



Representing users of the Barnstaple to Exeter rail line

## Response to the South Western Rail Franchise Consultation

### Introduction

**North Devon's mainline is a vital transport artery. It is our region's only link to the national rail network and will play a key role in the future economic wellbeing of North Devon.**

**However it needs major investment. We need a more frequent, modern, faster service to cope with the growing numbers of passengers, and, in the long-term, we need direct trains from Barnstaple to London. These improvements will attract more jobs and businesses here, as well as easing the pressure on our busy road network.**

**The Tarka Rail Association has done excellent work for many years, and the ideas in this submission will be a major contribution to ensuring that North Devon gets the rail service we need and deserve in the future. I am proud to support it.**

**Peter Heaton-Jones  
MP for North Devon**

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### Summary

The Tarka Rail Association (and its antecedents) is the longest established rail passenger user group in the South West and has been closely involved with the various fortunes of the Exeter - Barnstaple railway for over forty years. Thus we are in a strong position to make representations based on our knowledge and experience. We enjoy good working relationships with GWR but feel that there is scope to build the service involving two operators - ie GWR and the future SW Franchise operator.

This will allow passengers to experience the benefits of innovation, higher standards, and improved service levels through competition. This can only be of benefit to all concerned. It will also be the next step towards creating North Devon's 'Mainline' which will begin to bring significant improvements to the skills, education opportunities, jobs and economy of Northern and Mid-Devon.

**Consequently, we would ask that the SWT franchise specifies how the aspirations that follow can be realised through joint working with the successful franchisee and GWR through the proposed Devon and Cornwall Business Unit.**

**President : Mel Stride MP**

**Vice Presidents :**

**Peter Heaton-Jones MP, Geoffrey Cox QC MP, Sir Nick Harvey,  
Dr Ian Harrison BSc PhD Ceng , Cllr Andrew Leadbetter**

## Aspirations

### **BY 2017/18:**

- a) A faster overall journey time of no greater than 55 minutes to make the most of recent track improvements and to realise potential gains from level crossing and any other infrastructure enhancements.
- b) Four-carriage corridor trains running to a standard hourly service and operating to and from Axminster in furtherance of the Devon Metro concept and to make efficient use of rolling stock. The GWR trains expected to be used have similar operating characteristics as those currently used by SWT. (Refer to Appendix A)
- c) Railhead platforms (Barnstaple, Umlerleigh, Eggesford, Copplestone (as Mid Devon Parkway) and Crediton) to be extended where necessary to accommodate six 23m carriages to cater for future growth. (The limited services at other stations to be catered for by Selective Door Opening [SDO]).
- d) An earlier Monday - Saturday service from Barnstaple at around 0530.
- e) A later Monday - Saturday departure from Exeter at around 2300
- f) An earlier Sunday service timed to enable shop workers to arrive at their place of work in central Exeter by around 0945.
- g) A later last Sunday train.
- h) At least one train per day in each direction extended to London Waterloo as the first stage in joint working of the line.

### **BY 2020/21:**

- a) A twice-hourly four-carriage weekly service and an hourly Sunday service.
- b) A new and/or expanded Barnstaple Station

### **BY 2025:**

- a) A twice-hourly service with provision for six carriages where needed to cater for passenger demand.

## **Background**

The Barnstaple/Exeter Railway line's 39 miles of single track (with two crossing places) runs from the county city of Exeter to the North Devon primary urban area of Barnstaple, the latter's station being located 0.3 miles from the town centre. This location puts the station at the centre of significant developments, both commercial and residential, as laid out in the North Devon Strategic Plan.

The Tarka Line has consistently been among the top ten highest-growth branch lines in the UK. Over the past decade its growth has averaged 9% per annum -- far higher than both the national average and the growth rate used by Network Rail to plan for future services and infrastructure.

Despite the current TOC (Great Western Railway/GWR or in its former First Great Western/FGW guise) adding some carriages, the line still experiences significant overcrowding on certain services.

Barnstaple typically accounts for some 75% of the line's footfall. Some trains now depart Barnstaple full and standing, even before the 39 mile (and more than 60 minute) journey to Exeter has begun, presenting a challenge for the roughly 25% of customers planning to board at intermediate stops.

Between 2000 and 3000 houses are planned for the immediate Barnstaple area in the next five years alone,(figures from Emerging Joint North Devon and Torridge Local Plan 2015 as quoted in North Devon's Five Year Housing Land Supply Statement Oct 2015); and a projected housing requirement of over 16000 to 2031( refer to appendices B and C) . This is similar to the figure being quoted by East Devon District Council for Cranbrook, the recipient of a brand new station and likely a second one .

Network Rail's Great Western RUS was seemingly unaware of the homes to be built in the Barnstaple area, nor does it take into account the line's actual growth rates over the last decade. Network Rail has persistently underestimated both the line's current and future use.

The Direct Award now run by GWR for the Barnstaple/Exeter line was uninspiring and failed to take full advantage of the opportunities the line has to offer. As part of the TRA's line strategy we require an early-morning weekday service, departing Barnstaple say 05:30, and a late-night service, leaving Exeter at 23:00 returning from Barnstaple around 00:00 to connect with the Night Riviera. We also advocate improved Sunday services with a Barnstaple departure at 08:43, instead of the current 10:00.

As regards rolling stock, for a number of years the Barnstaple/Exeter line's customers have endured some of the oldest and poorest vehicles in the UK: the infamous Class 142 & now Class 143 Pacer units. We believe this outdated stock, together with lack of seating capacity, may have significantly dampened demand and possibly continue to do so. For customers at shoulder or peak periods of the year, it is a gamble securing a seat even at the two termini, Barnstaple or Exeter, let alone the intermediate stations along the route.

To give a detailed projection of what is possible over the period up to 2043 we have projected passenger loadings based upon actual numbers during 2015.

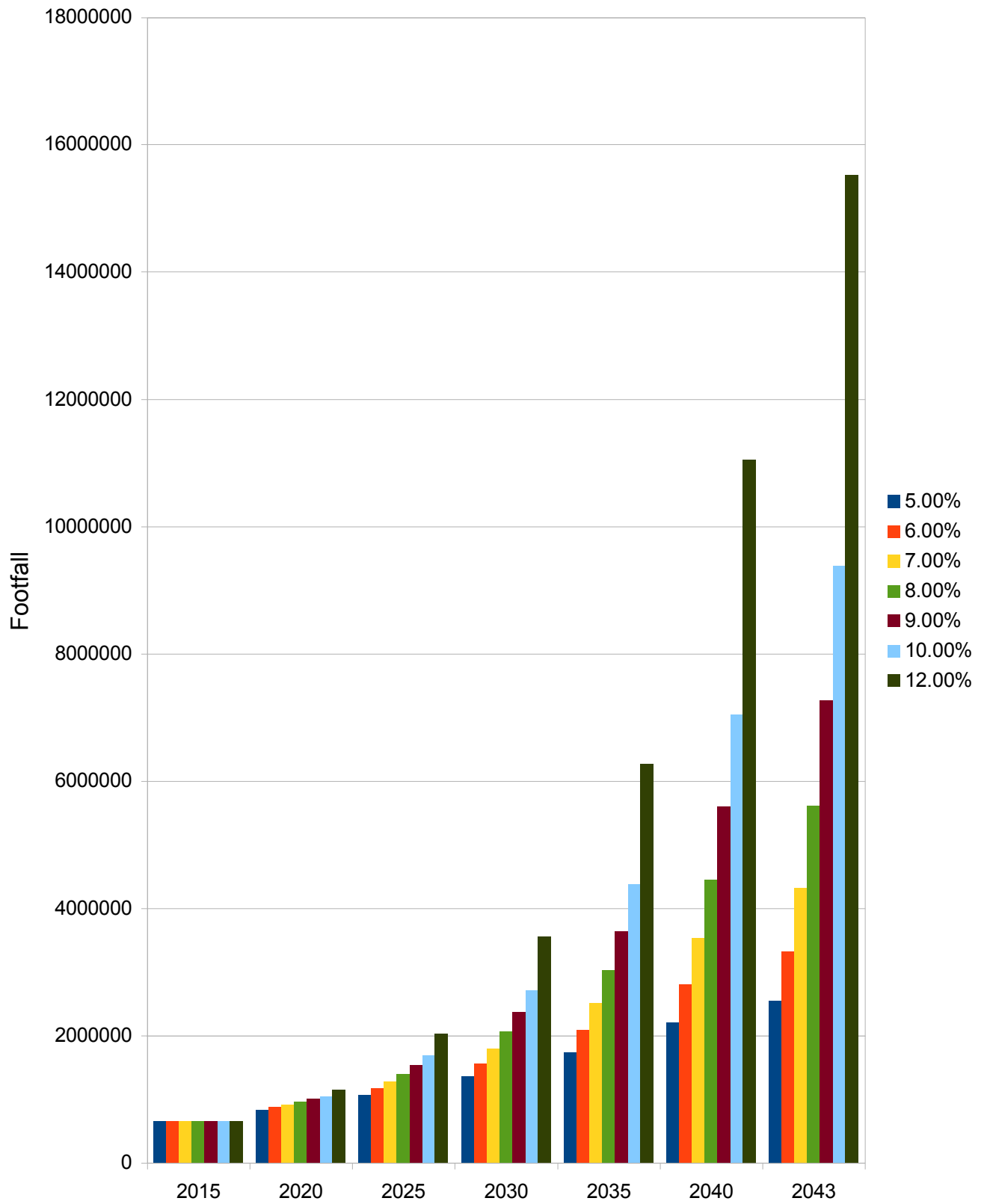


Chart I: Footfall figures with various growth rates to 2043

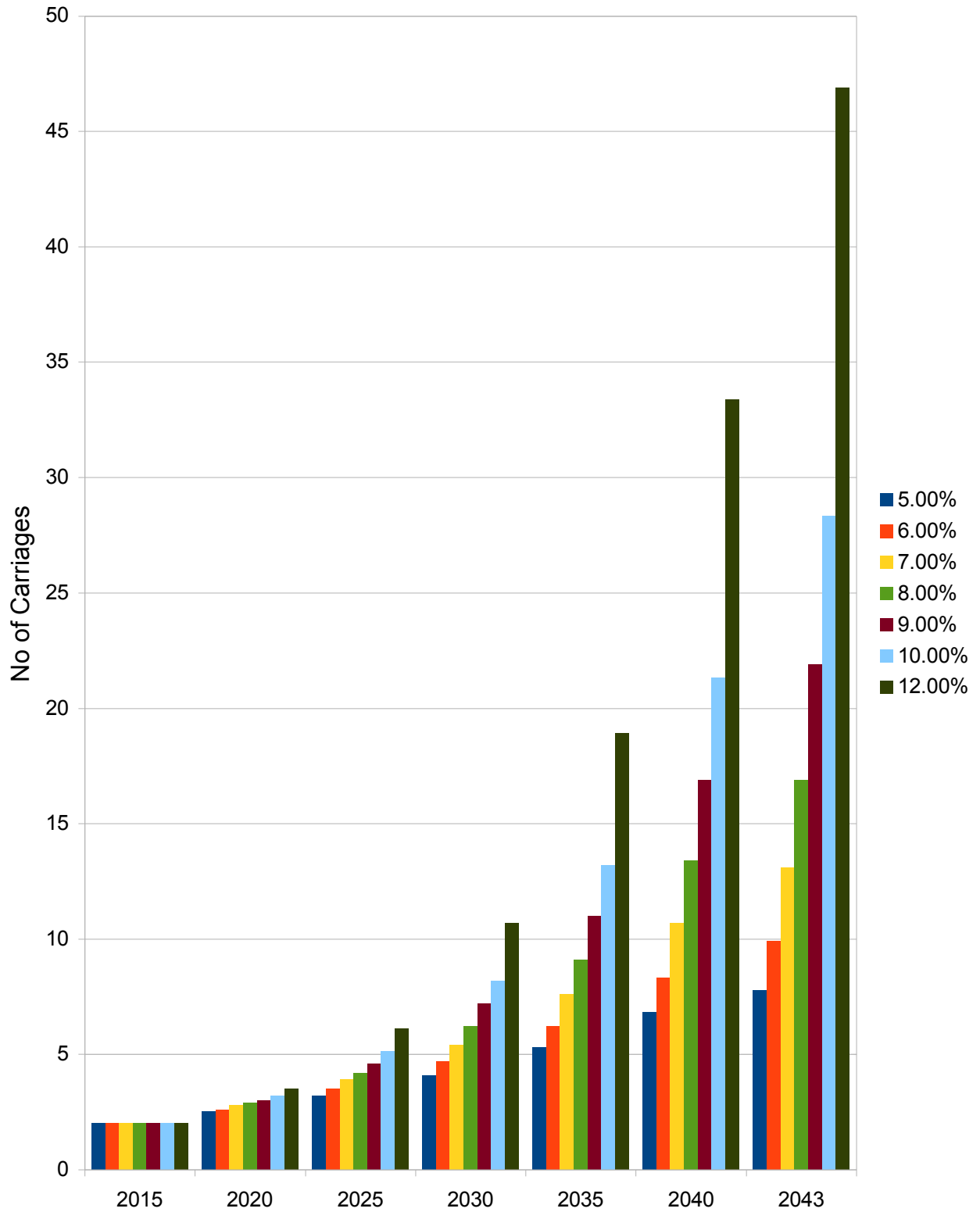


Chart 2: Number of carriages required for a non peak, non shoulder 0943 weekday service

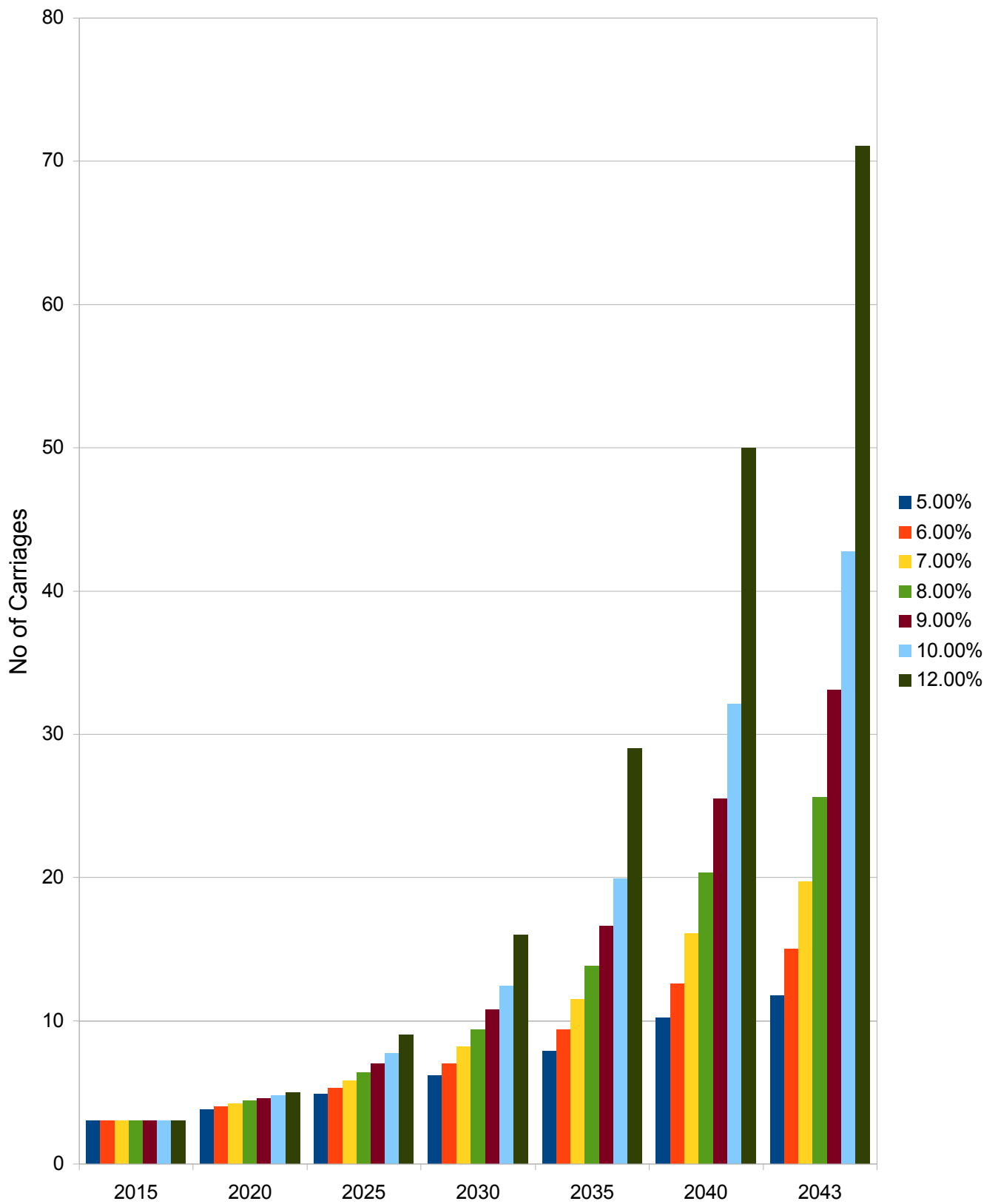


Chart 3: Number of carriages required for a non peak 0943 Saturday Service

**It is important to note the following:**

- The figures are from *Barnstaple only* and thus only represent 75% of the final loading on arrival at Exeter.
- The figures are from an average day in 2015, non peak, non shoulder season.
- Thus these figures represent the MINIMUM numbers we expect to see.
- The growth figures do not take into account the houses planned for Barnstaple.
- The figures do not take into account the extent that outdated rolling stock may have dampened demand.

We fully appreciate that as we near 2043 some figures show a high growth rate in passenger numbers and the number of carriages required. While we do not expect 10 or 12% growth each year for 28 years, for the past ten years the line has consistently shown a 9% growth rate, and this at a time when few houses were being built.

Based on these tables the TRA feels fully justified in seeking the improvements set out on the second page of this document.

Having been originally engineered mostly for double track, including bridges, the line offers numerous opportunities for double track or long passing loops. In the not too distant future a loop will be required to run more than one service per hour. It is essential that, when this is planned, the location and design allow for a second loop, to permit more than two services per hour to use the track.

It may be prudent to utilise the current Crediton to Coleford Junc. section of the line to Okehampton, but to extend the double track slightly further towards Copplestone. We anticipate Exeter/Okehampton services recommencing in the foreseeable future (be it as a local service or as a Dawlish diversionary route.) Additional double track on the North Devon line north of Coleford Junction would permit much greater operational flexibility (until rationalisation double track extended as far as Copplestone). There are also opportunities for installing a section of double track between Crediton and Exeter.

The TRA has for a long time campaigned for the reinstatement of *direct* London trains -- London, after Exeter, being the most popular destination for tickets sold at Barnstaple. Planned improvements on the GWR and South West lines would theoretically permit direct London services in less than three and four hours respectively. A direct service to the capital would provide significant social, economic and environmental benefits to North- and Mid Devon. [Note: North Devon is comprised of two local authority areas -- Torrington and North Devon District Councils -- currently recognised as among the most deprived in the UK.]

### **Other Transport Links:**

Nearest Airports: Exeter International and Bristol.

One single-carriageway A road, (A361) on the southern edge of Exmoor National Park, links North Devon to the east of the country. This link sees frequent closures due to accidents and bad weather. The 34 mile journey from Barnstaple to Tiverton currently takes 45-60 minutes and much longer in peak summer periods. The A361 is earmarked for upgrades to increase capacity, as one of the Government's current priorities. Anticipated road construction will further increase journey times, putting additional pressure onto the railway. The only other road is the A377, a slow, winding former turnpike constructed in 1831. Prone to flooding and landslips, it is unsuitable for large vehicles.

### **Tourism:**

Barnstaple Station serves the busiest tourism area (outside of Bristol) in the West Country as calculated by bed nights. (Source: South West Tourism).

North Devon has a much higher resident population than Newquay, and receives more tourists, yet Newquay (unlike Barnstaple) enjoys direct London and Manchester rail services in the summer.

### **Destinations:**

As a secondary main line *terminus*, we believe Barnstaple should offer a variety of destinations: London (via Paddington and/or Waterloo), the Midlands & North; services to Plymouth/ Cornwall.

Direct services to London via Waterloo could be easily achieved by extending the existing Waterloo service beyond Exeter towards Barnstaple. This would also provide much better six-carriage rolling stock. The faster route to Paddington could be diagrammed for a double IEP set that could split at Exeter, one heading west towards Cornwall and one to Barnstaple.

### **Conclusion:**

We very much welcome the opportunity to comment on the franchise consultation. As, currently, our line is not directly served by SWT, we felt it was preferable to limit our comments and aspirations to those set out in this document rather than respond to the full consultation. We feel very strongly that our proposals are good for passengers and the economy of much of Devon and, working jointly with GWR and other partners, can achieve a very efficient operation making maximum use of both human and rolling stock resources.

February 2016

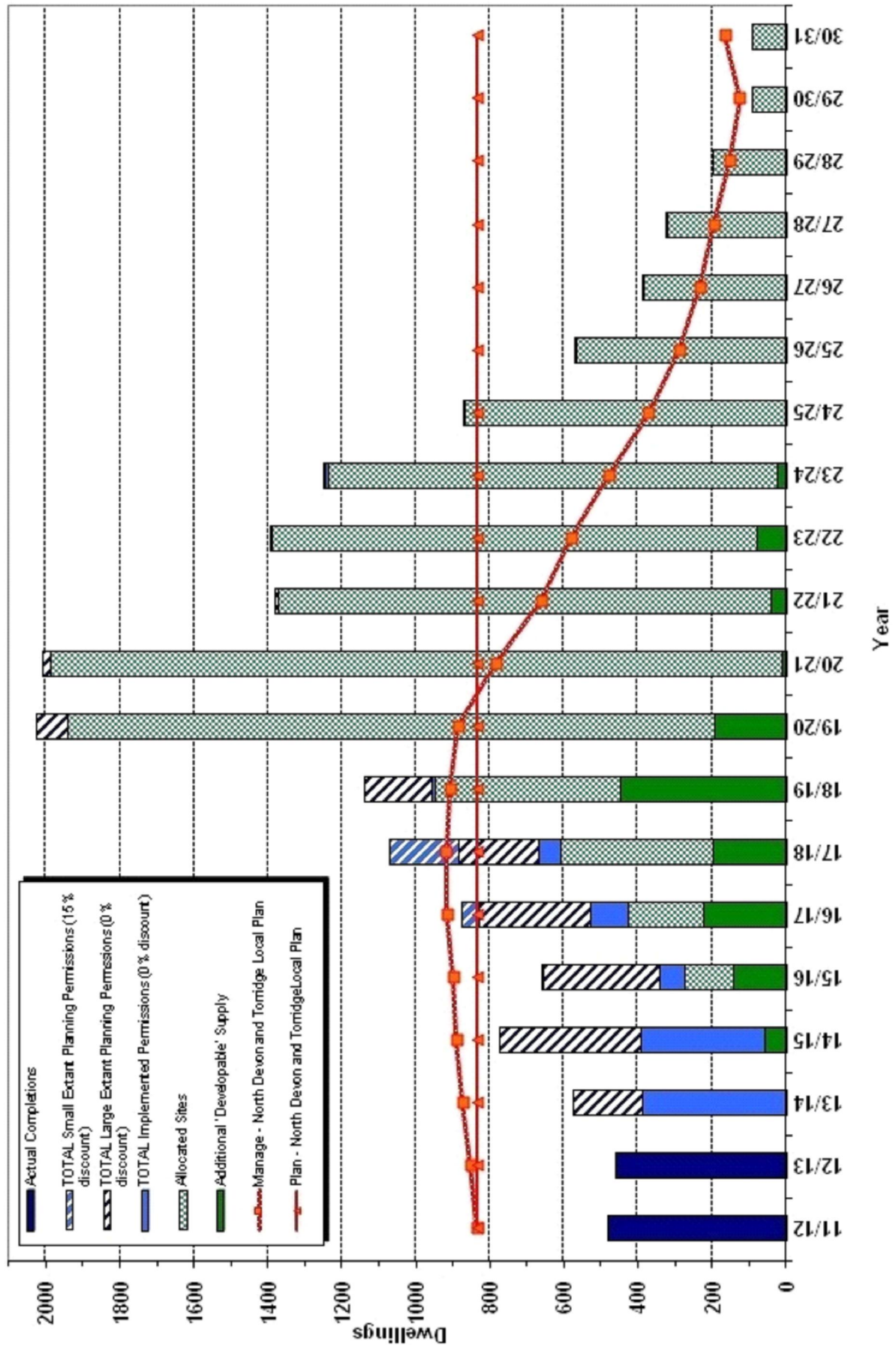
Mike Day  
Chairman  
Tarka Rail Association

John Burch  
Vice Chairman  
Tarka Rail Association





## Appendix B North Devon and Torrington Housing Trajectory 2011 to 2031



## Appendix C Extract from last consultation draft of North Devon and Torridge Local Plan

The first column of figures is number of homes that land has been allocated for, the second is employment land allocated in hectares. There will be some changes to housing numbers in the final document, but this is supplied as a guide. The employment land is likely to be reduced due to possible over-provision in these figures. They are 2011 to 2031 figures, some of which have already been built.

<b>Barnstaple*</b>	<b>3,885</b>	<b>26.2</b>
<b>Bideford</b>	<b>4,161</b>	<b>30</b>
<b>Braunton/Wrafton</b>	<b>382</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>Fremington/Yelland*</b>	<b>426</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Great Torrington</b>	<b>499</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Holsworthy</b>	<b>640</b>	<b>9.5</b>
<b>Ilfracombe</b>	<b>1,426</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Northam</b>	<b>1,782</b>	<b>0</b>
<b>South Molton</b>	<b>1,208</b>	<b>17.5</b>
<b>Local Centres**</b>	<b>952</b>	<b>0.9</b>
<b>Villages</b>	<b>912</b>	<b>0.3</b>
<b>Rural Settlements and Countryside</b>	<b>196</b>	<b>0</b>
<b>Area Total</b>	<b>16,469</b>	<b>110.4</b>

\* Barnstaple figures include an element of housing commitments from the adjacent parishes of Fremington, Pilton West and Tawstock.

\*\* Excluding Fremington and Yelland.