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Commitment to our railways is needed now as much as then...

FIRSTLY, I would like to introduce myself with a bit of my local family history. Great-grandfather William Steer was a signalman in Crediton before relocating to Barnstaple and continuing the same career at Barnstaple Junction, Portsmouth Arms and Instow: he retired after completing half a century in the railway industry.

His son (my Grampy), Bill Steer was the leading railman in the parcels office at Barnstaple Junction: he retired from the railway after 41 years of service. Finally, my late father Brian Steer was a fireman on the footplate at Barnstaple Junction but sadly his career was halted in the 1960s because Dr Richard Beeching had sent a 'Reshaping British Railways' report to central government.

That report (known by many as the Beeching axe), took away many towns and communities from the rail network and offered a token bus service in its place.

In North Devon and Torridge, the axe of the rail network meant my late-father had to find a new career

Tim Steer

Vice-chair of the Tarka Rail Association



as did hundreds of local railwaymen however, my father did not stop a life of dedication to the railway and in his later years, he became an engine driver for Bideford Railway Heritage

The damage the Beeching axe dealt in towns such as Bideford and Ilfracombe meant after the lines no longer served their towns they rapidly fell into hardship or what we currently call deprivation.

Luckily, we have had many who have campaigned to keep the Barnstaple to Exeter line from receiving the rail network axe; mainly thanks to the decades of dedication from Tarka Rail Association's commit-

The Tarka Rail Association has successfully campaigned to also in-

Mr. Bill Steer, of 20, Linden Close, Barnstaple, has retired after 41 years with the railway service. He joined at Barnstaple, where he has remained ever since. He was leading railman



Mr. BILL STEER

in the parcels office. He has been presented with a gold watch by the management and cigars and an electric cigarette lighter by his col-

n a bad condition. HALF A CENTURY IN RAILWAY SERVICE

Mr. W. Steer Retires in Barrstaple

Mr. William Steer, of 2, West V:
Barnstaple, retired last week at
nearly half-a-century in
railway service. He started wi
ing at Creditor
1899 and was
signalman for
years. He
stationed
Instead and Pe



Instow and Pomouth Arms, spent 27 years signalman Barnstaple, served under s t a tionmast Messrs. He Samson.

Mr. Steer two sons, bot whom are employed at the E staple Junction station.

Tim Steer's great-grandfather William Steer, pictured above right, was a signalman in Crediton before relocating to Barnstaple. Tim's grandfather Bill Steer, pictured above left, was the leading railman in the parcels office at Barnstaple Junction: he retired from the railway after 41 years of service

crease the frequency of Barnstaple to Exeter services from every two hours to every hour: a service that is now showing record breaking passenger growth.

The TRA continues to campaign and work with Great Western Railway (the service operator), and Network Rail (the line's infrastructure management team), to see that the services are increased for additional capacity and frequency.

Three years ago, the TRA had also elected me as an officer to their committee to take on the ACE Rail (Atlantic Coast - Exeter Railway), campaign to reconnect Bideford to the rail network and together, we have had huge formal support from the parish and town councils; district authorities, MPs, and the County transport lead. The ACE Rail campaign successfully received funding from Great Western Railway, Railfuture and from the TRA for an Initial Business Case called the North Devon and Torridge Connectivity Programme; in its conclusive summary the consultant stated Bideford warrants a better public transport service and further investigation into extending the line.

One of the highlights of the Initial Business Case was to learn that the public needs a better capacity service on the existing Barnstaple to Exeter line as the consultant confirmed the line is experiencing 'suppressed demand' basically meaning the services are becoming full and standing leaving Exeter and Barnstaple with no room to get on board.

The ACE Rail campaign has now been absorbed within the Northern Devon Railway Development Alliance and will now take the campaign on as a project and is already working with local partnerships in producing the next body of work a Strategic Outline Business Case.

Sustainable public transport that connects with other services is the future for our communities because that will provide affordable mass transport to various destinations around the nation.

Private vehicles such as cars, vans and lorries are causing daily congestion as anyone who lives around Barnstaple will know; the road network around the town is not able to sustain the levels of use and we must look at alternative transport.

A hole lot more funding for road repairs

THERE'S little doubt the one subject I and my fellow councillors get the most complaints about and that's potholes.

So I was delighted to be able to announce that the county council - due to prudent budget management - has been able to find at least an extra £10 million to put into road repairs over the coming months.

There will be a full paper going to my Cabinet next week but I'm confident of it being approved - I don't think anybody would vote against more cash for potholes.

This isn't a problem unique to Devon. Travel anywhere in the country and you will find people complaining about the state of the roads.

It's a growing issue because our weather is changing. We're getting wetter and wetter winters and the rain is becoming much more intense. Couple that with occasional freezing conditions and an unprecedented number of violent storms and you have the worst possible combination for road surfaces.

The numbers speak for themselves. In the year ending March 2023, we recorded 39,813 potholes. In $the\,11\,months\,to\,February\,2024, there$ were 44,260. No matter that in December and January alone we repaired more than 7,000 defects.

So I am really pleased that we are now in a position to make extra mon-

John Hart

An update from the leader of **Devon County**



ey available for road repairs and drainage. I won't pretend that is going to fix everything but it will enable us to do much more. In my early days on the county

council, when Plymouth and Torbay were still part of the authority, it used to be said that Devon had more miles of road than Belgium.

Today the council is still responsible for around 8,000 miles of road and in lots of rural areas we have numerous roads that were originally just farm tracks and now have to cope with heavy tractors and farm equipment, delivery vans and modern cars - often four by fours. So we are planning to use at least £7.25 million on extensive repairs right across the county. We'll put an extra £2 million into drainage improvements and £750,000 into replacing faded road markings. The extra money will take our highway maintenance budget this year to over £72 million and I hope you will really notice the dif-

This potholes boost wasn't the on-



Devon County Council has found more funds for pothole repairs. Picture: Bill Kasman/Pixaba

ly announcement I've made over the past fortnight. I have decided to step down as leader of the county council next month at our annual meeting.

I was elected leader of the opposition Conservative group at County Hall in 2007 and after the 2009 elections I was able to form my first administration after we won a landslide victory. So I've done 15 years as leader of the council and 17 years as leader of the party.

In the last few months we've concluded an agreement with the Government for £95 million of national funding to support our special needs education and, within weeks, we will hopefully finalise our devolution deal. And despite the financial woes facing other local authorities, we set a balanced budget for this financial vear and have now been able to find

this extra cash for potholes.

It's been a real privilege and pleasure to serve the people of Devon for so long. Devon is the county in which I grew up and have lived all my life, in which I've run my family business, got married - to a Holsworthy girl and raised my children and it is the county which I love. I'm grateful for the opportunity I've had to put something back.