

# Enthusiasts vision for trains from the Torridge area through Crediton

SIXTY years ago people were having to get used to the idea of never having a rail link from towns and villages - ever. Now, thanks to a group of enthusiasts, who have a vision, a dream, trains from the Torridge area could be running once again through Crediton.

Monday, March 27 marked the 60th anniversary of The Beeching Report called "The Reshaping of British Railways".

ITV chose Bideford as a station to feature on its programme, talking about how much a restored railway is needed in each region.

At the old Bideford railway station, three people much involved in bringing a rail service back to Bideford and Torridge were interviewed.

They were Tim Steer, Tarka Rail Association's ACE Rail lead officer, ACE = Atlantic Coast-Exeter Railway Project.

Dr Michael Ireland, chairman of OkeRail and David Northey, Tarka Rail Association Strategic Lead looking at how the railway could grow in the future.

He said he was interested in the effect of re-connecting communities that had been cut off by the Beeching cuts of the 1960s and early 1970s. The scheduled passenger service for Bideford finished in 1965.

Tim said: "The volume of traffic now coming towards Barnstaple on the A and B roads is causing peak-time gridlock and this is only going to get worse with more large-scale housing developments around Greater Bideford, Fremington and Barnstaple.

"Torridge has absolutely no rail link meaning it is cut-off, the residents are reliant on a bus service or to drive to Barnstaple to catch the Tarka line or drive to the newly restored Dartmoor service at Okehampton.

"Torridge is now widely known for having some of the UK's worst weekly wages and one

of the most deprived districts."

He also said: "A restored Greater Bideford rail link would help alleviate the traffic that bottlenecks around Barnstaple and bring economic prosperity to both towns.

"Tarka Rail Association has been successful in securing funding from Railfuture and Great Western Railway (The Barnstaple to Exeter railway operator).

"The funding has now gone to commissioning an independent railway consultant who will look at the existing rail line and what can be done to improve the existing line as well as options to extend the service to Greater Bideford."

He added that ACE Rail has the support of three MPs, the local transport lead, parish and town councils and local authorities. Beeching had said it was possible that losing the service could result in work drying up. This had seen many families leave the area.

Tim thanked Dr Ireland for his continuing loyal support for ACE Rail.

David Northey pointed out that if either of the main road links into North Devon was disrupted this would affect the whole of North Devon.

"Investment into the railway could help so many people," he said. "Reopening the railway would be vital in connecting people."

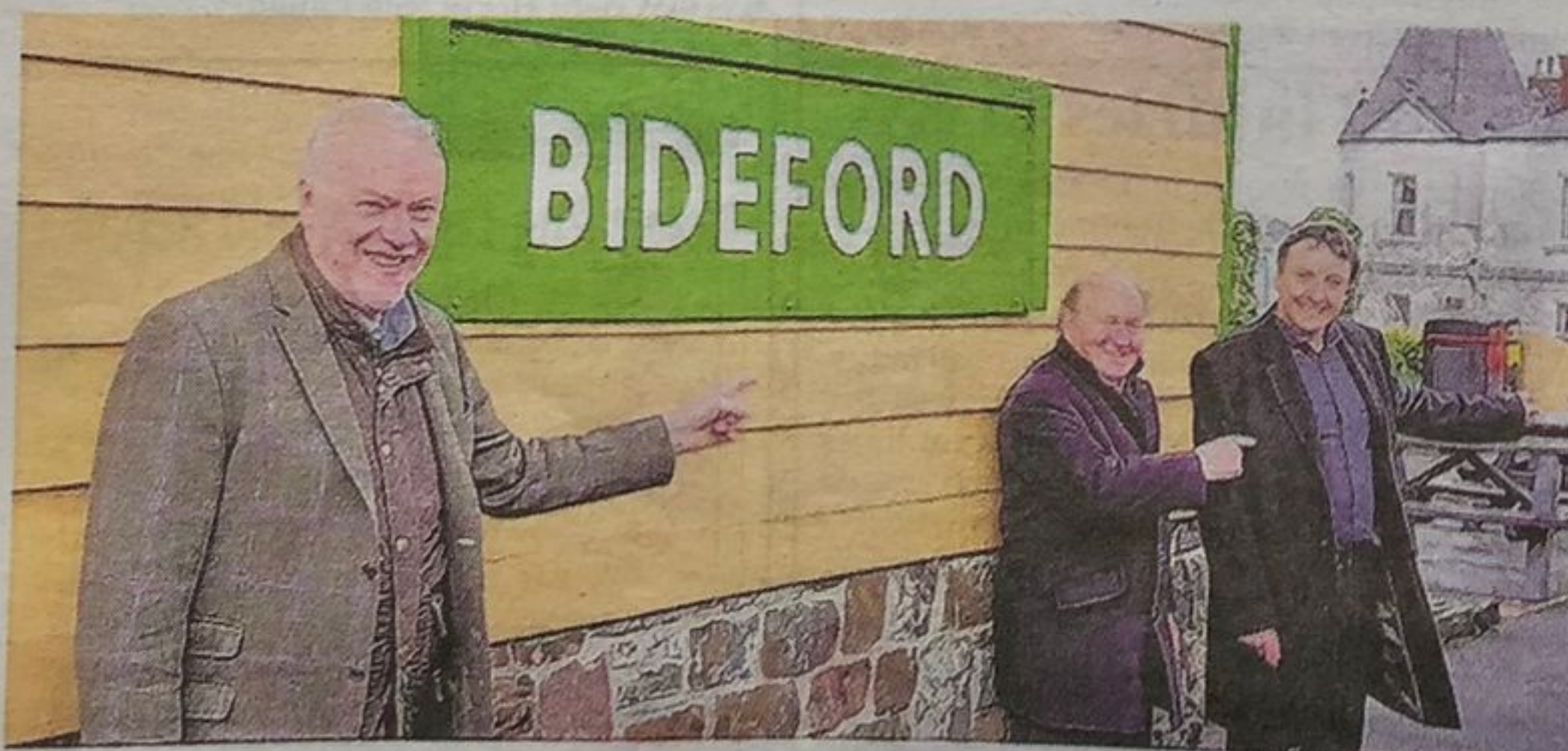
Dr Ireland explained that the Okehampton line was closed to passengers in 1976 by the Labour Government but remained open for freight traffic from Meldon.

Passengers have been able to use the train from Okehampton for the past two years. Dr Ireland said having the line restored was a lesson that could be taken to other areas. It had certainly revitalised small businesses and shops by bringing people into the town.

Sue Read



Tim Steer being interviewed by ITV, watched by Dr Michael Ireland and David Northey.



At Bideford, David Northey, Dr Michael Ireland and Tim Steer. Photos by Simon Ellery