

Railfuture Fighting Fund grant supports new Devon rail link campaign

The Tarka Rail Association AGM in Umberleigh on Thursday 19 May 2022 was the first to hear the good news that Railfuture's Board of Directors had just confirmed its financial support for the Railfuture-affiliated Atlantic Coast – Exeter Railway campaign (ACE Rail) with a 40% contribution towards the cost for an Initial Business Case to be drawn up.

The campaign aims to restore the socio-economic benefits of being rail-connected to the 31,000 residents of Greater Bideford which includes Appledore, Northam and Westward Ho! The Torridge and North Devon Connectivity Programme aims to connect Bideford to central Exeter in an hour, via a new rail link to Barnstaple station and an upgraded Tarka line, with a new hourly limited-stop express service in addition to the long-established, and accelerated, all-stations hourly service.

Tim Steer, ACE Rail lead, with Railfuture's Infrastructure & Networks Director Roger Blake in support, made the announcement - to the evident delight of Tarka Rail Association President Andrea Davis, also Devon County Council's Cabinet Member for Climate Change, Environment and Transport and Chair of sub-national transport body Peninsula Transport.

In the audience too were TRA Chair Mike Day and its Press & Publicity Officer Julian Crow, with guest speakers including Great Western Railway's Regional Growth Manager (West) David Whiteway and Devon & Cornwall Rail Partnership Manager Richard Burningham who is also Chair of the national Community Rail Network.

Tim Steer said "This funding commitment by Railfuture is a terrific vote of confidence in this new campaign which aims to:

- ~ right an over half-century-long transport injustice,
- ~ transform the economic and educational prospects of a large left-behind community with quicker access to a wider choice of opportunities for work, training and education, and give a boost to the local visitor economy,
- ~ make rail journeys to and from our county's capital city truly competitive with road journeys for the first time in generations.

No other sustainable transport infrastructure investment holds such a firm prospect of being as transformational for Torridge and North Devon."

Roger Blake added "Railfuture is delighted to be associated with a local campaign which while barely a year old has already galvanised support across a wide spectrum of key local stakeholders. It has excited genuine enthusiasm and belief among many who understand the significance for expanding economic opportunities which will come from reconnecting not just Devon's largest non-rail-served town, but one of only a handful of such similar-sized free-standing communities in the whole country which are disconnected and marginalised."

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