

Dear Railfuture

26.05.2021

Hello, I'm Tim Steer

I am a parish councillor for Fremington. I am also to be the newly-appointed director of Bideford Railway Heritage Centre CIC in North Devon. I come here today to say that it is time to reinstate the Barnstaple to Bideford railway line.

The North Devon area has seen a massive growth in population since regular passenger services were withdrawn in 1965 and the planning developments between Barnstaple and Bideford are still being approved monthly. We have so much continued economic growth through development that councillors are now in the process of rewriting the Torridge and North Devon joint local plan; this could be a good opportunity for us to add reopening the line.

Many of the relief roads for vehicle access to our local motorway, the A39 and A361 to Tiverton, were proposed on the old neighbourhood plan; however, they were sold to property developers. Unfortunately the developers built more housing on these proposed road areas. This has had a massive impact on our inadequate local roads.

Bideford railway station is located in the town's centre and has been maintained by the fantastic Bideford Railway Heritage Centre volunteering working party. We have restored and maintained the site's platforms, rolling stock and signal box. As a director of the group, we would welcome the opportunity to help lead the study to reopen the line.

Our road networks have largely stayed the same and the volume of traffic has increased so much that RAC reps have stated to me that on a 3-mile stretch in my parish, they receive per week 10-15 vehicle faults from hitting potholes due to inadequate road maintenance and vehicle volumes. The traffic tailbacks in to Barnstaple, the local railhead, are increasing and it is time for us to add better and reliable access to a public transport network for the area before it becomes gridlocked with traffic congestion.

The last railway survey for this area was done in 1998, 22 years ago; a lot has changed since then. However, the physical survey remains unchanged. The entire 9-mile route is physically intact and used as a cycle path, named The Tarka Trail and all in the ownership of Devon County Council. As a result of the 1999 survey (Maunsell Report), changes were made to Barnstaple's western by-pass, including adding a bridge alongside the current Barnstaple station and raising the height of the road embankment enabling a future railway tunnel to be inserted through it on the route of the track-bed. One key part of that old report stated that the line could be reinstated with enough room for both cycle way and reinstated railway.

Furthermore, along the route we have Fremington's population of 12,000 and Bideford's population of 20,000; potential users would also be the 12,500 residents living in Bideford's neighbouring towns of Westward Ho!, Appledore and Northam.

North Devon has a plan to be zero carbon. Only a substantial reduction in private car usage in favour of public transport offers hope of a solution that will afford the growing population of the area the mobility it needs. I strongly believe that extending the railway from Barnstaple to Bideford would produce a well-used transport link.

Letter to Railfuture Infrastructure & Networks Group meeting, 26th May 2021