



Representing users of the Barnstaple to Exeter rail line

(est'd 1977)

**Press release**

## **New 'Northern Devon Railway Development Alliance' embraced by Tarka Rail Association**

Devon's Tarka Rail Association welcomes the bold initiative taken by Bideford Town Council, meeting on 7<sup>th</sup> December 2023, to establish a Northern Devon Railway Development Alliance as a strategic stakeholder champion for the expansion and extension of rail services both within northern Devon – Torridge and North Devon Districts – and for the wider economic and environmental benefit of neighbouring communities in Mid-Devon, West Devon and North Cornwall.

The Tarka Rail Association declares its keen interest in joining the new Alliance as another founder member, recognising the successes achieved elsewhere in other parts of Devon, across the South West, and also nationally by independent and multi-agency, cross-sector and all-party lobby groups.

The timing of this initiative could not be better:

- ~ continuous record-breaking ridership of the existing Barnstaple-Exeter line is stirring widespread public and official interest in meeting the immediate need for a higher-capacity, better-performing railway, and as a foundation for restoration of rail services to Bideford;
- ~ central government's designation of Torridge District for a Levelling-Up Partnership raises the profile of the urgency to address long-standing socio-economic under-achievements;
- ~ Torridge District Council are being asked to include in their new Strategic Plan support for examining the options for restoring a rail link to Bideford, including an extension of the North Devon Main Line;
- ~ North Devon and Torridge District Councils have committed to a new joint Local Plan which will include infrastructure and transport considerations;
- ~ sub-national transport body Peninsula Transport's recent publication of its Rail Strategy, and the current consultation on its regional Transport Strategy, provide a strategic context for realising local ambitions to improve economic integration and connectivity by rail.

TRA Chair Mike Day said: "The new Northern Devon Railway Development Alliance can bring together all the key stakeholders to develop a coherent message to central government, making the compelling case for sustained infrastructure investment to transform economic opportunities for coastal and rural communities in northern Devon and further afield."

**President:** Cllr Andrea Davis

**Vice Presidents:**

Sir Geoffrey Cox KC MP,  
Julian Crow MBE, Peter Heaton-Jones,  
Dr Ian Harrison. Cllr Andrew Leadbetter,  
Roger Blake, Peter West OBE, Stuart Brocklehurst