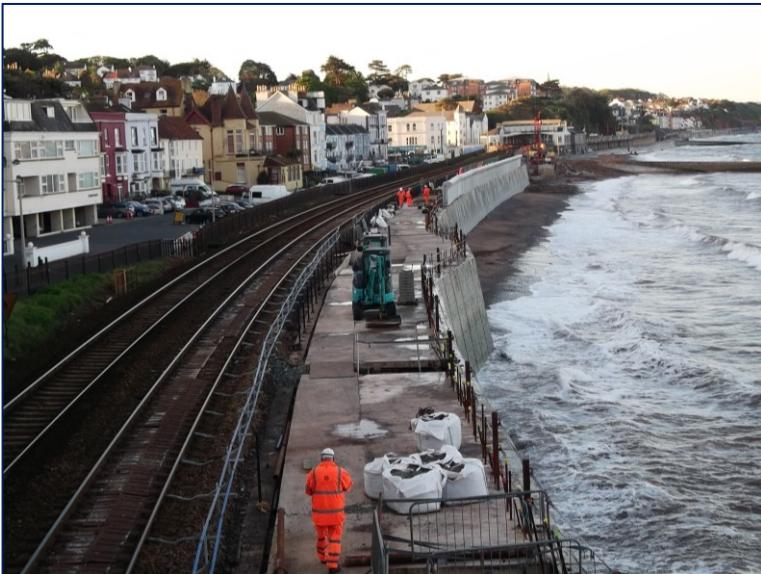
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Dawlish Sea Wall Rebuilding

The first stage of the sea wall rebuild between Dawlish station and Boat Cove was largely completed by the end of July 2020 allowing the public to walk along the sea wall for the first time for months.



Before and after views of the Dawlish sea wall work looking from near Kennaway Tunnel towards the station. Top picture 28th July 2019 and bottom 14th May 2020.



The left hand picture, taken from Marine Parade, shows the increased height of the new outer concrete wall (work in progress) and the sea still visible where incomplete in May 2020. The right picture shows rough sea conditions on 17th September 2020, just before a late evening 4.9 m high tide combined with generally south easterly winds.

The strengthened sea wall gives better protection to the railway and safer access for pedestrians, compared to the unfenced seaward side of the original wall. The outer wall should deflect waves away from the railway as seen happening in the right hand picture above. Unfortunately the seaward side of the concrete wall is quite ugly compared to the weathered Devonian limestones that have now been covered up. Waves crashing on to the wall also creates noise.



Work underway on the station area sea wall strengthening as seen on 3rd April 2022.

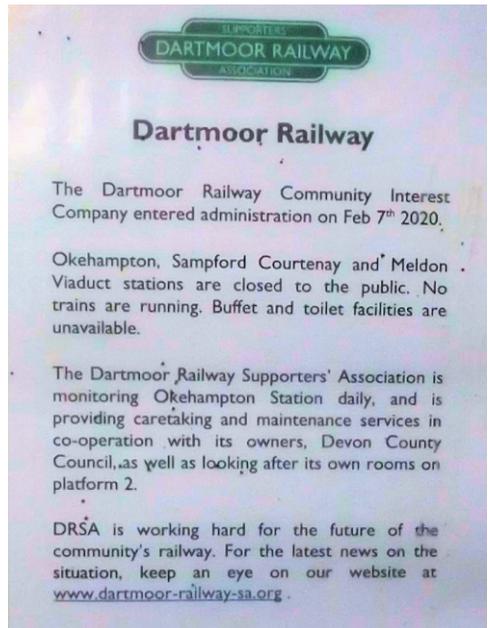
DARTMOOR RAILWAY – OKEHAMPTON LINE

The Dartmoor Railway Community Interest Company (Company number 03610168) and Previously Dartmoor Railway Limited went into administration on 7th February 2020 (right is a photo of the notice at Sampford Courtenay station). They had been operating heritage services on the line from near Coleford Junction to Sampford Courtenay, Okehampton and Meldon. Aggregate Industries who have owned the line between Coleford Junction and Meldon leased it to the Dartmoor Railway. Control of the line from Coleford Junction to Okehampton has since been returned to Network Rail control for the now restored daily rail service operated by Great Western between Exeter and Okehampton.

Between then and the recent reopening the Dartmoor Railway Association helped to look after the station. At the station the Bullied buffet is planned to reopen early in the Autumn and refurbishment will provide rooms for a Dartmoor National Park visitor centre and a Dartmoor Railway Association shop.



View towards Coleford Junction from the foot crossing at 184 miles 0 chains from Waterloo. The former Network Rail boundary is about 10 chains (22 yards) away in the distance.



What do we do about the rail funding crisis?

A personal view by Stewart Palmer

The rail industry is in a mess. A model which relied on annual growth of passenger numbers to balance the books has been broken by covid. The financial core of the passenger railway's income, daily travel to work and business travel has collapsed and looks unlikely to return to pre pandemic levels for years, if ever. Whilst leisure travel has returned to pre covid levels in most areas, the revenue yield from such journeys is much lower, as they tend to be made using advanced purchase tickets, or some form of discounted ticket. In the meantime, the costs of operating the railway and the costs of investment projects have continued to increase and the latest disruption of a series of strikes has not only lost income for the rail industry and undermined confidence in rail, but will inevitably increase its costs when a settlement is eventually reached.

It is my personal view that the Government has lost patience with the rail industry and now regards rail as a problem, rather than an opportunity to solve the issues of climate change and road congestion. If one is objective, this is hardly surprising. The emerging economic crisis will force government to make hard choices about spending priorities and politicians and the Treasury are asking what value the £14 billion of taxpayer's money that supported the railway through covid has delivered? I fear we are on the verge of recreating a 1970's scenario where cost cutting reduced the attractiveness of rail compared to other modes, which led to lower income, more cost reductions etc. and a spiral of decline. We have been here before!

So, what can Railfuture members do about this? As individuals the answer is honestly probably "not a lot", but as a movement we can influence the debate and make sure that the voice of users is heard, remember we have 20,000 members and affiliated members via Rail User Groups. So my call to all members is get informed about what is going on, get involved in your local RUG, your Railfuture Branch and get active in engaging with your local rail managers, local

councillors and MP's. We must not argue "that trains are good and cars are bad", we have to show that we are serious players who understand the economic issues and can offer practical value for money solutions to the problems the industry faces. Ultimately rail has to be seen to provide good value for both users and taxpayers. If it does not, it will go the way of canals, airships and coal mines. None of this is easy and it requires effort, but if we sit idly by, my fear is that other more strident voices will drown out the good reasons why rail matters and we will witness a period of stagnation and managed decline of our railway in Britain.

(Stewart Palmer is a Vice President and Director of Railfuture and spent 38 years working in the rail industry.)

Penstone Bridge - North Devon Line

Penstone Bridge carries the Exeter to Barnstaple line over a minor road leading into the hamlet of Penstone and was replaced on 17th April 2021. It is located on the former double track section between Yeoford and Coplestone and just to the north of Coleford Junction at 184 miles and 0.5 chains from Waterloo.



The old bridge was due to be replaced by the new 25 m long bridge at the end of March 2020 and assembly started on a nearby site on 11th March. However, work was delayed by the pandemic.



The old bridge was weak and only multiple units could pass over at 70 mph. Other trains were subject to a 30 mph speed restriction.

Moretonhampstead Station Site Development

We commented on the revised proposal for housing development on the former station site currently used by the logistics firm Thompsons. So far as we are aware they will continue to use the southern half of the site which contains the grade II listed engine shed. The new plans for the northern half of the site are now for 35 houses, three of which are being constructed by conversion of the former goods shed. The former station building and overall roof are long gone, but until recently a short section of platform remained.

This is what we said of *Application 0588/19*

This plan resembles that of planning application number: 0139/19 for 40 houses and which Railfuture Devon and Cornwall previously commented on. We

repeat some of these comments here, but taking note of revised aspects of the planning application.



Our objection is that within the plan for houses there is still no provision to allow the railway to be restored to the Moretonhampstead station site. If provision is made, and the historic goods shed is indeed retained within the development, we see no further reason to object to the proposal. Residents of the houses would be potential users of a restored railway service and be key to making such a scheme viable

A future new station does not have to be on the original site, but it should not be significantly further away from the centre of Moretonhampstead. The south-east corner of the planning site already has a proposed green space and this could be made into a reserved area of land for a station of approximately 40 m x 10 m. This would be for a single track line and a platform of sufficient length for a 2 coach train. This length, if kept fully within the planning site, would encroach on house number 10 (B4V2(H0) and garage).

Whilst there is no immediate prospect of the railway reopening, increasing concerns about climate change and the need to reduce car usage may change this situation. Much of the former Moretonhampstead line retains an intact track bed to Bovey Tracey and Heathfield. From there the track is in-situ to Newton Abbot.

Update On The Buses

Taunton Bus Station

In Somerset Taunton bus station closed on 28th March 2020. For onward bus connections to places such as Glastonbury and Wells passengers must search for their stop in the Parade. This is also the situation for service 30 to Ilminster, Chard and Axminster and the 54 to Yeovil via Langport and Somerton (now only one per day beyond Somerton). Fortunately the 25 to Bampton and Dulverton and the 28 to Minehead can still be caught at or near the railway station.

The reason for the bus station closure in Tower Street was given as, 'the rising costs of even day-to-day maintenance has made it totally uneconomic, let alone the heavy investment that would be needed to bring it up-to-date and fit-for purpose for the future.'

Gains and Losses in Devon

From Plymouth railway station Stagecoach 2/2A is half hourly to Plymstock and the Sherford new town (hourly in the evening and on Sundays hourly during the daytime).

Totnes railway station to Kingsbridge (Tally Ho 164), as we suggested in the bus consultation, has been extended through to Salcombe. It is hourly for most of the day with the last bus from Totnes at 20:55 Mondays to Saturdays. Three journeys on Sunday.

The 309/310 (Filers Travel) Barnstaple to Lynton now starts from Barnstaple railway station, as did the 310 following closure in 1935 of the narrow gauge railway. This lasted until at least 1977. Today, it is mostly hourly Mondays to Saturdays, last bus from Lynton 18:10 and from Barnstaple railway station 18:50. Two Buses each way on Sundays until the end of October 2022.

On Mondays to Saturdays since 28th August 2022, service 1 from Tiverton to Tiverton Parkway, Uffculme and Cullompton, regains its old 373 number. Buses no longer run through to Exeter so cutting the direct rail connection to Bradninch and direct buses between Uffculme and Exeter. The 373 buses are operated by Stagecoach and Dartline and the last bus from Tiverton Parkway to Tiverton is 40 minutes later at 20:31. The limited Sunday service is still Stagecoach 1.

Exeter Bus Station

Exeter's new bus station opened on 25th July 2021, replacing the 1964 bus station accessed from Paris Street. It has been built at the eastern end of the old bus station site and so is now even further from most parts of the city centre and Exeter Central railway station. We objected to the relocation of the bus station in a letter to Exeter City Council on 28th April 2016 (December 2016 Newsletter).

The new bus station is also smaller and has meant that many services not operated by Stagecoach have been displaced to stops in Paris Street and Sidwell Street, including National Express services. To add to the problem the H bus which provides a nearby link to Central and St Davids stations, now only has a half hourly frequency.



Exeter bus station development as on 7th November 2020. The picture shows the new building under construction with frontage on to Cheeke Street. Buses are now in front of the building here and passengers wait under cover within the building, except those displaced to the streets of course!

Consultation on Devon Bus Services

Devon County Council ran a consultation on possible new Government Support for supported bus services. This is what was sent by us on the form by the 24th April 2020 deadline –

DEVON COUNCT COUNCIL PROPOSAL 2

Railfuture supports restoration of cross Dartmoor service 82, but not its exclusion from the National Bus Pass. At minimum the section of route between Moretonhampstead and Exeter should be included within the Bus Pass scheme and operate as an integrated part of the 359 Exeter to Moretonhampstead service.

DEVON COUNCT COUNCIL PROPOSAL 5 (Railfuture Priority)

Railfuture supports restoration of more evening journeys on service 5, but should include later evening connections between Tiverton Parkway and Tiverton.

DEVON COUNCT COUNCIL PROPOSAL 8 (Railfuture Priority)

Railfuture supports retention of service 885 between Seaton and Axminster station at hourly level, but add later services for rail connections if possible.

DEVON COUNCT COUNCIL PROPOSAL 10 (Railfuture Priority)

Railfuture supports development of service 164 to hourly between Totnes station and Kingsbridge, but extend some journeys through to Salcombe where possible.

DEVON COUNCT COUNCIL PROPOSAL 13

Railfuture supports extension/restoration of H bus to Cowley Bridge. Consider integrating this service with Service 5 Exeter to Crediton.

DEVON COUNCT COUNCIL PROPOSAL 17

Railfuture supports any improvements that can be made on the Exeter to Okehampton and Bude service.

We also added - Provide support to extend Stagecoach service 88, Buckfastleigh – Ashburton – Newton Abbot, to and from Newton Abbot railway station. Route some or all service 359 buses from Moretonhampstead to Exeter via St. Davids station.

Develop service 398 Tiverton – Bampton – Dulverton as a 2 hourly through service from Exeter. This could be achieved by integrating it with service 55B from Exeter to Tiverton or in consultation with Stagecoach service 55. Replaces lost 1963 rail service along the Exe Valley.

St. James Park & Barnstaple Services



On 6th November 2020 an up Exmouth to Paignton service is seen departing from St. James Park station in Exeter. Up platform extension in progress.

Barnstaple line trains have now been separated from the Exmouth service and instead terminate at Exmouth Junction sidings. For a time they were stopping at St. James Park, but the up line platform (seen on the right in the photo above) could only accommodate 2 coaches and so has been lengthened. By November 2020 the cutting side had been cut back and some construction work done as seen in the photo. This platform work now just benefits Exmouth line trains.

It is hoped that trains from Barnstaple to Exeter will be extended to Axminster to give the long awaited additional local service on the Waterloo line. Provision of the Whimble loop is necessary for these additional trains. St. James Park is the closest station to parts of the University of Exeter campus, so some stops here would serve more than just the local community around the station.

May 2019 Cornish Main Line Resignalling

At an event held in Penzance on 30th May 2019, Great Western and Network Rail launched their enhanced services using shortened HSTs (Castle Trains) and utilising the improved signalling. The increase in services follows a £30 million signalling upgrade carried out by Network Rail between Plymouth and Penzance.



The photo above shows Mike Gallop explaining what had been done.

The modernisation included 21 additional signals along the Cornish main line, as well as upgrades to seven level crossings. Sponsors for the work were the European Union's Regional Development Fund, Cornwall Council, Great Western, Network Rail, Cornwall and Isles of Scilly Local Enterprise Partnership and the Department for Transport.



Two of the then new short formation HSTs in Penzance station on 30th May 2019.

Railfuture and other rail users groups were invited to the event, which was also a chance to talk directly with those in the railway industry. On the journey to Cornwall we heard about the drop out weld on overnight track work, which had stopped Barnstaple line services running that morning. Your newsletter editor spoke to the

Network Rail representative, also travelling on the train, about ideas for the Bere Alston line. Some worrying ideas had surfaced from other groups that included replacing the through Gunnislake to Plymouth trains, instead with a connecting service to restored Tavistock trains at Bere Alston. However, both services could be accommodated on the existing line with just signalling alterations, no track alterations except the restored single line from Bere Alston to Tavistock and the 2 hourly Gunnislake train turn round time increased at Gunnislake and reduced at Plymouth.

Once the Gunnislake train has left Bere Alston a following Plymouth to Tavistock train would immediately depart from St. Budeaux and reach Tavistock (Monksmead area) with one intermediate stop at Bere Alston in around 21 minutes. After a 6 minute turn round it would be back at St. Budeaux in 48 minutes at which point the returning train from Gunnislake would regain the main route at Bere Alston.

A Plymouth to Tavistock journey time of around 24 minutes would be possible with some line speed improvements and stops limited to just St. Budeaux and Bere Alston. This would allow operation with just one train running a shuttle service. Ideally the Gunnislake service would be hourly, but this would require additional track for passing just south of Bere Alston.

Marsh Barton Station Progress

The new station at Marsh Barton in Exeter has made good progress with opening anticipated later this year. However, one unfortunate aspect is that access to the southbound platform will be long and inconvenient. The station itself is by the large green incinerator building in the photo background, but passengers will need to walk from the footbridge seen in the background to a point near the bottom of the picture and then back along the level road (seen under construction on 28th August 2022).



North Devon and Bideford Report from Tim Steer

Campaign and rail user groups from Devon returned from July's national AGM in Bristol bearing framed certificates. In the revived Rail User Group Awards, the Judges' Special Award went to



OkeRail and the Dartmoor Line for their success in reconnecting Okehampton to the rail network with regular all-day / all-week passenger train services direct to and from central Exeter.

The Tarka Rail Association was rewarded twice, with a gold award to its Railfuture-affiliated ACE Rail campaign, lead by Barnstaple's 'rail runs in my family' Tim Steer, for Best New Group, and a commendation to the TRA for its newsletter. See <https://www.railfuture.org.uk/RUG-Awards> for details and photos.

The ACE Rail campaign is about to embark on its first dedicated study, an Initial Business Case (IBC), part-funded by Railfuture's own Fighting Fund. Reporting by the end of next March, it will in effect be the equivalent of a bid to the DfT's Ideas Fund as it will seek to establish the case for further funding to enable the next step in the long process, namely an SOBC as is being done for Tavistock-Plymouth.

ACE Rail is very definitely not just about Bideford-Barnstaple. It is about significantly upgrading the Tarka Line too. Unless journey times are competitive with road and the target is Bideford-Exeter Central in 60 minutes, there will be no business case.

The existing most-stations hourly services would remain, albeit benefiting from the upgraded Tarka Line; 'Central in 60' from Bideford would be an additional hourly service calling at a very few principal intermediate 'hub' stations only. Adding the >30k population of 'Greater Bideford' to the >30k population of Barnstaple, roughly doubling the railway's northern catchment with less than 10 miles of new line, is what drives the case for a 2tph Tarka Line service.

Full details of the ACE Rail campaign and its progress can be found in the 'Railway Reopenings' section of the branch website. Also a Facebook page, linked off that website.

Buses Replace Trains Between Axminster and Pinhoe

The line was scheduled to be closed from Monday 19th September 2022 until the Friday to allow Network Rail to do £5 million of improvement work. Drainage work will be done in the cutting leading up to Honiton Tunnel. Landslip prevention in the cutting will take the form of two retaining walls constructed using sheet pile walls linked by concrete panels. At Feniton East Devon District Council will be installing a flood prevention culvert in the vicinity of the railway to protect local homes. At Gillingham an 8 day closure might also take place from 10th December 2022 for landslip work at the tunnel.

Threat to Disused Railway Bridges

Highways England, who inherited the remaining disused railway structures from the British Railways Board, planned to infill a number of road overbridges to cut down on maintenance costs. Fortunately objections have stopped any developments at least for now. The table below shows those relevant to Devon and Cornwall branch and our assessment of what should be protected.

Original Company & line	Mileage	OS Grid Ref	Location	Recommendation
SR Callington Branch	5m 29c	SX419720	Chilsworthy Bridge	No Objection
GWR Launceston Branch	19m 66c	SX502831	Lydford Road	Retain if possible
GWR Launceston Branch	22m 37c	SX464829	East Liddaton	Retain if possible
GWR Launceston Branch	31m 32c	SX336848	Ridgegrove Rd, Launceston	No Objection
GWR Truro to Newquay	4m 60c	SW748502	Goshen Bridge, Mithian	Retain if possible
GWR Truro to Newquay	11m 13c	SW809535	Lanteague	No Objection
GWR Original main line	254m 26c	SX391567	Greeps, St. Germans	No Objection
SR North Cornwall line	234m 39c	SX181897	Tregray Bridge, Penwenham	Retain
SR Bude Branch	222m 53c	SS268015	Merryfield Farm	Retain
GWR Taunton-Barnstaple	?	SS868261	East Anstey	Retain

In Barnstaple Devon County Council have reported that the former Rock Park railway bridge, which carries the shared pedestrian/cycle path over the River Taw in Barnstaple, has had to be closed for now. An underwater inspection has revealed corroded steel columns.