

New push to revive long-dormant Devon rail link

Campaigners are calling for Bideford's lost rail line to return - linking with regional plans to reduce traffic and boost sustainable travel in Devon's biosphere

DevonLive NEWS By [Lewis Clarke](#)

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Bideford station and Tarka Trail (Credit : Tim Steer)

Campaigners are calling for a long-dormant rail link to be revived in northern Devon, arguing the move would help cut congestion and support a more sustainable future for the region's prized biosphere.

Railfuture's Devon and Cornwall branch has thrown its weight behind the new 10-year strategy set out by the North Devon UNESCO Biosphere Partnership, advocating for an increased share of visitors using public transport and active travel.

The branch is part of the Northern Devon Railway Development Alliance, which is lobbying for improved and extended services on the North Devon Line, including half-hourly trains that could reduce journey times – and potentially restoring the line from Barnstaple to Bideford.

Branch chair Tim Steer, who was born in Barnstaple, said the proposals aligned closely with the biosphere's vision for sustainable growth.

"We believe that our active support for the current feasibility and viability assessments of modernising the North Devon Line and its services, with half-hourly trains taking much less time to get from end to end, and extending them from Barnstaple to Bideford, are both schemes which align with the vision and mission of the North Devon Biosphere and the targets which it is setting itself," he said.

Roger Blake, acting convener of the Northern Devon Railway Development Alliance and Railfuture's national Infrastructure and Networks Director, said the proposed improvements would give people better alternatives to driving.

“Improved and extended mainline rail services will add sustainable transport capacity, choice and connectivity to an area reeling under the growing pressures of congestion, car-dependency and carbon emissions,” he said.

Blake added that their campaign has already gained key support from local and regional transport authorities.

“Our work has secured the official backing of Peninsula Transport in its Strategic Implementation Plan’s Delivery Plan for 2025–50 and of the Devon and Torbay Combined County Authority’s Local Transport Plan for 2025–40,” he said.

A Network Rail study also examined Bideford as one of five national case studies for potential new stations. It found the town ranked fifth overall in a list of 23, and second in terms of strategic fit.

An independent economic assessment, commissioned by Railfuture, suggested that a reopened Bideford station could become as busy as Weston-super-Mare by 2040.

Blake said: “We therefore look forward to a long-term collaboration with the North Devon Biosphere as each party develops its schemes centred on natural and community sustainability over the coming decade.”