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Dear Sir/Madam,

## **Devon County Council Strategic Plan 2021-25**

Railfuture is Britain's leading and longest-established national independent voluntary organisation campaigning exclusively for a better railway across a bigger network for passengers, and freight users, to support economic (housing and productivity) growth, environmental improvement and better-connected communities.

We seek to influence decision makers at local, regional and national levels to implement pro-rail policies in development and transport planning. In that context we offer the following responses on your priorities in the face of the five challenges which you have identified: climate change, Devon's changing population, fairness and equality, trust and confidence, and financial resilience and prosperity.

### **Respond to the climate emergency**

Q: What should Devon County Council be doing to meet this priority?

A: As part of prioritising sustainable travel and transport, over the next four years continuing support to the Tamar Valley Line Enhancement (Tavistock-Bere Alston-Plymouth) Project, and also backing the bid being developed by ACE Rail for a Tarka Line Enhancement (Bideford-Barnstaple-Exeter) Programme including a new rail link to provide additional and sustainable public transport capacity and connectivity for the more than 30,000 people already in 'Greater Bideford' (including Northam, Appledore, Westward Ho!), the county's largest town without its own direct access to the rail network, and for the area's future sustainable growth.

Q: What could your organisation be doing to help meet this priority?

A: We have been and shall continue to offer advice and guidance to the ACE Rail campaign to develop in partnership with key stakeholders a sound and compelling case for restoring a rail link between Bideford and Barnstaple and enhancing the Tarka Line to provide competitive journey times connecting north Devon communities direct with the county's capital city. We also have a Fighting Fund which may be able to offer some financial support for development of the campaign.

Q: How can Devon County Council help?

A: Embrace the ACE Rail scheme within its Local Transport Plan, Rail Strategy and other policies, and advocate for the scheme with Network Rail, Department for Transport and other agencies.

[www.railfuture.org.uk](http://www.railfuture.org.uk) [www.railfuturescotland.org.uk](http://www.railfuturescotland.org.uk) [www.railfuturewales.org.uk](http://www.railfuturewales.org.uk)  
[www.railwatch.org.uk](http://www.railwatch.org.uk)

## Be ambitious for children and young people

Q: What should Devon County Council be doing to meet this priority?

A: Working with schools and colleges to develop opportunities for student engagement in projects associated with the Tamar Valley and Tarka Lines, and their future enhancements.

Q: What could your organisation be doing to help meet this priority?

A: Our affiliated ACE Rail campaign Lead is working with the Tarka Rail Association, part of Devon & Cornwall Community Rail Partnership, and others at Barnstaple station and has involved Bideford College in a logo competition for ACE Rail.

Q: How can Devon County Council help?

A: Continue its support for the Devon & Cornwall CRP.

## Support sustainable economic recovery

Q: What should Devon County Council be doing to meet this priority?

A: As part of securing investment in transport infrastructure, over the next four years continuing to drive forward the Tamar Valley Line Enhancement (Tavistock-Bere Alston-Plymouth) Project, and also backing the bid being developed by ACE Rail for a Tarka Line Enhancement (Bideford-Barnstaple-Exeter) Programme.

Q: What could your organisation be doing to help meet this priority?

A: We have been and shall continue to offer advice and guidance to the ACE Rail campaign to develop in partnership with key stakeholders a sound and compelling case for restoring a rail link between Bideford and Barnstaple and enhancing the Tarka Line to provide competitive journey times connecting north Devon communities direct with the county's capital city. We also have a Fighting Fund which may be able to offer some financial support for development of the campaign.

Q: How can Devon County Council help?

A: Embrace the ACE Rail scheme within its Local Transport Plan, Rail Strategy and other policies, and advocate for the scheme with Network Rail, Department for Transport and other agencies.

## Tackle poverty and inequality

Q: What should Devon County Council be doing to meet this priority?

A: While directly-attributable results in tackling poverty and inequality will only materialise in the longer term, the transformational benefits of improved connectivity - arising from new and improved public transport services by rail - for increasing economic and educational opportunities depend on supportive actions over the next four years, in order to ensure that steady and sustained progress towards such new and improved public transport services by rail materialising is maintained.

Q: What could your organisation be doing to help meet this priority?

A: We have been and shall continue to offer advice and guidance to the ACE Rail campaign to develop in partnership with key stakeholders a sound and compelling case for restoring a rail link between Bideford and Barnstaple and enhancing the Tarka Line to provide competitive journey times connecting north Devon communities direct with the county's capital city. We also have a Fighting Fund which may be able to offer some financial support for development of the campaign. Our researches for example have highlighted the very weak economic performance of Torridge District, home to most of 'Greater Bideford' (including Northam, Appledore, Westward Ho!), with in 2019 the lowest per capita GDP in Devon while only 13 of the UK's 375 local authorities were even lower, and in 2021 the next-

lowest gross weekly earnings in Devon for full-time employees with only 7 of Britain's 362 local authorities even lower. The increased economic and educational opportunities which come from improved connectivity through new and improved public transport services by rail can play a vital role in lifting economic outcomes and educational attainment through broadening workers' and students' search catchments and horizons.

Q: How can Devon County Council help?

A: Embrace the ACE Rail scheme within its Local Transport Plan, Rail Strategy and other policies, and advocate for the scheme with Network Rail, Department for Transport and other agencies.

## **Improve health and wellbeing**

Q: What should Devon County Council be doing to meet this priority?

A: No specific response.

Q: What could your organisation be doing to help meet this priority?

A: No specific response.

Q: How can Devon County Council help?

A: No specific response.

## **Help communities be safe, connected and resilient**

Q: What should Devon County Council be doing to meet this priority?

A: Working with community organisations to develop opportunities for engagement in projects associated with the Tamar Valley and Tarka Lines, and their future enhancements.

Q: What could your organisation be doing to help meet this priority?

A: Our affiliated ACE Rail campaign Lead is working with the Tarka Rail Association, part of Devon & Cornwall Community Rail Partnership, and others at Barnstaple station and has involved Bideford College in a logo competition for ACE Rail.

Q: How can Devon County Council help?

A: Continue its support for the Devon & Cornwall CRP.

## **How we will work**

Q: What should Devon County Council be doing to meet this priority?

A: No specific response.

Q: What could your organisation be doing to help meet this priority?

A: No specific response.

Q: How can Devon County Council help?

A: No specific response.

Yours faithfully,

Roger Blake BA, MRTPI (Rtd), MTPS  
Railfuture  
Director for Infrastructure & Networks, national Board

**Devon County Council Strategic Plan 2021-25**