

# NORTH DEVON JOURNAL

Thursday, April 24, 2025

DevonLive.com

 InYourArea.co.uk

£3

## Full speed ahead for railway line improvements



» The Northern Devon Railway Development Alliance met in Barnstaple

» Work is being carried out to increase frequency and speed of services along Tarka Line. [See Page 4](#)

Page 4 below

# Teaming up for progress on better railways

by LEWIS CLARKE

lewis.clarke@reachpic.com  
@DevonLiveNews

**W**ORK is underway to modernise North Devon's railway services with the goal of two-services an hour and faster journeys on the Tarka Line.

At the second annual meeting of the North Devon Railway Development Alliance (NDRDA) planners from Network Rail outlined early-stage work being carried out to make improvements.

Network Rail's senior strategic planner Andrew Robinson said these could include reintroducing double tracking at the southern end of the route, establishing new passing loops at the northern end, addressing outdated level crossings, and modernising signalling systems.

He confirmed design teams are currently assessing feasible locations for passing loops and junctions, as well as potential risks associated with increased service frequency and speed.

"The aim is to enable a two trains per hour service and achieve journey times of under one hour," said

Mr Robinson. "We need to look at how we can operate the line more efficiently and provide the flexibility and resilience it will require to meet future service levels."

He acknowledged that while some interventions would take time and substantial investment, others could be implemented to help in the interim. Among those backing the urgent need for improved transport links was Appledore shipyard.

Daniel Burke of Navantia UK/Harland & Wolff Appledore Shipyard said upcoming defence and green energy projects could bring 5,000 jobs to the region, but poor connectivity threatens to limit access to these opportunities.

"Workers and apprentices cannot rely on existing public transport to meet shift or education schedules," he said. "There is funding available from strategic investors such as the Crown Estate - but they are waiting for Devon to demonstrate what infrastructure is required to unlock growth."

The meeting in Barnstaple, provided an update on NDRDA's efforts to modernise the Tarka Line and

**“We need to look at how we can operate the line more efficiently and provide the flexibility**

progress towards the reinstatement of passenger services to Bideford, bringing together local government representatives, rail industry leaders, and strategic transport planners.

NDRDA was launched in late 2023 by Barnstaple Town Council, in partnership with the Tarka Rail Association and Railfuture. Since then, it has rapidly grown to encompass a broad network of stakeholders committed to improved public transport links for northern Devon.

Mayor of Barnstaple Janet Coates reflected on the pace of development since the alliance was formed. She noted that the Tarka Line's modernisation has been referenced in strategic planning documents including the draft Devon and Torbay Local Transport Plan for 2025 to

2040, and the Peninsula Transport Strategic Implementation Plan.

She said: "Work is continuing to finalise business cases for investment for adoption by official bodies. We at Barnstaple Town Council are proud to be one of the stakeholders in this important organisation."

Member of Parliament for North Devon, Ian Roome, highlighted the sharp rise in passenger numbers on the Tarka Line, calling them "staggering" and reflective of the urgent need for enhancement.

"The case for the enhancement of our cherished branch line has not been stronger in my lifetime," Ian said. "The rolling stock is one side of the coin. But it is the cold, hard data of passenger numbers that will drive decision making."

He confirmed discussions with Great Western Railway (GWR) and government representatives have been encouraging, but said regional advocacy must remain robust to ensure North Devon's needs are prioritised in national funding.

Devon County Council's cabinet member for climate change, environment and transport, Andrea

Davis confirmed the authority remains committed to lobbying for improvements to the Tarka Line.

"I met with the rail minister, Lord Peter Hendy, to discuss this," said Ms Davis. "Devon County Council continues to be one of the most proactive authorities regarding rail."

Mark Hopwood, managing director of GWR, said the Tarka Line is one of the best performing in the country in terms of post-pandemic passenger growth, but noted reliability and capacity constraints remain a concern.

He said: "We're working to introduce recently refurbished trains and are progressing with Project Churchward to replace all remaining diesel trains."

Robust data and business cases were highlighted as key to investment and this was highlighted by other speakers

Ian Baxter, strategic director at SLC Rail said the cost of reopening the Bideford line could range between £305 million and over £500 million depending on whether flood defence work is included. Evidence is being gathered to support a case.