

North Devon railway alliance launched to restore historic rail link

The proposal includes not only restoring the rail link between Bideford and Barnstaple but also upgrading the existing Tarka Line



Barnstaple station with record-breaking numbers of over 500k in 2022-23. Credit: Roger Blake

North Devon Gazette By Ella Sampson 05 Mar 2024 11:00 AM Email: ella.sampson@clearskypublishing.co.uk

A new organisation dedicated to reinstating the Bideford to Barnstaple railway line was launched on Friday, March 1.

The Northern Devon Railway Development Alliance wants to create a new rail link between the two towns and to upgrade the Tarka Line connecting Exeter and Barnstaple.

With 30 representatives from 13 stakeholder organisations in attendance, the Alliance has pledged to advocate for government support to re-establish this crucial connection for the Torridge community, which boasts more than 40,000 residents.

The first meeting took place at Bideford's Royal Hotel at an event organised by Railfuture and set the stage for reversing the closure of Bideford's railway in 1965, a decision made during the Beeching era.

Torridge and West Devon MP Sir Geoffrey Cox was unable to be present, but said in a statement: *"You are embarking on a very worthwhile cause. There is substantial support in Torridge for exploring the viability and economic case for this important railway connection to Barnstaple. Housing and population growth are likely to require improved communication links in the future."*

In a statement, North Devon MP Selaine Saxby, also unable to be present, said: *"I wholeheartedly support the Northern Devon Railway Development Alliance's ambition to restore the rail link between Bideford and Barnstaple, and to upgrade the existing Tarka Line between Barnstaple and Exeter."*

The proposal includes not only restoring the rail link between Bideford and Barnstaple but also upgrading the existing Tarka Line, which expects to strengthen economic prospects and transportation options for North Devon.

Andrea Davis, Cabinet Member for Climate Change, Environment, and Transport at Devon County Council added: *"Devon County Council and Peninsula Transport are committed to decarbonising the transport system, improving connectivity and giving genuine transport choice for our residents, visitors and businesses. Improving connectivity for residents in Northern Devon, supporting new development with transport infrastructure and creating healthy, connected communities for the future is key to our future wellbeing and prosperity."*

The town of Bideford has long awaited the return of its railway. The revival efforts, including the ACE Rail campaign led by the Tarka Rail Association and supported by Railfuture, gained momentum, leading to the formation of the Northern Devon Railway Development Alliance.