



*South  
West*

**Proof of Evidence**  
**for the Public Local Inquiry into**  
**the Barnstaple Western Bypass**

**June 2001**

*Submitted by Railfuture*

**The need to maintain a railway route to**  
**Bideford and Braunton beneath the**  
**proposed Barnstaple Western Bypass**

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## 1. Summary

The reopening of closed railways in the Barnstaple area, together with bus park and ride schemes, has been proposed by other objectors as an alternative to building the Barnstaple Western Bypass. While we are sympathetic to this view, Railfuture South West is not objecting to the building of a new road. Our focus is on the need to improve the rail network in North Devon and we are concerned that some design aspects of the proposed new road might compromise this.

There are three aspects to our objection:

1. The blockage of the Bideford line trackbed by the proposed Western Bypass, for a length of up to 250 meters.
2. The new pedestrian access to Barnstaple railway station, under the proposed road embankment from the Fremington direction. This will produce an insecure area for rail users walking to or from the station.
3. The blockage of the Ilfracombe line trackbed by the proposed Western Bypass.

The site of the new downstream road bridge also occupies one of the few possible sites for a new rail bridge across the River Taw.

### ***The Blockage of the Bideford Line Trackbed***

Railfuture South West has classified all disused railway lines in Devon with an A to E grade. We placed the Bideford line reopening in the top Class A, alongside other potential reopening schemes such as restoring the railway to Tavistock.

We consider that the Bideford railway is needed *now*, and should never have been closed. Its primary purpose would be to provide a transport link to Exeter and the rest of the national rail network.

A secondary objective is to provide a fast local Bideford to Barnstaple rail service. The route is currently used as a cycle path, but our surveys suggest that a path could be rebuilt alongside the railway for nearly the entire route (except through the tunnel at Instow).

At national level, Railfuture has included the Bideford line as one of its major reopening campaigns, alongside others such as Edinburgh to Galashiels, and the Oxford to Cambridge (East-West Link). Our vision for the Bideford railway is as a secondary main line, with train services running through to Exeter and London Waterloo. Coupled with associated improvements between Barnstaple and Exeter, the reopened railway would be competitive as a faster alternative to bus and car travel. Access to and from the Torridge District of North Devon would be greatly improved. This has important implications for improving social inclusion and encouraging modal shift from private to public transport.

The Maunsell Rail report of January 1999 suggests that the railway would not be economically viable. However, the report only considered the operation of the Bideford line as a separate service to Barnstaple. We do not understand the basis for this, or the provision that the revenue from bus passengers, who might use rail instead, had to be discounted. Nevertheless, it was

proposed in the Maunsell Rail Report that the road should be built at the correct height to allow a railway underbridge or bridges to be built at a later date. The recently produced supplement to the Maunsell Rail Report has now abandoned this recommendation to Devon County Council. We are very concerned about this recent change, considering it a serious threat to any scheme to reopen the Bideford line in the future.

Our minimum requirement for the Bideford railway is that the road should be built at the correct height to allow the railway to pass beneath, and that the costs of providing future underbridges is met from the roads budget. We believe that protecting the disused transport corridor would be in accordance with Planning Policy Guidance as introduced with PPG13.

Railfuture also asks that a full regional travel survey is undertaken, including through journeys to Exeter and on to the national rail network, to take into account the full potential of the Bideford line. This can then be used to assess the economics of providing the necessary bridges at the time of road construction, together with the time scale for reopening the railway.

### ***The New Pedestrian Access to Barnstaple Station***

Our objection to the proposed pedestrian underpass linking Sticklepath Hill to Barnstaple station, relates to the creation of insecure area for passengers walking to and from the station at night. We are also concerned that the underpass will intersect the railway trackbed to Bideford on the same level.

A solution needs to be found. The plan might be modified so that the road for buses and pedestrians crosses the bypass on the level with traffic lights and a pedestrian crossing. A footbridge might also be considered. Alternatively the current Sticklepath Terrace overbridge, leading from Sticklepath Hill should be retained for buses and pedestrians, leaving the new road to pass underneath at the level of the adjacent and existing railway. In the latter case Railfuture would recognise that the Bideford line trackbed may need to be realigned, as would the new road's vertical alignment.

### ***The Blockage of the Ilfracombe Line***

Railfuture believes that a reopening of the Ilfracombe line to Braunton could follow the successful reopening of the Bideford line. From the Pottington Industrial Estate, on the north bank of the River Taw, to Velator near Braunton the trackbed is free from obstruction. The former double track width is sufficient to accommodate a restored single track railway alongside the Tarka Trail cycle path.

However, between Barnstaple Station and the Pottington Industrial Estate the original railway bridge across the River Taw has been removed. Part of the trackbed on the south side of the River Taw will be used by a new link road from the proposed Western Bypass. Also, on the north bank of the River Taw the old trackbed has buildings on it to either side of the former Barnstaple Town station. Therefore, rather than use the original railway alignment, it might be better to select a new alignment and river crossing point.

One option would be a new railway bridge over the River Taw, which could be built between the existing Long Bridge and the proposed Western Bypass downstream bridge. Another option would be a new railway bridge parallel to the proposed downstream bypass bridge. With this second option, the road plans should be designed to allow a parallel railway bridge to be built

with suitable approach curves and gradients. This could mean building the bypass road bridge piers to allow a single track railway line to be added alongside at a later date.

Railfuture asks that recommendation is made that a railway alignment is agreed for a new River Taw crossing as soon as possible. This should be by investigation and consultation of interested parties. This route can then be protected from adverse development and incorporated into the Western Bypass design, so that embankments are built at appropriate heights to allow road and rail to cross each other at a later date.

Railfuture considers it wrong that those who are planning a local road scheme are effectively determining the future of a substantial part of the Devon railway network. They are doing this with insufficient research and without consultation with rail users. A full transportation survey would help to establish the true potential of the closed railway network.

Railfuture believes that it would be wrong for the Western Bypass scheme to be built without provision for reopening the Bideford railway. If the trackbed is left unprotected then both the Bideford and Braunton railways will become inaccessible and difficult to reopen at reasonable cost. This will lead to continued travel difficulties in Torrington and North Devon for those unable to use a car. With fewer passengers travelling on the local railway network, it will be more difficult to justify enhancements to the Barnstaple to Exeter railway line. We therefore ask that the necessary bridges are put in place to allow the Bideford line to be reopened, a footbridge is provided for pedestrians to gain safe access to Barnstaple station from the Fremington direction, and that a route is left protected for a future reopening of the Barnstaple to Braunton railway.

## **2. About Railfuture**

*Railfuture* is the campaigning name for the Railway Development Society, the national independent voluntary body for rail users, feeding comments and suggestions to rail managers, politicians and civil servants on improving and expanding the rail network. *Railfuture South West* is responsible for Cornwall, Devon and the Isles of Scilly.

## **3. Background to Railfuture's Objections**

Firstly Railfuture is very concerned that the physical design of the Barnstaple Western Bypass will prevent the future reopening of the Bideford to Barnstaple railway by blocking the trackbed on a permanent basis. Railfuture is seek to protect the existing trackbed (or a suitable alternative alignment) which would allow the railway to be reopened. Our second objection relates to the proposed pedestrian/bus underpass near Barnstaple station. Railfuture is worried that this will produce an insecure area for pedestrians walking under the new road, as well as requiring a level crossing with a restored railway west of Barnstaple. Thirdly we wish to see a route identified and protected that would allow the former Ilfracombe line to be reopened between Barnstaple and Braunton.

Bus 'Park and Ride' schemes, together with reopened railways, have been proposed by other objectors as an alternative to building the Barnstaple Western Bypass. Railfuture supports ideas to improve public transport such as a new frequent local train service from Braunton to Barnstaple and Bideford, bus park and ride schemes and a short new rail link over the disused Taunton line as far as the Newport area of Barnstaple. However, Railfuture South West has not evaluated these alternatives, except to note that a train service more frequent than half hourly would need some passing loops or double track between Barnstaple and Bideford, and similarly

between Barnstaple and Braunton. We are not putting forward an objection to the building of the Western Bypass, nor are we presenting alternative transport options to the road. Our focus is on the need to improve the rail link between North Devon and the national network at Exeter.

### **3.1 Objection to the Devon County Council Planning Application**

Our letter of objection to the Barnstaple Western Bypass planning application was made on 21st May 1999 [Appendix 9.1]. It covered our three objections, together with a brief history of our submissions to the County on previous occasions and a request that they worked with groups such as ourselves to improve public transport in Devon. We received a reply from Mr. D M Warbey on 9th June 1999, referenced DGWJ/BA(5)A [Appendix 9.2]. This offered some reassurances, but did not entirely satisfy our objections.

### **3.2 The Bideford to Barnstaple Railway**

Some assurance was given by the statement that, '*...we are ensuring by resolution that the design of the Western Bypass does not preclude future rail structures being added at a later date and that the former railway track bed is to be safeguarded against development to ensure that the integrity of the former rail route is maintained*'.

However, this did not solve the problem of the physical blockage of the Bideford line trackbed by the proposed Western Bypass for a distance of more than 250 meters. Even if some of the bypass is built on piers instead of embankment, the trackbed may still be blocked by the road connection to Sticklepath Hill. No assurance was given that the costs of incorporating these future bridges would not have to be paid for out of a future railway reopening budget.

### **3.3 The proposed pedestrian/bus under pass at Barnstaple station**

The Devon County Council letter partly addressed the issue of personal security for users of the proposed underpass, '*The current plan incorporates modifications to open up the access and visibility around this underpass to ensure that it is a safe and convenient route for the people who use it.*' However, we believe that some sectors of the population may still feel vulnerable and rail custom may be lost by those afraid to use the underpass after dark.

The 9/6/99 letter also raised the point that bus interchange would be improved, as the underpass would give buses direct access the station frontage bus stops, before continuing into Barnstaple town centre. Railfuture recognises that buses have an important role in providing links to and from Barnstaple station, but providing a suitable road layout for this is not necessarily dependent on building the Western Bypass.

### **3.4 The Braunton to Barnstaple Railway**

In the Railfuture South West Rail Strategy [1] it is assumed that the old route of the Ilfracombe railway between Barnstaple station (Barnstaple Junction), Barnstaple Town and the Pottington Industrial Estate would not be reinstated. Blocks of flats have been built on the trackbed to either side of the former Town station. Consequently we did not raise a specific objection to the Western bypass link to the Long Bridge. This section will be built on part of the old railway on the south side of the River Taw. Irrespective of the Western Bypass two options were suggested to restore the railway to Braunton. the first a new route linking to the north bank of the River Taw near the Civic Centre and to the east of Rolle Quay. The second was a railway bridge parallel to the proposed Western Bypass bridge (Figure 1).

The Devon County Council 9/6/99 letter gave assurance that a railway could be restored under the Western Bypass bridge on the North Bank of the River Taw, but did not cover the problems

of the road blocking approach routes from the south side of the River. The road/rail conflicts are similar to those for the Bideford railway.

### **3.5 Additional Points**

One problem not covered in our original objection, or mentioned in the Devon County Council letter, is that a reopened railway to Bideford and/or Braunton would cross the underpass road on the same level. This would occur in a difficult location beneath or close to the proposed Western Bypass embankment.

## **4. The Railfuture Campaign for the Bideford to Barnstaple Railway**

### **4.1 History of campaigning**

The Bideford to Barnstaple railway, closed to passengers in 1965, was the subject of a reopening campaign in the late 1970's to early 1980's [2]. The line was included in the Railway Development Society's book, the A to Z of rail reopenings [3 and 4]. The importance of this line was emphasised by the author at a presentation made to the Railway Reopenings Conference. This was held at the George Hotel, Nottingham (Saturday 21 March 1992) and considered the need to identify, classify and prioritise disused railway lines which still held potential for reopening. The following summary point was made in a subsequent report of the conference to the Society's Railwatch publication [5], '*Gerard Duddridge of RDS outlined a possible classification scheme for routes which should be reopened.....Bideford, Tiverton and Tavistock should be priorities. Track beds of all possible reopening lines should be protected*'.

Subsequently the need to protect the Bideford line trackbed has been emphasised by RDS in submissions to Devon County Council. These have been in connection with the annual Transport Policies and Programme and the Devon County Structure Plan as summarised in our letter of 21/5/99 (Appendix 9.1). In addition we were invited to comment of the draft Local Transport Plan [6] and again emphasised the Bideford line in our letter of 30 May 2000 [Appendix 9.3].

### **4.2 Criteria Used by Railfuture (RDS) to Select Route for Reopening**

Railfuture South West has now classified all disused railway lines in Devon with an A to E grade. We placed the Bideford line in the top Class A, alongside other potential reopening schemes such as restoration of the railway to Tavistock. We consider that the Bideford railway is needed now and should never have been closed. Its primary purpose should be to provide a transport link from the Torridge area to Exeter and the rest of the national rail network. A secondary objective is to provide a fast local Bideford to Barnstaple rail service. The route is currently used as a cycle path, but our surveys suggest that a path could be rebuilt alongside the railway except through the tunnel at Instow.

Overall Devon has less miles of railway per head of population than neighbouring Cornwall and for Devon to achieve the same level of rail provision would require an additional 100 miles of railway to be restored. In this context the restoration of the railway to Bideford is a modest proposal especially when it is considered nationally that the use of railways is rising. In Cornwall the branch lines are known to bring economic benefits to the towns they serve and the restoration of the Bideford line to the secondary main line status proposed by Railfuture, would bring even further benefits.

If the analogy of Cornwall is taken further it is possible to compare the regional centre of Barnstaple with Truro. Despite being smaller than Barnstaple, Truro has double the level of train frequency and a full range of destinations including London and Scotland. The fact that the railway continues west of Truro must be a contributory factor to this better rail service. It can also be considered that if the 12 mile Truro to Falmouth (with Penryn) corridor with a population of over 41,000 in 1991 can support 3 buses per hour plus a rail service, then the 9 mile Barnstaple to Bideford (with Northam) corridor with a higher population should also be able to do so.

### **4.3 Reopening in the National Context and other Support**

The Railway Development Society published '*Bring Back Our Tracks*' [7] in June 1996. Ignoring developments within 30 miles of London this publication outlined 215 miles of track that should be restored to the railway network of Great Britain. The Bideford to Barnstaple reopening was one of 25 such schemes, many of which have now received varying degrees of support from Railtrack, local authorities, Train Operating Companies or local initiatives. These schemes include the East-West link (Oxford to Cambridge), Oxford to Princes Risborough, Walsall to Stourbridge Junction, Stratford upon Avon to Honeybourne, Bere Alston to Tavistock, Edinburgh to Galashiels, and Penrith to Keswick.

### **4.4 The Vision for the Bideford Railway**

Our vision for the Bideford railway is as a secondary main line with train services running through to Exeter and London Waterloo. The reopened railway would be competitive with bus and car travel. Access to and from the Torridge District of Devon would be greatly improved. There would be social and environmental benefits derived from improving social inclusion, and encouraging modal shift from private to public transport.

#### **4.4.1 Train services from Bideford**

Railfuture envisages a restored Bideford to Barnstaple railway operating as a secondary main line with a minimum hourly train service running through to Exeter on an upgraded route. From Exeter St. Davids station most trains from Bideford would run to Exeter Central station, and a few would run as through services to London Waterloo via Salisbury. A number of trains would also run to Taunton and Bristol. A new passing place would be required on the Barnstaple to Exeter line (the exact location depending on the train timetable adopted). Irrespective of reopening the railway to Bideford, work is needed on the Exeter to Barnstaple line anyway for it to accommodate an hourly train service.

#### **4.4.2 Train timings from Bideford and comparisons with other modes**

Prior to closure Bideford to Barnstaple trains took 21 to 24 minutes [8]. Today the Barnstaple to Exeter St Davids journey takes between 59 minutes and 1 hour 9 minutes when all stations are served. This would give an overall time of 1 hour 20 minutes to 1 hour 33 minutes from Bideford to Exeter St. Davids station.

However, examination of various factors (such as permissible speed on curves) shows that with new high quality track these times can be realistically improved. The Bideford to Barnstaple journey would take 12 minutes with a stop at Instow, and 10¼ minutes non-stop. This would save over 15 minutes compared to the bus service on the main road via Fremington.

A Bideford to Exeter time is achievable with 5 intermediate stops and this would be 10 to 15 minutes faster than a bus or car via Great Torrington and Winkleigh. Connectional time would also be saved when trains were operated through to places such as London Waterloo. Today,

most buses on the 315 route between Bideford and Exeter deviate to serve Dolton and North Tawton and this extends the journey to 1 hour 52 minutes.

Assuming no road congestion a bus could be timetabled from Bideford to Exeter via Great Torrington and Winkleigh to give a timetable comparable to a rail service. In practice the comfort and convenience of this mode will not attract sufficient passengers to justify such a high frequency. At present there are 5 buses daily each way on service 315, but an hourly service from 07:00 to 22:00 would require an additional 12 buses each way per day. This would represent an additional 1000 bus miles per day on the direct 42 miles route. In comparison, the extension of an hourly Exeter to Barnstaple train service to Bideford would only add 288 train miles per day (it is an objective of Railfuture, Devon County Council, Rail Passengers Council and Railtrack for there to be an hourly Exeter to Barnstaple service).

Railfuture considers that only an hourly public transport service operating directly from Bideford to Exeter will provide the flexibility and convenience for passengers to link satisfactorily into the main railway network. In the short term a bus link would be cheaper to implement, but in the longer term a railway will be better used and generate more revenue on the railways beyond Devon.

## **4.5 Other Views on the Bideford-Barnstaple Railway**

### **4.5.1 Devon County Council**

Railfuture understands that Devon County Council does not support rail restoration beyond Barnstaple. We support their current efforts to integrate bus services at Barnstaple station, and we have actively promoted the development of bus/rail links generally in the south west. However, we would refute any assumption that a connecting bus service from Barnstaple to Bideford can in any way substitute for a restored rail service. Bus replacement services generally fail to attract significant passenger numbers compared to rail.

In considering substitution of rail services by buses a 1976 British Railways document [9] suggests that only 10% of passengers would be retained and researchers Hillman and Whalley [10] conclude by saying, *'the difference between rail and bus travel have been seen in this study to be so marked- both in terms of objective evidence and in terms of the respondents' judgements-that it would be an illusion to think that a bus service can fully replace or compensate for a rail service'*.

### **4.5.2 Rail Passengers Committee**

The Rail Passenger's Committee for Western England have recently published the final draft of their report, *Western Advance* [11] and support the reopening of the railway to Bideford and associated improvements to the Exeter to Barnstaple line.

## 4.6 Railfuture Concerns about The Maunsell Rail Report

### 4.6.1 Separating the Bideford line at Barnstaple

The Maunsell Rail report of January 1999 [12] has only considered the operation of a separate Bideford to Barnstaple railway, and the conclusion is reached that the railway would not be economically viable. The executive summary page 1 states, *'As Railtrack had already indicated that it had no plans to extend its network beyond Barnstaple, the team examined the possibility for a third party infrastructure operator to run the line'*. Railtrack is largely responsible for maintaining the existing rail network rather than expanding it. We would expect the initiative to come from a new bidder for the Wessex Franchise, or perhaps in the future the Local Authority. The Summer Sunday service from Exeter to Okehampton was started by Devon County Council and is operated as a through train service, running over both Railtrack and privately owned track. Therefore Railfuture does not believe that it is a valid to only consider a third party infrastructure operator to run the Bideford line in any report.

Railfuture has been campaigning for an hourly service from Bideford to Exeter to be operated with high quality trains, some running through to London Waterloo and Bristol. The primary function of the railway would be for this long distance passenger traffic and we would expect revenue forecasts to be lower if this type of service is excluded. In relationship to the main line rail network at Exeter, the Maunsell assessment effectively regards the Bideford line as a branch line of a branch line. Railfuture knows that passengers prefer not to change trains and the necessity to do this at Barnstaple as well as Exeter would be detrimental to the revenue earning potential of the Bideford line.

Railfuture (as RDS) made a similar objection against the design aspects of a road scheme in 1992. At the Public Inquiry into the Honiton to Exeter A30 trunk road scheme (1/9/92 to 19/11/92) we asked for the road to be built at a suitable height to allow the former Sidmouth line to be reopened. To counter our proposal, the Department of Transport suggested that the railway could not be operated as a through service to Exeter [13]. *The road scheme has been in the public domain since 1977 but up to the end of the objection period in January 1992 nobody had raised the possibility of the line reopening. British Rail has sold virtually all the land and has no plans to reopen the line. At present it is not permissible for non British Rail drivers to operate on British Rail lines so if the line were opened privately, passengers would have to transfer to British Rail services at Feniton.*

In the past the separation of a rail service into two parts has resulted in loss of revenue and a subsequent closure proposal. In some cases this might be the intention. Kingswear which is connected to Dartmouth by ferry, was the starting point of trains to London Paddington and the North of England. In the second half of the 1960's the service was cut in two leaving the main line trains to start from Paignton. A shuttle train service ran from Kingswear to Paignton. A closure notice was issued in 1972 and although the line is now operated by tourist steam services no regular through trains are operated. Today Dartmouth must normally be reached by bus or car from Totnes. By analogy it can be concluded that a new train service will also be unviable if run as a separate operation.

The trend over the last two decades of linking separate rail services to form a secondary main line express services is also evidence of the operational and revenue benefits of through running. Examples include the extension of Waterloo to Exeter trains to Paignton and Plymouth and trains operating on the Wales and West Alpha line service such as Penzance to Manchester via Hereford.

Railfuture considers that the primary purpose of the Bideford railway would be to provide a fast link to the main line at Exeter, and therefore revenue forecasts must include the money generated on the connecting routes. The exclusion of this revenue from the Maunsell assessment was inappropriate.

#### **4.6.2. Exclusion of Revenue from Existing Road Users**

Railfuture is puzzled by the provision in the Maunsell report that the revenue from most bus passengers who might use rail instead had to be discounted. This must also have effected the revenue forecasts of the railway. We would expect some rail revenue to be gained from the transfer of passengers from First Red Bus services 1 and 2, but overall buses would gain revenue. This would be the case for services from Bideford to Westward Ho! and Appledore if direct connections were made with trains at Bideford East the Water.

The Maunsell report says that the train would not be significantly quicker than the bus, and *'additional passenger traffic would not be generated.'* This may become true for bus service 86 for journeys between Barnstaple and Bideford Town Centres, especially if future use of the Western Bypass is taken into account. However, our calculations show that the train would be 16 to 18 minutes quicker than buses on the main route via Fremington (Sticklepath Terrace to East the Water).

When through journeys are taken into consideration the rail journey would be much faster than the express bus from Bideford, which takes between 5½ and 6 hours for the journey to London Victoria Coach Station. The train would be considerably quicker to London Waterloo and would take about 4 hours from Bideford. With upgrading of the Waterloo line, 3¼ hours to London should be possible. Railfuture anticipates that drivers currently using road entirely for their journeys, or using Tiverton Parkway station for main line trains, would be diverted to a new Bideford main line rail service. This revenue source needs to be quantified and taken into consideration in any survey.

#### **4.6.3. Tourist Train Services**

As the route between Bideford and Instow runs alongside the scenic Torridge Estuary, some additional rail custom may be gained. However, we do not understand why the report has included a study of using the route for tourist steam services, both narrow gauge and standard gauge. A steam service would not be able to offer the journey quality needed to attract passengers to the railway network (although as on any railway the Bideford line could be used for occasional special train services both steam and excursion).

#### **4.6.4. Infrastructure Considerations**

Railfuture agrees with the Maunsell report that there would be no problem in reinstating the railway from Barnstaple to North Instow with retention of the Tarka Trail cycleway. We also concur in realising that it would be necessary to divert the Tarka Trail from the section through Instow Tunnel. However, we consider that the report gives the false impression that the final Instow to Bideford section would be difficult to restore.

#### **4.6.5. Conclusions Relating to the Maunsell Report**

It was proposed in the Maunsell Rail Report that the road should be built at the correct height to allow a railway underbridge or bridges to be built at a later date. The report concluded that, *'The limited potential revenue combined with the operating, capital and environmental cost required to reinstate rails services between Barnstaple and Bideford indicates that no economic or environmental case can be made for the foreseeable future'*. Railfuture believes that this conclusion has been reached with inadequate consideration of the full revenue potential of the railway. If this work is to have a bearing on the outcome of providing a bridge for the Bideford railway beneath the Western Bypass then it should be re-evaluated.

The recently produced supplement to the Maunsell Rail Report [14], is now of even greater concern as it has abandoned completely the recommendation to Devon County Council that the road should be built at the correct height to allow a bridge to be built in the future.

### **5. Reopening the Braunton (Ilfracombe) to Barnstaple Railway**

#### **5.1. Closure and Population Served**

Since the Ilfracombe line was closed in 1970 the entire North Devon coast has been devoid of rail communication. A reopened railway from Barnstaple to Ilfracombe, with intermediate stations at Braunton and Morteohoe, would serve a resident population of over 20,000. This is a level slightly in excess of Barnstaple and represents a quarter of the population within the North Devon District. Stations could also be developed to serve the Royal Marines base at Chivenor, and Wrafton where 500 are employed at the nearby laboratories. The 1991 population figures are given in the South West Rail Strategy [1]. A reopened railway would be beneficial to the tourist industry and reduce the peripherality of Ilfracombe. North Devon is second only after Torbay for the number of tourist nights spent in the Devon area.

#### **5.2. Advantages of a Restored Railway**

The railway at Barnstaple is too far away to be reached at reasonable cost by taxi and those without cars will need to use the bus. The First Red Bus via Muddiford takes 41 minutes from Barnstaple railway station to Ilfracombe and 45 minutes back. In comparison it can be calculated that a modern train on the old railway route through Barnstaple Town could complete the Barnstaple to Ilfracombe journey in 25 minutes with 3 intermediate stops. This would give a time saving of 16 to 20 minutes compared to the bus, and more time would be saved if through trains were operated from Exeter to Ilfracombe. In practice, the number of passengers seen transferring between buses and trains at Barnstaple is considerably less than would be expected for a rail link. Accordingly we think that much business is being lost from the Barnstaple to Exeter railway, and also from the rail network beyond, because of the continued closure of the lines to Bideford, Braunton and Ilfracombe.

#### **5.3. Obstacles to Reopening the Ilfracombe Railway**

Regrettably there are a number of obstacles to reinstating the former route. These include a factory on the Ilfracombe station site, developments at Braunton and within Barnstaple flats on the trackbed to either side of the former Town station, plus loss of the bridge across the River Taw.

#### **5.4. Reopening from Barnstaple to Braunton**

In the medium term we wish to see the Braunton to Barnstaple line restored. This would link Braunton (1991 population 7,388), Wrafton and Chivenor to the rail network. A new rail bridge would be needed across the River Taw and two sites were identified in the South West Rail Strategy [1]. The options are:

- Option 1. Reinstatement of the old route to pass through the former Barnstaple Town station. This would need to consider the crossing arrangements of the proposed new link road from behind Sticklepath Terrace to the Long Bridge. It would require provisions for re-acquisition of land and properties on the North Bank of the River Taw.
- Option 2. A new railway bridge over the River Taw to a new Town railway station near the Civic Centre, then over the former route across Rolle Quay to Pottington.. The route could be designed to skirt the edge of the Leader Flush development site, but it would be circuitous between Barnstaple station and Rolle Quay. The final design would need to consider the provision of sufficient straight track for the new Town station, and this would vary depending upon the exact position of the river crossing. To avoid creating a railway junction with the Bideford line beneath the proposed Western Bypass roundabout, a deviation could be made to take the railway under the first span of the Western bypass downstream bridge, on the south side. This would require a curve of 200 m through 90° from the Bideford line, followed by a 150 m curve of 180° across the river.
- Option 3. A new railway bridge parallel to the proposed downstream bypass bridge on its west side. So long as the Bideford line is protected, then the new railway could diverge from it at a point just west of the proposed Western Bypass roundabout. This option has the advantage of providing a faster more direct route from Barnstaple station to Braunton than options 1 or 2, but Barnstaple town centre would be missed out. Consideration should be given to building the road bridge with piers wide enough to carry the bridge decking of a future railway crossing.

From the Pottington Industrial Estate to Velator the trackbed is free from obstruction and the former double track width is sufficient to accommodate a restored single track railway alongside the Tarka Trail cycle path. The station at Braunton would serve the coastal area around Croyde and might be sited in the Velator area to avoid adverse development on the approach to the original station site.

#### **5.5 Conclusions for the Barnstaple to Braunton Railway**

In the longer term Railfuture believes that only a restored railway can provide a satisfactory public transport link to Ilfracombe. If the Ilfracombe railway was restored with a River Taw crossing parallel to the Western bypass, the fastest Barnstaple to Braunton journey would be reduced to 7 minutes. With just one further stop Ilfracombe would be reached in 21 minutes from Barnstaple.

Accordingly Railfuture objects to aspects of the Western Bypass at Barnstaple, that would compromise the reopening of the Ilfracombe railway towards Braunton.

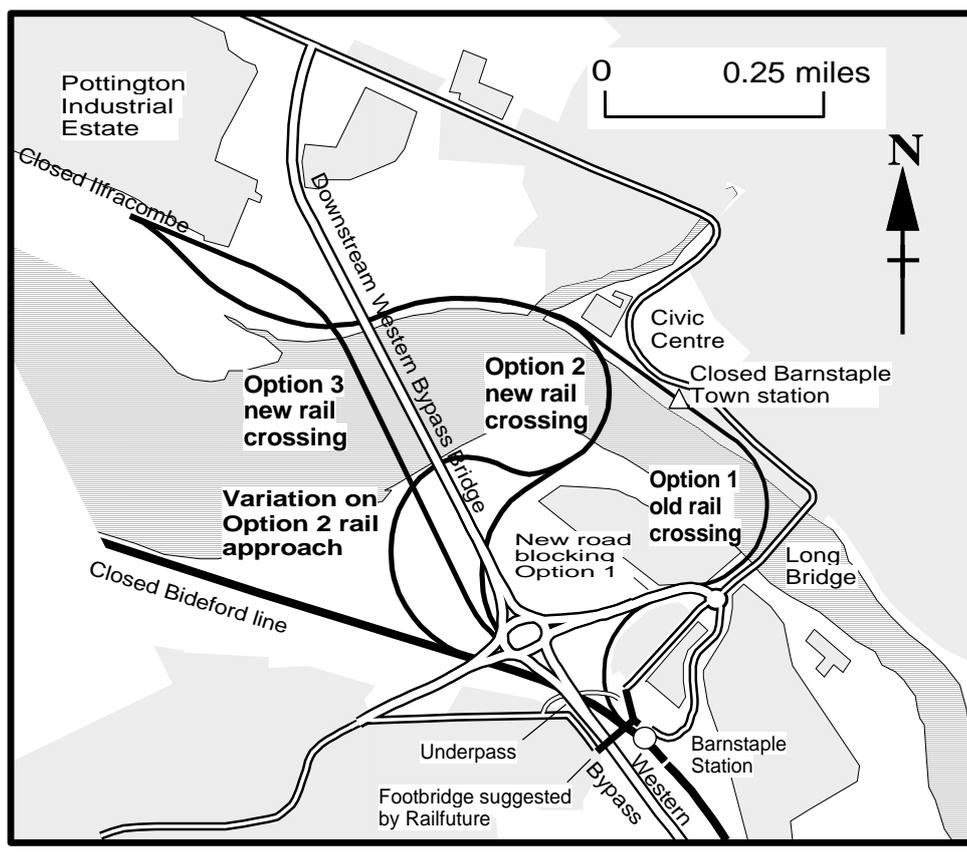


Figure 1. Map to show the Barnstaple Western Bypass and its relationship to options for the existing and possible future railway system.

## 6. What Railfuture is seeking from the Western Bypass Public Inquiry

### 6.1 Bideford to Barnstaple Railway

Our minimum requirement for the Bideford railway is that the recommendations on page 2 of the January 1999 Maunsell report [12] are followed:

1. The road is built with the necessary clearance to allow the railway to pass beneath,
2. No further encroachments on the route are permitted,
3. The costs of providing future underbridges (underpass) is agreed to be met from Council/Central Government funding rather than being attributed to the operator or developer of the rail route.

However, Railfuture additionally asks that a full regional travel survey is undertaken to investigate the potential of the Bideford line. This can then be used to reassess the time scale for reopening the railway and the economics of providing the necessary bridges at the time of road construction. The Maunsell Supplementary Report of June 1992 [14] itself recognises that evaluations do not take into account other factors, *'the evaluations do not take into account of wider benefits that might accrue from accessibility, economy, environmental, integration and safety measures. In order to calculate these access to a land-use transportation model would be required'*.

We understand that the road may now be partially built on piers due to poor ground conditions and that this might mean that only the Sticklepath approach road requires a specific underbridge for the railway. Our recommendation is that the design and exact alignment of the railway is evaluated to see if the crossing point of road and rail can be optimised and agreed in principle now. Railfuture (as RDS) offered to help with this course of action in our letter of to Devon County Council of 21st May 1999. This offer remains open.

## **6.2 Barnstaple Underpass**

It is not clear to Railfuture whether the recently proposed section on piers will lie in the exact vicinity of the proposed bus/pedestrian underpass. If it does, this may improve visibility and security for pedestrians. Nevertheless it may be still be a problem at night and also require a level crossing with a restored railway to Bideford. We cannot recommend a solution as we do not have detailed plans of the bypass with vertical profiles. However, we can suggest options to explore:

1. A footbridge over the Western Bypass could be located to the east of the proposed underpass. Once across the railway it would in one direction link to Sticklepath Terrace and the town centre, and in the other direction to the railway station entrance. This would provide pedestrians with a route of similar length as at present, and improved security. The access road would still cross the Bideford railway on the level, or the access road could be taken across the Western Bypass at the same level with traffic light control.
2. The Western Bypass is lowered to the level of the railway at the point where Sticklepath Hill and Sticklepath Terrace adjoin each other. The latter road would then cross both the Western Bypass and the restored railway on the same horizontal and vertical alignments as at present. The direct bus access road to Barnstaple station from Fremington could be built from the north side of the existing railway bridge which would be retained. The road would then have to rise sufficiently to cross the restored railway to Bideford.

A gradient climbing westward no steeper than 1 in 25 would be achievable if the protected railway alignment was diverted to pass under the road at the centre of the roundabout. The disadvantage of this would be the road cutting leading from the east would need to be deeper, although the nature of the geology is likely to allow the cutting slopes to be steepened accordingly.

If none of these options prove possible it may be necessary to allow rail users free use of buses between Barnstaple station and Bickington. This would be similar to the provision of free buses over the Tamar whilst bridge strengthening is taking place, but on a permanent basis.

## **6.3 Braunton to Barnstaple Railway**

Railfuture is asking that the Western Bypass plans are modified in such a way that it remains possible to reconnect the railway from Barnstaple station to the existing trackbed near the Pottington Industrial Estate. As previously considered above (Section 5.4), it may be best to select a new alignment and river crossing point, but all options should be considered.

Railfuture asks that a railway alignment is agreed for a new River Taw crossing as soon as possible by investigation and consultation between interested parties. This route can then be incorporated into the Western Bypass design and protected from adverse developments, so as to allow for future restoration at reasonable cost.

## 7. Conclusions

The Maunsell Rail report has only included a limited assessment of the potential of the Bideford railway and has ignored its role as a secondary main line operated with fast high quality trains to London Waterloo and Bristol. The evidence from the Maunsell report has been used by Devon County Council to conclude that reopening the Bideford line would be uneconomic.

However, Railfuture believes that when a number of factors are taken together there is strong evidence to suggest that the Barnstaple to Bideford railway is one of the most important railway reopening candidates in the south west. The population which would be directly reconnected to the railway network is high, other places of similar size are able to support a railway. The additional passengers who would be carried to Exeter and beyond would significantly improve the economic viability and future of the Barnstaple to Exeter railway.

Railfuture considers it wrong that those who are planning a local road scheme are effectively determining the future of a substantial part of the Devon railway network. They are doing this with insufficient research and without consultation with rail users. A full transportation survey would help to establish the true potential of the closed railway network.

Railfuture believes that it would be wrong for the Western Bypass scheme to be built without provision for reopening the Bideford railway. If the trackbed is left unprotected then both the Bideford and Braunton railways will become inaccessible and difficult to reopen at reasonable cost. This will lead to continued travel difficulties in Torridge and North Devon for those unable to use a car. With fewer passengers travelling on the local railway network, it will be more difficult to justify enhancements to the Barnstaple to Exeter railway line. We therefore ask that the necessary bridges are put in place to allow the Bideford line to be reopened, a footbridge is provided for pedestrians to gain safe access to Barnstaple station from the Fremington direction, and that a route is left protected for a future reopening of the Barnstaple to Braunton railway.

## 8. References

- [1] *South West Rail Strategy: A discussion Document*, March 2000
- [2] *Bring Back the Trains*, Railway Development Society, 1984. ISBN 0 901283 01 0
- [3] *A to Z of Rail Reopenings*, Railway Development Society 1989. ISBN 0 901283 02 9
- [4] *A to Z of Rail Reopenings*, Railway Development Society 1998. ISBN 0 901283 13 4
- [5] *Railwatch*, Railway Development Society, No. 52 July 1992. ISSN 0267 5943
- [6] *Devon on the Move - Devon Local Transport Plan 2001-2006 - Consultation Document*
- [7] *Bring Back Our Tracks*, June 1996, 6 sided A4 leaflet, Railway Development Society.
- [8] *British Railways Western Region timetable*, 9 September 1963 - 14 June 1964.
- [9] *Transport Policy: An Opportunity for Change*. 1976 British Railways Board.
- [10] *The Social Consequences of Rail Closures*. Mayer Hillman and Anne Whalley, Policies Studies Institute 7e, No. 587, April 1980.
- [11] *Western Advance: A plan for the growth of rail passenger services within Western England 2001-2002*. Final Draft. July 2001. Rail Passengers Committee
- [12] *Economic Feasibility Study of the Former Bideford to Barnstaple Railway Route*, Maunsell Rail, January 1999.
- [13] *Department of Transport London - Penzance Trunk Road, The Department's Response to the Railway Development Society*, October 1992. RT-DTP0305-R50-03
- [14] *Economic Feasibility Study of the Former Bideford to Barnstaple Railway Route*, Maunsell Rail, Supplementary Report, June 2001.

## 9. Appendix

### 9.1 Letter objecting to the planning application for the Western Bypass

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**RAILWAY DEVELOPMENT SOCIETY**

SOUTH WEST BRANCH

*A Voice For Rail Users*

67, Higher Exwick Hill,  
Exwick,  
EXETER,  
EX4 2AW  
21 May 1999

Devon County Council,  
Planning Control Group,  
Lucombe House,  
County Hall,  
Exeter. EX2 4QW

Dear Sir,

#### **Objection to the Barnstaple Western Bypass Planning Application**

I am writing on behalf of the Railway Development Society to object to the planning application for the Barnstaple Western Bypass. There are three aspects to our objection, all of which need to be addressed if the existing Exeter to Barnstaple railway is to realise its full potential to serve the economic and social needs of North Devon and Torridge Districts. The RDS objects to the blockage of the Bideford line trackbed, the arrangements for pedestrian access to Barnstaple railway station and the lack of protection for a new alignment on to the Ilfracombe line.

Firstly we note that the road will block the Bideford line trackbed for some 250 meters and we ask that the County revises its plan to allow the formation to be kept free for rail use. Reopening to Bideford is a project that the Society considers to be of utmost urgency.

Secondly the plans for the pedestrian/bus underpass access to Barnstaple Railway station from the Sticklepath Hill area will produce an insecure area for rail users walking to or from the station at night. This aspect of the plan should be modified so that the access road crosses the bypass on the level with traffic lights and a pedestrian crossing. Alternatively the current Sticklepath Terrace overbridge, leading from Sticklepath Hill, should be retained for buses and pedestrians, leaving the new road to pass underneath at the level of the adjacent and existing railway. In the latter case RDS would recognise that the Bideford line trackbed may need to be realigned as the road would then need to climb westward to pass over the Bideford railway trackbed.

Thirdly RDS wish to see an alignment protected for the possible future restoration of the Ilfracombe line towards Braunton. The site of the downstream road bridge occupies one of the possible sites for a rail bridge and the road plans should take this into account. This could mean building the bridge piers to allow a single track railway line to be added alongside at a later date.

The RDS is disappointed by the lack of consultation on this matter to date, especially given our long standing interest on this matter. The Railway Development Society has been actively calling for the reopening of the Barnstaple to Bideford line for over 4 years now, although it has always been our policy that this line should be restored. The line was included in our campaign leaflet 'Bring Back Our Tracks' in 1996, the A to Z of Rail reopenings, in our submission to the South West Regional Planning Conference last year and on numerous occasions to Devon County Council as outlined below:

22/5/95, RDS response to Transport Policies and Programme 1996/97 Consultation Draft

*"The society hopes that any future package bid for the area will include money to reinvestigate the case for rail restoration to Bideford and or to Braunton, the latter via a new road/rail bridge as part of the Barnstaple western bypass scheme. If an extension to Braunton was found to be warranted then the planned Velator link road might need to be considered in relation to a new station site there."*

10/95, RDS response to County Structure Plan First Review Consultation Draft

*"To the Exeter package we suggest that Willand is added and reopening to Tiverton. There should also be a North Devon/Bideford area package to include extension of the Exeter to Barnstaple line to Bideford."*

5/6/96, letter to Mr. TP Brunt, TPP consultation,

*".....we must also draw attention to the Velator Link road (6.2.11.) which is potentially another obstacle to restoring rail services to Ilfracombe and we ask that this possibility is taken into consideration. Similarly any impact that the Barnstaple Western bypass may have on restoring a rail service from Barnstaple to Bideford. This reopening to Bideford should be the next priority after Tavistock and Okehampton."*

19/12/96, RDS Response to Devon County Structure Plan First Review

*"Policy T7 (TR8)*

*Sub section 6 should be more specific in protecting disused railways for future rail-use or be specific to avoid a blanket coverage of all former routes in the County. For specific protection for railway use the Railway Development Society suggests in order of priority: Barnstaple to Bideford (unless upgraded to a reopening in policy T8), Okehampton to Tavistock, Willand to Tiverton, Feniton to Sidmouth and Barnstaple to Ilfracombe."*

10/97 The written submission of the Railway Development Society South West Branch to the Devon Structure Plan First Review (Devon 2011)

*"Bideford (pop 22,998 with Northam) which lost its service in 1964 came close to reopening by the county 18 years ago. This was before the track was lifted, but unfortunately the project failed to gain sufficient finance. Bideford could still regain its rail services by relaying the 9 miles of track to link with the Barnstaple - Exeter line, so benefiting the local economy and the overall viability of North Devon rail services. Since the first proposals to reopen this line in 1979 the intact trackbed has been incorporated into the Tarka Trail. It is fortunate that the topography is*

*favourable for parallel rail and trail routes, except through a tunnel at Instow, as the route lies in the wide flood plain of the River Taw. An uncertain threat to the line could be the Barnstaple Western bypass which if built will cross the trackbed just beyond the end of the line at Barnstaple (Junction) station."*

27/5/98, The Railway Development Society South West Branch Response to, Devon County Council Transport Policies and Programme 1999/2000, Consultation Document 4/98

*"A number of the highway schemes should include studies to evaluate their impact on possible railway development. The Barnstaple Western Bypass must not of course obstruct the trackbed of the Bideford railway, but studies should also consider the possibility of providing a parallel rail track to reinstate the former Ilfracombe line as far as the proposed Velator link road at Braunton. A study of the potential of the line beyond to Ilfracombe should also be made before any funding is sought for construction of the Velator link road."*

We hope that the opportunity will now be taken by the County to work with groups such as ourselves to ensure that North Devon and Torridge will be given the rail service which the area deserves.

Yours faithfully,

Gerard Duddridge (Chairman, RDS South West)



looked thoroughly at this issue and has not closed off any avenues for future provision of this railway should a future economic package be presented for its consideration. However, I would note that the cost of inserting appropriate structures into the Bypass at this time is estimated at Pl.6M to which has to be added the cost of reinstating the rail line into Bideford which the consultant estimated to be in the order of £7.5M.

2. As you note the major pedestrian/cyclist corridor between Barnstaple Railway Station and the Sticklepath Hill area is a key route in the locality giving as it does access to the Station, North Devon District College, the town and local food stores for both the young and the elderly alike. A key factor in the design of this area is to ensure that there is a convenient and safe crossing which minimises any conflicts with road traffic and in this context it is considered that this can be best achieved by the creation of a short underpass following the approximate alignment of the existing Sticklepath Hill. The current plan incorporates modifications to open up the access and visibility around this underpass to ensure that it is a safe and convenient route for the many people who will use it. The underpass also incorporates a bus only link between the Sticklepath Hill and Station areas thereby maximising the potential for bus/station interchange and encouraging sustainable transport. I trust that you will therefore be reassured that the County Council has pedestrian and cyclist safety and convenience at the forefront of its consideration for the design of this area.
3. I confirm that the Barnstaple Down Stream Bridge element of the Western Bypass proposal is at an elevation such that it fully facilitates any future rail provision consideration on the north bank of the River Taw following the former Barnstaple/Ilfracombe rail route. I would also note that Maunsell Rail in completing its economic feasibility study consulted some 24 organisations including the North Devon Rail Users Group.

I trust that you will be reassured that the County Council has looked thoroughly at these issues and not closed off any avenue for the future provision of railways should future economic packages be presented for consideration. If you wish to reconsider your objections, view the Maunsell Report or discuss the matter further please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours faithfully



D W Warbey  
Manager, Scheme Development  
for County Environment Director

### 9.3 Extract from our response to the draft Local Transport Plan 30/5/2000

As well as supporting Devon County Council rail projects (such as the Drake Line and Kingskerswell station reopening), we have consistently urged the inclusion of the following within the structure plan:

- The weekday reopening of the Okehampton to Crediton (and Exeter) railway line,
- Reopening of the Bideford to Barnstaple and Okehampton to Tavistock and Bere Alston railway lines,

#### **Table 8.7. Northern Devon Zone**

*Page 109*

The RDS supports measures in the LTP to promote an hourly train service on the Exeter to Barnstaple (Tarka line) and the development of a freight facility in Barnstaple. However, the RDS cannot understand why the benefits of reopening the Barnstaple to Bideford railway for a rail service from Exeter continue to be ignored. Today the emphasis is normally placed on the development of sustainable modes of transport. The importance attached to the construction of the Barnstaple Western Bypass and down stream River Taw bridge seem anomalous.

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