railfuture

Campaigning for better services over a bigger rail network

Have your say on Plymouth's future role in Devolution arrangements for Devon

Railfuture Devon & Cornwall regional branch views on Plymouth joining the Devon and Torbay Combined County Authority, and the creation of a Mayoral Strategic Authority

Are you responding as a resident, a business, an organisation, an elected member or in another capacity?

As an organisation

Please provide the first part of your postcode

EX31

If you are responding on behalf of an organisation, please tell us the name of the organisation

Railfuture Ltd – Devon & Cornwall regional branch

To what extent do you agree or disagree that Plymouth City Council should join the Devon and Torbay Combined County Authority 'the Authority'?

Strongly agree

What benefits do you think can be achieved through Plymouth City Council joining the Authority?

Since 1st April 2026 the Authority is now the single transport authority for the other two current upper-tier authorities in traditional (pre-1998) Devon. As transport in general and rail transport in particular operates as a cross-boundary network it can only make strategic sense for the largest population centre with the third-busiest station in that historic county, and in the wider South West, to add its strengths to the Authority. The Devon and Torbay Local Transport Plans for 2011-26 and 2025-40 both include six Plymouth stations within the Devon Metro network, as well as a clear aspiration for another at Plympton – there is now an initial prospect of one at Laira, too – and the extension of the Tamar Valley Line to Tavistock in West Devon. An enlarged, and also Mayoral, Combined County Authority could in particular help to consolidate the inherently cross-boundary Tavistock scheme within the broader context of an emerging Plymouth Metro, improving the scheme's prospects with its benefits spread across a wider geography. All such rail network developments face firmer prospects if taken forward within a strategic framework in an expanded single transport authority.

Do you have any concerns about Plymouth joining the Authority, and what could be done to address them?

No.

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The enlarged Authority would take decisions across Devon, Plymouth and Torbay on transport, skills and adult education, housing and strategic planning, economic development, the environment, health and wellbeing, public safety, culture and rural and coastal communities (please see the section on powers of competence). Which of these, if any, do you think would be better decided by a Mayor across the wider area rather than by each council on its own?

From our perspective, transport, housing and strategic planning, and economic development would be better decided across the wider area rather than by each constituent council on its own.

What benefits do you think can be achieved through the Authority becoming a Mayoral Strategic Authority?

Based on what the Government has said in its White Paper on English devolution, the opportunity to forge deeper collaborative relationships across the sub-region and a more strategic relationship with Whitehall, with greater devolved powers and funding resources based on multi-year settlements.

Do you have any concerns about the Authority becoming a Mayoral Strategic Authority and what could be done to address them?

Any concerns to be addressed by having strong and transparent scrutiny arrangements and governance structures in place, building on the experience of other areas with successful mayors.

What should the priorities of the enlarged and Mayoral Strategic Authority be?

From our perspective, transforming the connectivity, capacity and overall customer experience of travel by rail are fundamental to the functioning of ‘Greater Devon’ as a place in which to live and work for its resident and business communities, and also as an attractive destination for visitors and their contribution to local economies, including economic growth and housing. With no strategic road-based solutions any longer realistically available, a high-quality, high-performing and resilient railway is both a socio-economic and environmental necessity and potentially a source of ‘pride in place’ in a part of the country renowned for the birthplace of Trevithick and the rail building accomplishments of Brunel and Brassey (who is credited with the North Devon Railway and Bideford Extension).

The consultation document outlines potential governance and decision-making considerations associated with an expanded and converted Mayoral Strategic Authority. What is your view of these considerations?

We have maintained a close interest in the workings of the current Authority Board and are confident that as it expands its size and remit the evolution of its governance and decision-making arrangements are in safe hands. We recognise that its composition may change again once the make-up of local government reorganisation has been settled.