

“Tim Steer appointed chair of Railfuture's Devon and Cornwall branch”

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How it all began: Tim (second from left) in December 2021 when Railfuture’s Roger Blake (third from left) and West Devon’s Cllr Kev Ball (first left) - a member of the successful OkeRail campaign - met Mayor of Bideford David Ratcliff (fourth left), local councillor Peter Christie (first right) and Bideford Railway Heritage Centre volunteers for early discussions about restoring Bideford’s mainline rail services (Picture: Rob Dark, BRHC)

Tim Steer from Barnstaple in North Devon has become well-known over the past four years as a persuasive advocate for improving, modernising and extending the North Devon (Tarka) line which runs between Barnstaple and Exeter.

His work as the ACE Rail (Atlantic Coast – Exeter railway) campaign lead since mid-2021 has gained public and official recognition – and considerable media exposure – for his campaign and him as its local ambassador. It earned him Railfuture’s Gold Award for Best New Group in 2022 and then the Gold Awards for Best Social Media and the coveted Campaigner of the Year for 2023.

He personally initiated the ACE Rail campaign to extend North Devon line services to Bideford, in the deprived district of Torridge and the largest town in the South West without its own railway, based on upgrading the North Devon line. Tim’s work has laid the foundations for the Northern Devon Railway Development Alliance, instigated in late-2023. It’s a group of over two dozen partner and stakeholder organisations which has absorbed the ACE Rail campaign.

Tim, now a Rotarian, is the chair of Friends Of Barnstaple Railway Station, which is a member of the national Community Rail Network and a local group which has been winning awards for four consecutive years for enhancing the station. He has also until recently been a director of Bideford Railway Heritage Centre, and a vice-chair for the former Tarka Rail Association representing North Devon line users. He now sets his award-winning work on helping other rail campaigns throughout Devon and Cornwall.

“This work is now being taken forward by the Northern Devon Railway Development Alliance that I helped initiate in late-December 2023. The professionally-drafted business cases will prove that building a better railway for the area will improve community prosperity and help lead the area out of deprivation. What the Bideford line will look like and where exactly it will go is now in the hands of independent specialist advisers and representatives of over two dozen partner and stakeholder organisations in the still-growing Alliance. “I’ve also set up the Friends Of Barnstaple Railway Station (FOBRS), a member of the national Community Rail Network, and I will continue the award-winning work to enhance the station as their chair as well.

“As new chair for Devon & Cornwall, I will now look at all rail campaigns across the region and am ready to support them. In addition I want Railfuture’s membership to grow so that it represents students, parents, employers and their employees, patients and other rail users, future as well as existing. I will represent Cornwall as well as Devon and help passenger and freight campaigns get through the national Transport Appraisal Guidance and other processes to become new regional campaigns that the public and their elected representatives can get behind.

“For too long, I feel, railways campaigns have often been seen as the sole preserve of train enthusiasts, so instead my emphasis will be actively campaigning to represent the wider public who already use and want to use the railway.”