

Northern Devon Railway Development Alliance



Torridge District Council joins push for North Devon Rail Link

Torridge District Council backs feasibility study for new rail link with Northern Devon Alliance



GWR train (Image: Derek Harper / Geograph)

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Torridge District Council (TDC) has officially aligned itself with the Northern Devon Railway Development Alliance (NDRDA), a significant step forward in the campaign to enhance rail infrastructure in North Devon.

The council's community and resources committee recently endorsed the alliance's efforts to establish a new rail link between Bideford and Barnstaple, and to bolster improvements and services on the Barnstaple to Exeter line.

The council has agreed to explore a joint feasibility study for the new rail link, setting aside £10,000 for this purpose as part of its new strategic plan.

Notably, there is no additional cost for TDC to join the alliance, as the group's goals align with the council's own objectives.

This decision marks a proactive step for Torridge, which is currently the only district in Devon without a rail connection.

The region has been grappling with increasing traffic congestion, exacerbated by a 25 percent rise in passengers on the Barnstaple to Exeter line since the COVID-19 pandemic. The success of the recently restored Okehampton to Exeter line, which has reportedly stimulated the local economy in Dartmoor, further underscores the potential benefits of enhanced rail connectivity.

Cllr Chris Leather (Ind, Northam) expressed support for the council's involvement but emphasised that securing the Exeter line from Barnstaple should remain a top priority.

He expressed scepticism about the feasibility of reviving the Bideford to Barnstaple line, suggesting alternative modes of transport such as tramways or monorails might be more realistic.

Conversely, Cllr Teresa Tinsley (Lib Dem, Bideford North) voiced concern over the Bideford to Barnstaple line, questioning its potential benefits and the impact on Bideford. She advocated for a thorough feasibility study that considers all aspects before committing further resources.

There are also apprehensions regarding the potential impact on the Tarka Trail, a popular tourist destination that traverses former railway lines.

Great Western Railway (GWR) previously contributed £6,500 in 2022 to investigate the business case for reinstating the Bideford to Barnstaple rail line.

Tim Steer, vice chair of the Tarka Rail Association, welcomed Torridge District Council's participation in the NDRDA, praising the move as a positive step towards addressing transport challenges and boosting regional investment.

He said: "It brings me great joy in knowing all the work that I was leading under the Tarka Rail Association's ACE Rail campaign has now been absorbed by the Northern Devon Railway Alliance. Having Torridge District Council join the alliance as an official stakeholder is fantastic, it shows that they understand there are transport challenges that make the district less desirable to invest in and cause social deprivation. Other areas that have already invested in connectivity/transport to the whole nation by reinstating their rail link have received great social and economic prosperity whilst tackling the climate emergency on a local level. Great Western Railway and Railfuture part-funded the Initial Business Case with Tarka Rail Association: the Railway Alliance can now build on those foundations by constructing the Strategic Outline Business Case with supported funding. No one yet knows what type of rail system Bideford will receive or the route however, to improve the connectivity to Torridge (one of the nations most deprived districts), with an upgraded existing North Devon line will be transformational."

Roger Blake, part of Railfuture and acting convener for the NDRDA, also expressed satisfaction with the council's support.

He said: "Railfuture, as a co-founder of the Northern Devon Railway Development Alliance, is very pleased that Torridge District Council, which first joined the Alliance at Full Council on 8th April, has through its recent Community & Resources Committee unanimously supported that commitment."