

# Friends of Barnstaple station celebrate achievements and look to future

Tim Steer shares his view on the New Year



Blackmore Vale Rail Awards L-R:

Graham Haywood (FOBRS treasurer), Tim Steer (FOBRS chair), Peter Williams (South West Railway Commercial director).  
Photo by Alex Bowdery

By **Tim Steer** 03 Jan 2025

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This has been our first year as Friends Of Barnstaple Railway Station and we have had much to celebrate.

Thanks to our loyal Tuesday Barnstaple station team we picked up three high-level regional awards.

The South West in Bloom Outstanding award for the station.

The Stations in Bloom Gold award and the judges special award with trophy for our recycling efforts.

The Station in Bloom awards are an inter-station celebration of volunteering across the SWR & GWR networks in South West and Southern England.

This year, the awards were presented by the customer and commercial director for South Western Railway Peter Williams on behalf of Blackmore Vale Community Rail Partnership.

FOBRS has passengers' interests at heart as the station is the first and last impressions for when you visit Northern Devon by rail.

Area enhancement may win awards but service and infrastructure upgrades are what the North Devon line users also want.

Our FOBRs committee are very supportive of Great Western Railway's plan to run the newly-acquired class 175 'Coradia' trains on the line in 2025: to help deal with the present challenges associated with the ageing service fleet.

The 175's are now arriving in Devon and require route testing and driver familiarisation – this should be cleared later in the year.

Barnstaple railway station forecourt is expected to be upgraded: to improve connectivity and accessibility.

This forecourt enhancement is thanks to Devon County Council's transport team who bid to the Department for Transport's Bus Service Improvement Plan and won the approved scheme.

We are very supportive of this scheme and have seen how hundreds of thousands of passengers are now making the modal shift to use bus services.

The usage data for the North Devon (Tarka), line is showing it is nearing one million users per annum!

One concern we share is the scheme may be pulled due to local pressure and we hope DCC can redevelop the scheme to satisfy the Department for Transport as this money is ring-fenced for bus service improvements.

If it is not satisfactory to the Department for Transport, then the funding will be used in another area of the country instead.

More extreme weather means the North Devon (Tarka), line needs investment in its resilience.

Fallen trees and high rivers can cause several days of service disruption and that includes having a safe passage for a replacement bus service.

GWR has been challenged to provide the regular hourly service during storms and bad weather.

We thank Network Rail for making the line safe for users after the weather has subsided and for GWR for only operating when it is safe to do so.

We hope that the Northern Devon Railway Alliance that is championed by Railfuture, district and town councils can complete the business case work to upgrade the Barnstaple to Exeter line for a frequency of two faster services per hour and to finally present a compelling strategic case on why the line's services should be extended to Bideford.

It is very promising to hear the December 2024 Westminster Hall Devon Rail debate in which the North Devon and Exeter MPs had speeches regarding the line and said it is over-user-capacity and needs that warranted investment.

GWR have shared goals to see the line service is improved and the Bideford extension in part of their Southwest Vision.

The statutory transport authority Devon County Council has also made the line part of the Devon and Torbay Local Transport Plan 2025-2040.

Our Barnstaple station volunteers will continue to improve the environment but require help.

If you want to get involved, please come to Barnstaple railway station on a Tuesday morning.

The Friends Of Barnstaple Railway Station committee wishes you all a happy new year!

**Tim Steer**  
**Friends Of Barnstaple Railway Station – Chair**