

**Northern Devon Railway Development Alliance**

**Modernising the Exeter to Barnstaple Railway Line  
Reinstating Train Services to Bideford**

Friday 6 March 2026 – Eggesford, Mid-Devon

Peter West OBE

## Northern Devon Railway Development Alliance

### Progress Since March 2025

- Barnstaple line usage continues strong growth in passenger numbers, far above pre-COVID levels, bucking national trend
- Network Rail has completed its initial study on Barnstaple line infrastructure modernisation
- Early-stage business case work for the separate Barnstaple line modernisation and Bideford train service extension schemes completed and placed in the public domain
- SLC Rail's work on Bideford suggests strong potential passenger demand
- Both *Preliminary Strategic Business Cases* suggest strong arguments in favour of spending money on improvements - strategic cases
- The published *Devon and Torbay Local Transport Plan 4, 2025-2040* includes increasing Exeter – Barnstaple to two trains per hour and supports reviewing a Bideford extension
- Peninsula Transport has included both schemes as priorities in its published *Strategic Implementation Plan 2025-2050*





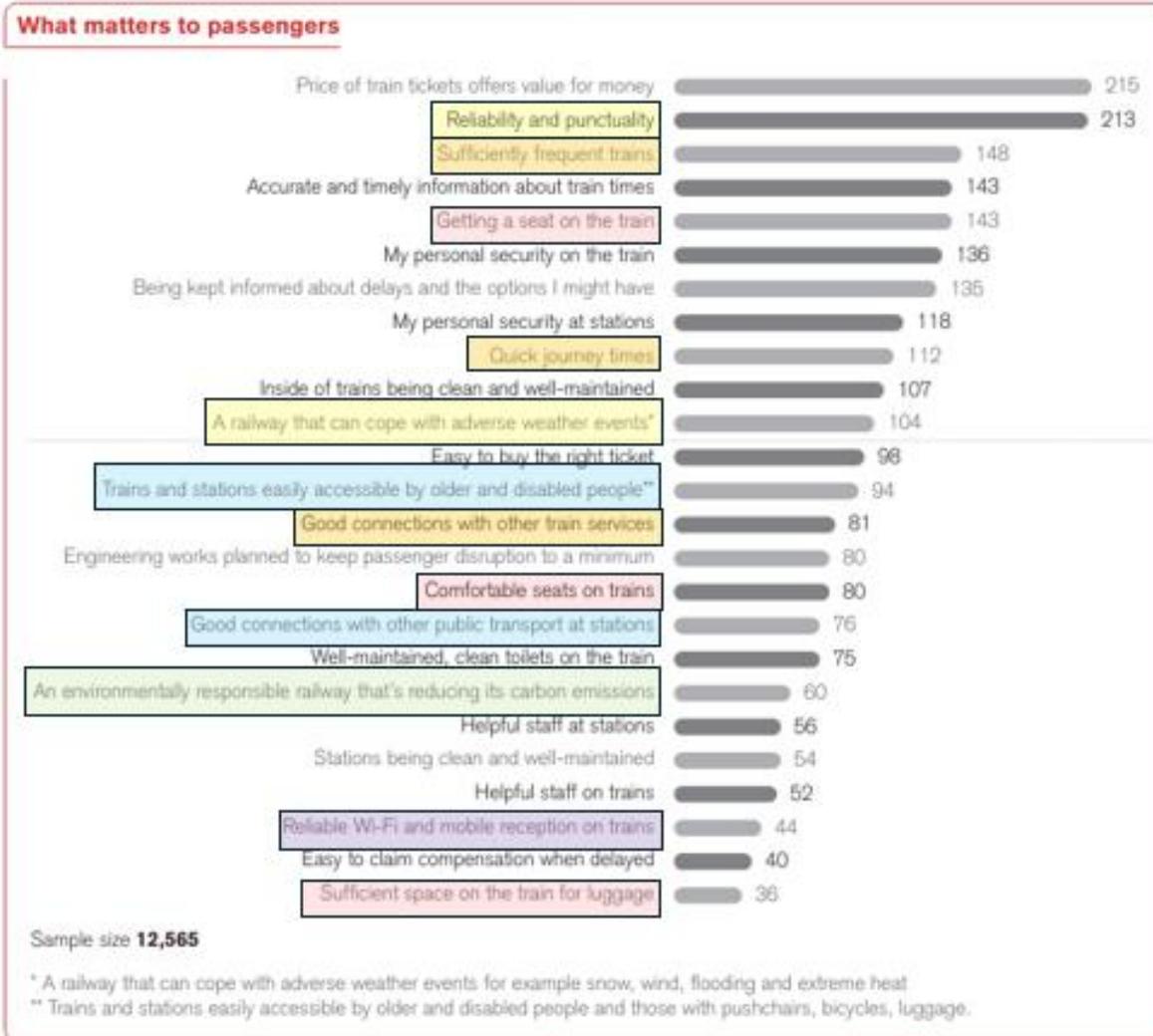
## Northern Devon Railway Development Alliance

# Why Produce a Preliminary Strategic Business Case?

- To help break the vicious circle resulting from the fact that a professionally-produced business case is expensive: “a Starter for Ten” and source of material/ideas
- A lot of discussion of Barnstaple with Network Rail and GWR: many comments, lots of helpful challenges and wider input
- Not definitive, as it is the first step in a process, not its conclusion: comments welcome
- Early views on objectives critical: how many problems in schemes have resulted from objectives not being clear?
- For Barnstaple, the focus is on establishing objectives / a problem statement and on creating a vision of what an improved train service could look like
- That means there are no construction cost numbers or economic case with BCR for Barnstaple modernisation: no attempt to set out in detail what would be built at this stage

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## Exeter – Barnstaple Line Modernisation – Passenger Priorities



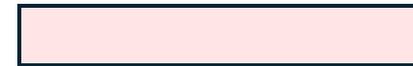
### Transport Focus Research



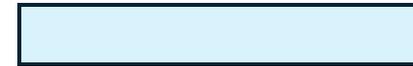
Punctuality - reliability



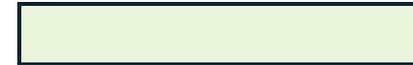
Frequency – journey times



Capacity - comfort



Accessibility



Environmental



Digital: wi-fi, mobile connectivity

## Northern Devon Railway Development Alliance

### Exeter – Barnstaple Line Modernisation: Vision for Improvement

- **Materially faster typical journey times:** Barnstaple - Exeter St Davids no more than 54 minutes with potentially significant further journey time savings, with modern, faster accelerating, more comfortable, more environmentally-friendly trains
- **Train service frequency doubled** from hourly to two trains per hour between Barnstaple and Exeter (three trains per hour for Crediton)
- **Significantly improved punctuality and reliability** for both Barnstaple and Okehampton train services, with reduced knock-on delay to other parts of the national network
- **Train service capacity substantially increased**, both for continuing growth on the Barnstaple-Exeter route and for potential reinstatement of the Bideford line
- **Stations easier/safer to use:** by car, EV, bus, active travel and for disabled people
- **Stations and the train service brought into the digital age** with wi-fi where not present, better mobile connectivity along the route and digital ticketing
- **Improved infrastructure resilience to more frequent severe weather events**

## Northern Devon Railway Development Alliance

### Is the Barnstaple Vision Realistic?

- **Nothing in the vision has not already been achieved somewhere in the country**
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Falmouth branch August 2016



Mid Cornwall Metro



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North Cotswold Line redoubling

South Cotswold Line redoubling



Modern sonar technology

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Roche station access ramp 2013

EV charging Reading station



Pay-as-you-go reader St Erth

