

Alliance meets to plan future of North Devon rail line

Rail groups gather to discuss modernisation and extension of North Devon's Tarka line
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By **Ella Sampson** 04 Mar 2025 4:00 PM

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An alliance of rail groups and specialists will meet in Barnstaple on Friday, March 7, to devise a masterplan for the North Devon line, also known as the Tarka Line.

The Northern Devon Railway Development Alliance's second annual convention will focus on modernising the line and extending it to Bideford.

Roger Blake, from Railfuture, who convened the event, said: "The line is so popular that it's usually standing room only, including on weekends. We must find ways to increase capacity so that everyone can get a seat."

The convention, sponsored by Railfuture, will bring together representatives from around 36 partner and stakeholder organisations.

Discussions will cover efforts to improve journey times, secure twice-hourly services, and lay the groundwork for extending the line to Bideford. The event will also see the launch of a new campaign banner.

The drive to modernise the line began with the 'ACE Rail' campaign, which started four years ago. It gained momentum after the reopening of the Dartmoor Line and the return of the historic locomotive to Bideford in 2021.

This year's event will be opened by Barnstaple's Mayor, Janet Coates, and feature a welcome video from Mark Hopwood, Managing Director of Great Western Railway.

Additionally, representatives will discuss the importance of incorporating the proposals for modernisation and extension into Devon's Local Transport Plan 2025-40.

Some members of the Alliance will also be attending a Department for Transport event in Falmouth, where they will advocate for investment in the North Devon line, one of the fastest-growing rail routes in Britain.

Ian Brown CBE, Vice-President of Railfuture, highlighted the ongoing progress: "I attended last year's event in Bideford where the Alliance was set up against the background of much enthusiasm for the project. Much work is in progress as a result to turn this potential into a live project meeting transport, economic, environmental and social needs in Devon, including education and work access, in addition to sustainable tourism. This year's event in Barnstaple represents the opportunity for everybody involved to get together, share experiences and establish a firm base on which to take the project forward. Really looking forward to witnessing the output from the day's event as an exemplar in mounting strong business case arguments for reopening and developing key strategic rail routes."

The Alliance includes 24 partner organisations, such as Great Western Railway, Network Rail, and local councils, as well as businesses like Navantia UK (Harland & Wolff, Appledore), which play a key role in the region's economy.