

# Tarka Rail Association

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# Destination Bideford

Bideford to Barnstaple railway people say, 'It will never happen' 'I am against it taking away my walking/cycling route' 'I don't want a railway polluting the Tarka trail'.

I heard what the members of the public were saying, I listened and their views helped me envisage a better than ever mainline railway service.

Firstly, let me take off my director's hat and put on my councillor one for a very brief moment. At the start of 2021 I was co-opted onto two separate parish councils in North Devon. One document was passed around to all councils "Taw Torridge Flood and Coastal Risk Management Study" an Environment Agency document that suggested councillors have ready flood defences in certain areas and places that are indeed seen to have poor flood resilience; one of those areas of concern was the Bideford to Barnstaple Tarka trail.

(Railway director's hat now back on) after successfully purchasing the Bideford nameplate, In August 2021, BRHC and Bideford Town Council were present at the unveiling of the nameplate at the Burton Art gallery. As the curtain dropped, Mayor David Ratcliff said that he doesn't just want to see a Bideford nameplate; he would like to see the railway restored back to the mainline 100%. The mayor, councillors and I met regularly to discuss how we could see the service being restored. We looked into the Restoring your railway program and found that we had all the boxes ticked as to why our service needed to be restored. This led me to see that other councillors were interested in seeing a Bideford to Barnstaple railway, I had councillors in Barnstaple who had been waiting for the opportunity to come, they had a view of a better public transport system where the general public could leave their cars at home or at a parkway. Anyone who lives around Barnstaple can see why they want this to happen, the traffic congestion has returned to levels first seen in the 90's.

As I am a member of Railfuture, in the summer, I wrote to director Roger Blake, I expressed my interest in restoring Bideford back to the rail network. Within weeks, I was invited to a Railfuture virtual meeting and given helpful advice on how to start the project. Railfuture have since remained in regular contact with me, they now see Bideford as a great project that has 'High priority' written all over it.

After that meeting, I spent many nights researching how a better railway from Bideford to Barnstaple could become a reality. Many points were on my jotter:

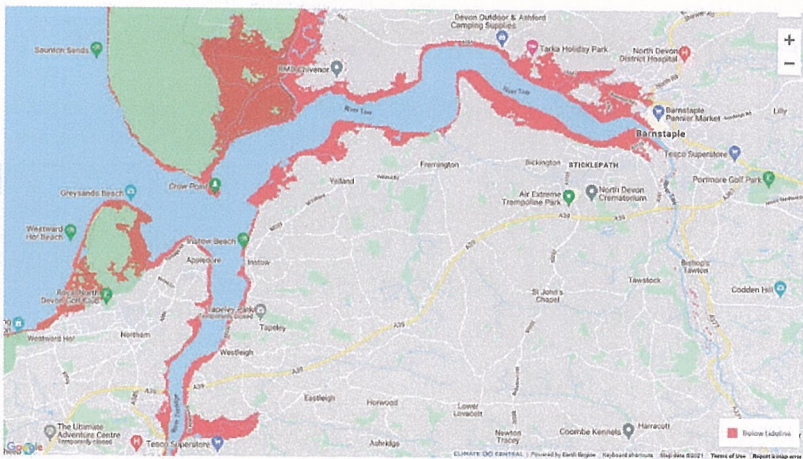
- 1 Help the active travel (recreational) user as the old track bed is in poor condition.
- 2 Identify areas for new parkways, suitable for large car parks.
- 3 Talk to various councillors about why they would want a restored railway.

Whilst I was busy researching one day in October, I got a message saying Okehampton had successfully gone to the final stages of restoring their railway. This was a big news story and one that sent whispers to me. If Okehampton has a railway service, how likely would Bideford be in being asking for a service? Kevin Ball from OkeRail has been one of the Okehampton team that spent 14 years of his life campaigning for the line to be restored, they are not stopping with a restored railway, oh no, they now have a phase two, a Okehampton parkway.

On the 12.12.21 I arranged OkeRail's Kevin Ball and Railfuture's director Roger Blake to meet with Bideford Town mayor David Ratcliff, Mayoress Philippa Ratcliff, Cllr Peter Christie and volunteers of Bideford Railway Heritage Centre. As I set up the meeting, I wanted to take advice and guidance on how to go further from those who were successful with their railway passenger services like OkeRail's Kevin Ball and Railfuture's director Roger Blake. We listened with intrigue.

After the meeting with our councillors and VIP's, I spoke to our local radio station The Voice FM and to the local news outlets. In the same week I had emails back saying that they both wanted to run an interview with me and a story. I would like to inform you all that in 2022, Bideford Town Council will have a new council led committee, Torridge District Council and North Devon District Council have both asked me to give a separate presentation as they have many councillors who want to see this happen.

Something that I am sure many of your readers will want to know is what I plan to do about the existing active travel community that use the former track bed? Here is my answer:



The entire Tarka Trail is likely to be washed away or underwater by 2030. I have 3 proposals for councillors to consider.

1. Make the new railway alignment water side and raised to be also a new flood defence wall for the Tarka Trail.
2. Leave the Tarka trail alone. Make the new railway alignment land side from the trail and raised to suit future flood levels.
3. Engineer a new flood defence system with an integrated railway and active travel system on top of the existing Tarka trail.

I have named the project ACERail, that could be Atlantic Coast Express railway or Atlantic Coast to Exeter railway.

Tim Steer



Backing the reopening: campaigners at Bideford.