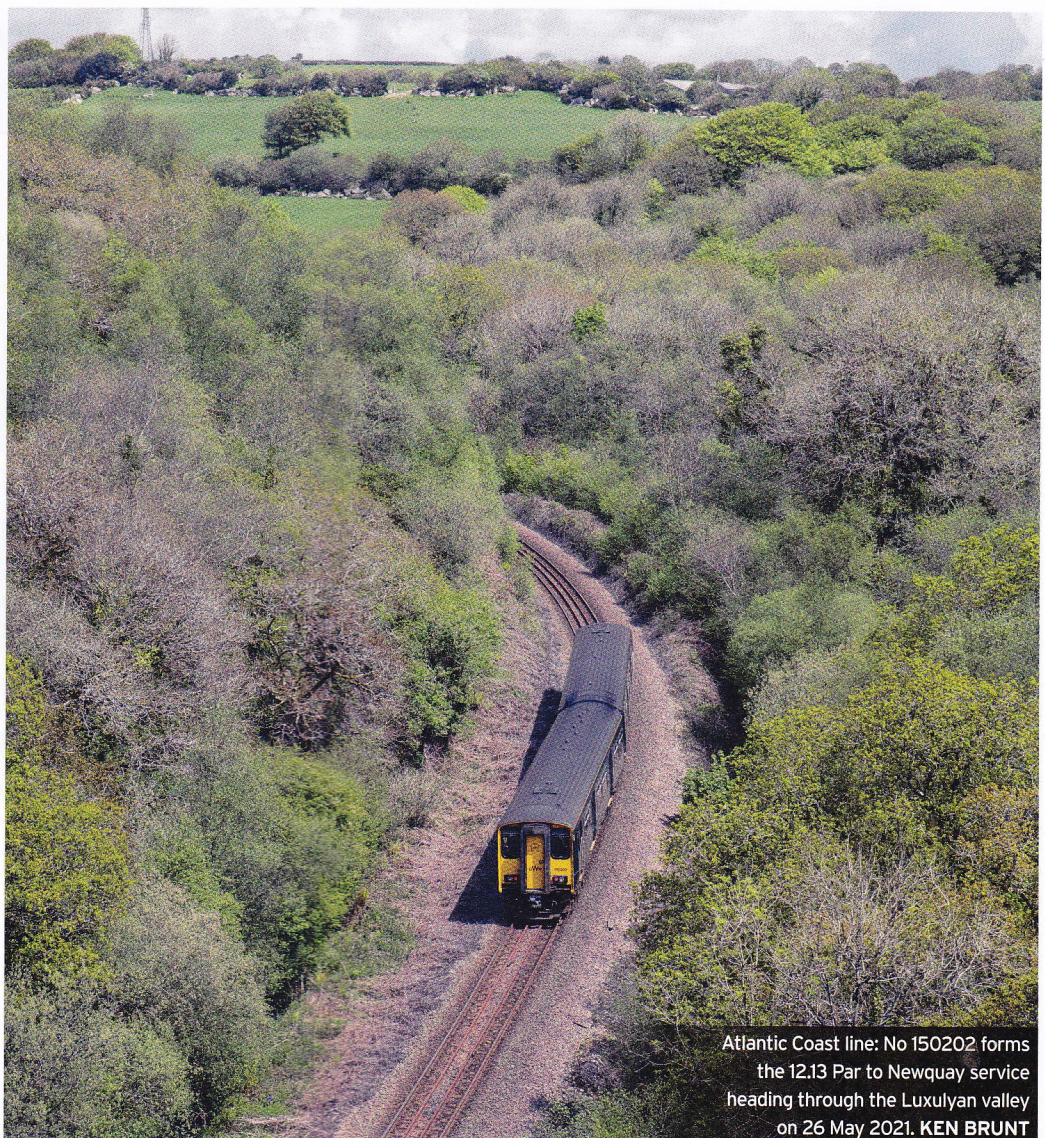


The new DMU depot at Exeter St David's is now complete, with train crew accommodation part of the new building. This has made redundant the crew portacabin and locker room on the trace of the old bay platform on the east side of the station and thus made feasible restoration of a five-car platform. 'The platform 2 project looks like it now has funding' reports the MD. It'd certainly come in handy: the last couple of years have seen an increase in CrossCountry services turning round in Exeter, and then there are our new two-hourly semi-fasts on the Berks & Hants that are Exeter starters. These are currently fighting for slots on platform 6 at St David's: a revitalised platform 2 would give us breathing space.'

The extra Castles coming to the West of England will give the capacity in the fleet for introduction of services using Class 158s and 150s on the Okehampton branch under the 'Restoring Your Railway' programme later this year. The MD says the infrastructure programme is going well and he is optimistic that a two-hourly service will be able to be introduced before the December timetable change.

## DEVON METRO

When the Okehampton service goes to hourly next year it will combine with the Barnstaple



Atlantic Coast line: No 150202 forms the 12.13 Par to Newquay service heading through the Luxulyan valley on 26 May 2021. **KEN BRUNT**

trains to offer a half-hourly service at CREDITON. The aim is to get as many as possible of these services to Exeter Central, which is just as it says on the tin – closer to the commercial heart of Exeter than St David's. But that's a difficult ask, as paths have to be found through the single line at Newton St Cyres, on to the main line at Cowley Bridge, across the layout at St David's and up the bank to Central. The Down line on the bank is reversibly signalled, allowing Up trains to use the Down to reach Central, 'but that doesn't help much as trains take up valuable capacity turning round and heading back at Central'. Many Barnstaple services are booked beyond Central to St James' Park, where they can turn round on the crossover at Exmouth Junction (where the Exmouth branch leaves the former South Western main line).

Devon County Council aspires to extend the Barnstaple services further east as part of the Devon Metro concept; Great Western is looking at getting them to

Pinhoe, the current limit of double track on the exit from Exeter. The ultimate aim is Axminster, but that would require some more double track; there are currently loops at Honiton and Axminster. A recent Network Rail study of this line proposed lengthening of those two loops, amongst other improvements (p15, October 2020 issue).

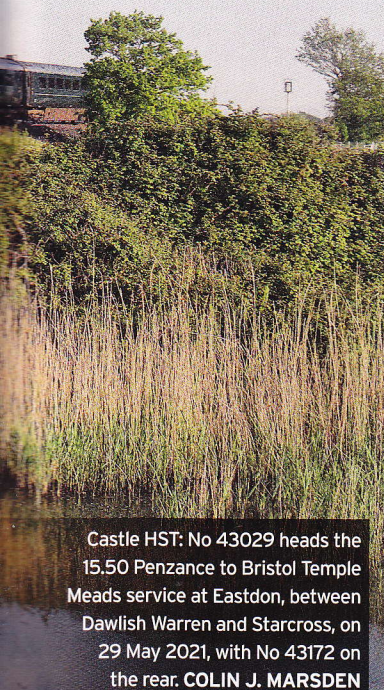
In addition to this work, GWR and Network Rail are looking at the line north of Cowley Bridge, where ancient mechanical signalling is based on staff exchange at Crediton and Eggesford and resignalling is pencilled in for Control Period 7 (2024-29). Shortening end-to-end journey times should be one of the aims of the resignalling project, says the GWR MD, as on the Barnstaple route most people are going all the way from Exeter to Barnstaple and the intermediate stations are relatively lightly used.

Currently, the Barnstaple and Okehampton lines run as two single lines on the old main line

formation north of Crediton, parting company at the site of the former Coleford Junction near Yeoford. Mr Hopwood says restoring the physical junction here should be one of the aims of the resignalling, giving a stretch of double track between Coleford Junction and Crediton that would introduce flexibility into operations in North Devon.

He also advocates restoring the second platform at Barnstaple, a straightforward job. 'Resignalling is a once-in-a-generation opportunity and we must make sure we make the most of it' he says, reciting a vision of making Barnstaple a public transport hub akin to those seen in Switzerland, with buses from the surrounding district feeding into the train. Devon County Council has a similar aspiration for the Mid Devon Transport Hub it has planned for a second station in Okehampton, on the eastern edge of the town.

The idea of reopening a second platform face at the branch



Castle HST: No 43029 heads the 15.50 Penzance to Bristol Temple Meads service at Eastdon, between Dawlish Warren and Starcross, on 29 May 2021, with No 43172 on the rear. **COLIN J. MARSDEN**