

# Roads win case for investment

WITH regard to reinstating the line from Bideford and Barnstaple, I am not sure how the line could run alongside the existing Tarka Trail as I do not think there is room for both.

I think that the estimated cost of £400-500 million would be better spent on our roads, not least to deal with the number of potholes that drivers and bikers encounter on a daily basis. I also am wondering if having a railway line alongside the existing Tarka Trail might be a health and safety issue, as lots of people, including young families use the trail.

**Paul Ousley**  
Bideford

## Trail will be ruined

THE railway should not be open as this will ruin the Tarka Trail.

If the railway fans had any idea how much it is used every day of the year by walkers and cyclists they wouldn't bother. I live beside the Tarka Trail and it supports a huge economy.

**Ian Wallace**

## Growth pressures

I FULLY support the reopening of Bideford given all the growth pressures in North Devon.

I travel to London perhaps twice a month and it is ridiculous that myself and others are forced to drive all the way to Tiverton Parkway. If time allows, I do use the line by joining at Umberleigh but again, an hourly service is just completely unacceptable between Barnstaple and Exeter, at present.

Having done some partnership work with Network Rail before retirement, primarily on East West Rail between Oxford and Cambridge, what a lot of people fail to grasp I feel, is that in addition to the previous route, they will look at all other options. Any cost, high or low, will be factored into any business case going forward.

Likewise, when talking about the existing route plus the retention of the Tarka Trail, I think people look at some sections and think 'how can both be accommodated?' That's entirely understandable but if the existing route were to be reinstated (and there's a long way to go to even get there), there would be substantial amounts of engineering work involving new bridges, realignment of a new track bed, the Tarka Trail itself, watercourse realignment, environmental compensation measures and a whole raft of other things so we do all need to think about it wider than the current track that we all know and love.

You only have to look at something like HS2 or even the Portishead reinstatement just started to realise that even if the engineering aspects are very challenging, that doesn't preclude Network Rail exploring all options to find the best one, whether or not a scheme is finally approved. That's the right approach and good

## Well spotted



A close encounter with two Burnet moths by photographer Graham Hobbs

planning in the 21st century although I would say that representing one of the partners on East West Rail, the endless discussions, changes, re-visiting stuff etc, can get extremely frustrating but it does deliver the right options in the end.

Let's hope that's the same for this project, whether or not it's finally approved and funded by government or not.

**Stuart McCabe-Bell**

## Too much coverage

I THINK the *Gazette* has given the proposal for a rail line extension between Barnstaple and Bideford far too much publicity and support by printing every last word and using Tim Steer as a columnist.

Since the Tarka Trail has been in existence four generations of my family have enjoyed the benefits of safe cycling, walking etc.

To reinstate a railway will inevitably compromise the trail width,

views and also would affect the many businesses along the route that rely on the thousands of visitors the trail brings throughout the year.

I have no idea where a station with suitable parking could be located Bideford end and think possibly Railfuture also have no clue either. The huge cost to engineer and build this extension will at some point put up a red flag as the line between Barnstaple and Exeter needs urgent upgrading, which seems to be on hold and has to close every time there is wet weather.

My opinion as a member of the North Devon public is that an express coach link from our area to Tiverton Parkway at busy commuter times to coincide with Paddington trains would take a fair bit of strain off the Barnstaple to Exeter railway and would be a far better solution than the hugely expensive proposed rail extension which even the direc-

tor of Railfutures seemed a little doubtful of the scheme coming to fruition at the talk he gave at Torridge District Council.

**Name and address supplied**

## Maintaining order

MANY years ago, when I was superintendent with a shipping company, we used to pride ourselves on how well maintained our ships were.

Then, when things became quite tough commercially, we were told to reduce the maintenance costs. At first this was quite easy as we could "live off the fat of the land" for quite a while.

However, there came a time when we had to start spending a lot of money just to keep the ships operational and this exposed the problem that the delayed maintenance had resulted in disproportionately high wear and therefore costs. The net result was higher expenditure and break-

downs than had we not previously reduced maintenance expenditure. Fifty years later it's a problem councils and the government may be waking up to regarding our roads!

**Tim Gibbs**  
Bideford

## Better connected

FURTHER to the article published on April 1 — *Revealed: new blueprint that aims to revive town economy* — it is gratifying to note that the Bideford Regeneration Strategy's 2026-31 Master Plan includes this acknowledgement in Movement Framework /Public Transport on page 18: "Although some feasibility work has been undertaken on the potential for a future railway connection, the timescale for that is beyond the scope of the Bideford regeneration strategy and master-plan, so has not been factored into consideration at this stage."

Also, on April 1, Torridge District Council's external overview and scrutiny committee received a presentation about an independent economic appraisal supporting the case for new train services connecting Bideford with Exeter and beyond.

Transport in general and railways in particular are economic enablers, and with a combination of high housing growth and a low journey time to Exeter of just one hour, the specialist study indicates a Bideford station in 2040 being as busy as coastal visitor destinations such as Poole in Dorset or Broadstairs in Kent were in 2024-25, with approaching one million passengers.

Since the pandemic many work and travel patterns have changed, with less daily commuting and more leisure/friends and family trips.

With northern Devon's economy heavily reliant on the visitor economy, modernised rail services extended to Bideford have the potential to attract more people into the town. Exeter through to Bideford in the same time that it currently takes to get to Umberleigh, or Bideford all the way to Exeter in the same time that it currently takes to get from Barnstaple just to Copplestone?

Bringing communities closer together through shorter journey times stimulates greater economic interaction.

The Northern Devon Railway Development Alliance of representative partner and stakeholder organisations looks forward to continuing to examine and develop the business case for a better-connected Bideford as a vital contributor to a regenerated Bideford.

The next Master Plan for 2031-36 will then have justification to factor it into consideration as coming within the scope of an updated regeneration strategy.

**Tim Steer, Railfuture Devon & Cornwall regional branch chair**  
**Roger Blake, Northern Devon Railway Development Alliance action convener**

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