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Bideford railway - key issues for residents

7 April 2026

This is an addendum to my usual two-monthly update. If you know anyone who would like to receive news from me, Councillor Teresa Tinsley, please forward this to them and get them to sign up [here](#).



Last week Torrige's External Overview and Scrutiny Committee were able to question Railfuture's Roger Blake on the results of the studies they have undertaken into the feasibility of reinstating the Bideford to Barnstaple rail line. I am not a member of that committee so was unable to take part, though I attended the meeting and witnessed the discussion. I was concerned that, because I was not allowed to speak, there were issues affecting residents in my ward which had not been given due attention. Following the meeting, I wrote a letter to Mr Blake outlining my concerns about the proposed location of the station, about the future of the Tarka Trail, and about the excessive hype surrounding the project which disregards what should be fundamental issues.

I am taking the opportunity to reproduce the contents of that letter below, which I hope will be of interest. I would be very interested to hear your views and whether they coincide or differ from mine.

You may be interested too in responding to the North Devon Gazette's poll on the subject, which can be found [here](#) and is open until next Monday 13 April.

Dear Roger

Thank you very much for coming to TDC's External Overview and Scrutiny meeting yesterday, and for the huge amount of work which has been put into the Feasibility Study for the reinstatement of the Bideford – Barnstaple railway. I was disappointed not to be allowed to speak at the meeting so am writing to you to raise points which are likely to be of concern to residents in my ward and more generally.

Firstly, the projections about future use of the railway present a vision for Bideford which I find disturbing. Last week, Bideford Regeneration Board, of which I am a member, launched a strategy for the town based on making it a vibrant, go-to place where both locals and visitors want to spend their time. **We want employment, healthcare, education, and culture and leisure options here in Bideford.** Unfortunately, the projections for future use of the railway paint it as a dormitory town with a massively increased population commuting to work, with young people travelling long distances to get the qualifications they need. We know that the government has set challenging new targets for housing, but it pre-empts local planning to assume that so many will be in what you call the 'greater Bideford' area. Many people feel we have already had our share of housing development and that we need a better balance with employment land, so people do not have to travel long distances to work.

The proposal to re-use the old Bideford station is something else which conflicts with a vision for Bideford which conserves its heritage and respects its architectural and riverside charm. The old station is already a well-used amenity accommodating the Railway Heritage Centre, the Tarka Trail, and a tearoom/picnic area where people can enjoy peaceful views over the river and the old rooftops of Torrington Street. The owners of the Royal Hotel have planning permission to develop the old station building as active holiday units and they already use the grounds as a turning area for buses delivering coach loads of hotel visitors as well as for their own parking. As your own feasibility study notes, the site is constrained in both width and length, with no level access and no car parking. The platform is too short to accommodate trains with more than two carriages, and the surrounding streets are steep and narrow, with no room for bus stops or drop-off areas. Parking is already a problem and the new spaces within the Brunswick development will not compensate for the loss of the Barnstaple St car park. With your estimated 800+ return journeys per day, **the congestion caused around the station would be horrendous.** Instead of using the Torridge Bridge, passengers from Northam and Westward Ho! would be drawn into town and over the old bridge. Tall vehicles would not be able to pass under the railway bridge on Station Hill and would have to use either Torrington Street or Barnstaple Street, adding to the congestion there. Cyclists and

walkers on the Tarka Trail would also have to use those streets and would be diverted away from what is currently an attractive heritage oasis. The site is simply unsuitable, and I believe it would be fiercely resisted. If you are going to take this project to the next stage, I would urge you to reconsider the location for the station.

I was glad to see that your proposals recognise the need to **safeguard the Tarka Trail** and possibly 'improve' it. But how is it improved by having a railway running alongside it, by diverting it through busy streets in Instow and Bideford, and by reducing access points? The character of the trail would be fundamentally altered if heavy commuter trains were allowed to run alongside it, disturbing the peaceful estuary environment. It is, as you point out, an important ecological site, but I note also that the budget does not include any allowance for mitigating environmental damage. One of the charms of the Tarka Trail is the many formal and informal access points which allow people, especially dog walkers, to get on it close to where they live. **The 'rationalisation' of access points, for which you suggest using underpasses or overbridges,** would destroy this feature. The proposal to reroute the path along the waterfront in Instow and away from the original track on the approach to Bideford is also something which would be resisted as it would reduce well-used access to and across the old track bed, for example at Embery's Drang in East-the-Water, a lovely old passage full of heritage value. I am also concerned about what might be a lengthy closure of sections of the Tarka Trail while work is carried out and the impact on businesses, on healthy leisure habits and on the ecology, not to mention noise and disruption for residents.

I will not repeat concerns about **flood defences and sewerage** which were expressed in the meeting and which I share. However, the other point I wanted to raise was about promotion and publicity. I was grateful that in the meeting you acknowledged the very many challenges this project brings with it and the need to 'carry them forward' into the next stage. However, I find that your messaging over-emphasises the political backing the project has received. Acknowledging the existence of your campaign, or being a member of the Northern Devon Railway Alliance supporting upgrades to the Barnstaple-Exeter line, does not equate to whole-hearted political support for the Bideford extension. I feel **the cost-benefits use unrealistic assumptions and are exaggerated,** while fundamental practical concerns which people have about the project are minimised or pushed to one side, saying that these will be answered at a later stage. It is quite clear that a lot of thought has already been put into the engineering side of the project, but the very real risks and challenges are buried under a welter of promotional press releases. This is misleading to the public and prevents serious discussion. A recent press account even announced that the project was already under way – indeed, one county councillor (not my party!) reported to their local parish councils that it had already received the green light.

In summary, the red flags for me are the siting of Bideford Station, the insubstantiality of assurances regarding the Tarka Trail, and the quality of the public debate being generated around what is **a highly challenging, high-risk, and expensive scheme** in a constrained and sensitive corridor.

Yours sincerely

Teresa Tinsley

Leader, Lib Dem Group

Ward member for Bideford North

Torridge District Council

Thank you for reading this update. Please do send me your views on this or on any other matter relating to Torridge. My councillor email is councillor.tinsley@torridge.gov.uk

Teresa



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