



## Representing users of the Barnstaple to Exeter rail line

### **TARKA RAIL ASSOCIATION**

#### **ASPIRATIONS FOR THE GREATER WESTERN FRANCHISE 2013**

##### **INTRODUCTION**

1 The purpose of this paper is to set out as succinctly as possible the aspirations of the Tarka Rail Association for the new Greater Western Franchise which is scheduled to come into force in 2013.

2 The new Department for Transport "Guide to the railway franchise procurement process" specifically excludes pre-qualifying bidders from discussing matters with stakeholders while preparing bids. Thus user groups are excluded from a widely accepted and appreciated process as has been the case hitherto. In particular we are not able to influence the service specification.

3 Consequently, we have prepared this document with a view to sending it to all major train operating groups and to the Department for Transport (DfT), Office of the Rail Regulator and Network Rail prior to the formal process getting under way. The document has been prepared in consultation with the Avocet Line Rail Users Group and the Torbay Line Users Group, the Devon & Cornwall Rail Partnership (DCRP) and also, most importantly, Devon County Council (DCC) as the transport authority for our area and with whom we have a strong working relationship.

##### **BACKGROUND**

4 The Tarka Rail Association was formerly known as the North Devon Rail Users Group. We have over 200 members. We have a Committee of volunteers representing users along the whole 39 route miles of the Exeter – Barnstaple railway line. We are the longest established users group in the south-west of England and are widely respected in the industry, not least because of our very positive and pro-active stance.

5 As well as performing a watchdog function, we have recently been instrumental in influencing DCC, Network Rail and First Great Western (FGW) to expand and develop the timetable, especially in successfully campaigning for an additional Sunday morning and Friday late evening trains.

6 We have developed a local station floral competition with financial support from FGW, have produced award winning walks brochures and carried out physical works to the station and redundant platform at Barnstaple.

7 We have also worked with DCRP on some of the above issues as well as their ongoing twice yearly passenger counts and surveys.

8 We are aware that other parties will be supplying statistical evidence and so have not repeated them here other than the table at **Appendix I**. This shows considerable year on year growth over the last decade and it will be seen that, in the first eight periods of the current year, the line has carried more passengers than the totals for 2001 and 2002 added together and by Period 10 had already exceeded the total for 2009.

9 We are, therefore, well placed to inform potential bidders and the DfT about the future needs of the line, based on many years of experience and with extremely detailed knowledge of the infrastructure and constraints this imposes. Furthermore, we can and do provide very good customer feedback as to passenger requirements. Consequently, we form a very good link between any train operator and their customers.

10 The current timetable is the best ever with fourteen return journeys Mondays – Saturdays (15 on Fridays) and seven on Sundays. This level of service exceeds that safeguarded in the Service Level Commitment. This has been completely justified as evidenced by the huge increase in passengers numbers and, so, must be considered as the baseline for the new Franchise. Indeed our submission is based on the assumption that this will be the case. We also support the proposed restoration of a regular passenger service between large market town of Okehampton and Crediton and Exeter by the Dartmoor Railway.

11 Yet there is severe overcrowding on certain services and not just in the summer peak. This needs to be recognised as in many cases the situation is just as bad as the well recognised problems in the Bristol area. Exeter is a rapidly expanding city with a buoyant economy and bustling shopping and leisure facilities drawing people from a wide catchment area, within which, the Tarka Line (as well as the other elements of the proposed Devon Metro) is playing an increasingly important part. The most recent Passenger Counts (and our own experiences) show that the following trains are consistently the most overcrowded:

0700 from Barnstaple Monday – Friday  
0943 from Barnstaple Monday – Saturday,  
1043 from Barnstaple Monday - Saturday,  
1143 from Barnstaple Saturday,  
1527 from Exeter St Davids Monday – Saturday, and worst of all  
1657 from Exeter St Davids Monday – Saturday,  
1000 from Barnstaple - Sunday.

In many cases this involves passengers having to stand for an hour or more, often among large quantities of luggage and buggies. There is also a very strict limitation on the carriage of cycles, surf boards and other bulky items on these trains.

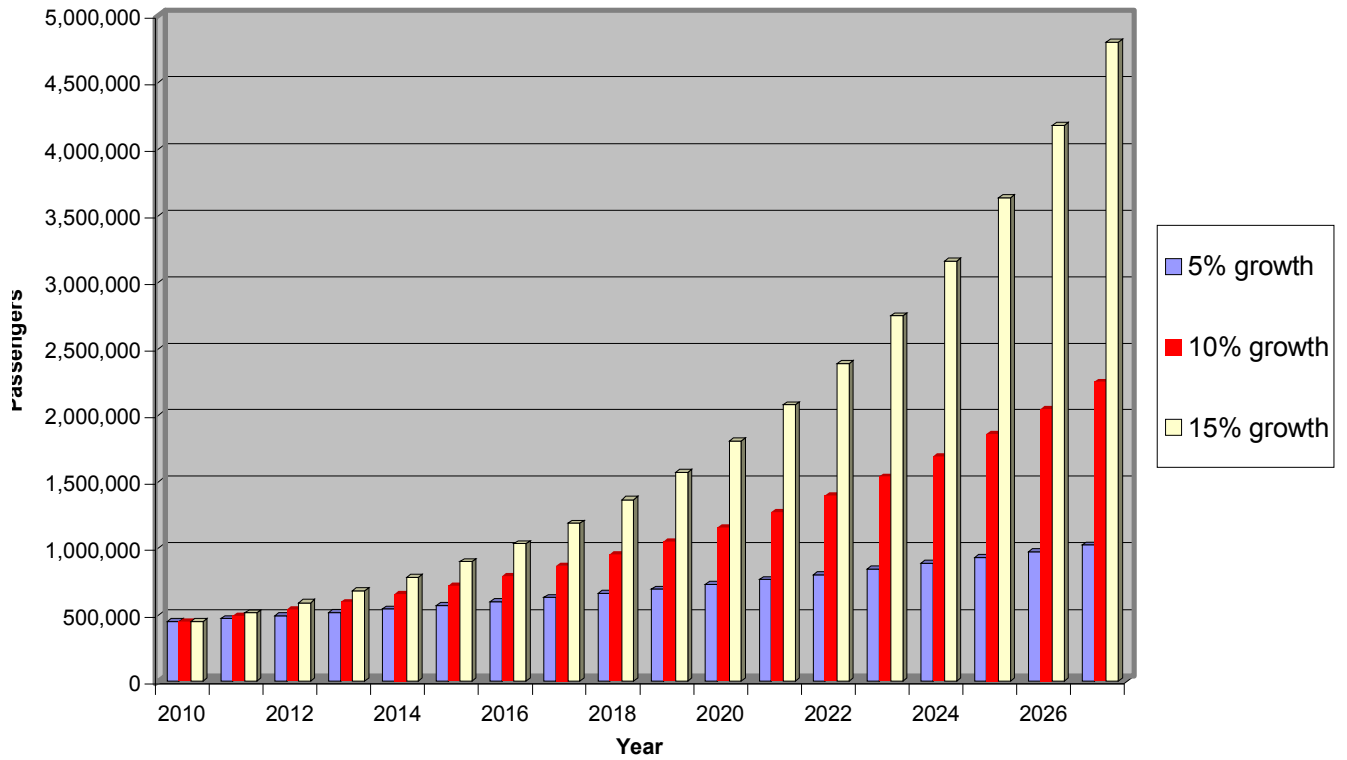
12 Furthermore, Barnstaple Station is the railhead for the whole of the North Devon growth area, with its own burgeoning population. Over 18,000 houses\* are expected to be constructed over the next 15 years or so, resulting in a total catchment population of around 175,000 people\*. Consequently, it will be seen that the line is an important inter-urban link, also serving an extensive rural area, and consequently, we consider it to be a secondary main line rather than a branch line.

*(Note: \*Figures obtained from North Devon & Torridge Housing Land Assessment and ONS 2010 Mid Year Estimates.)*

13 The following aspirations are, in part, based upon the growth predictions shown on the graph below and in figures on the next page. We have used three different rates of year on year growth: 5% being near the industry norm, 10% and 15%, the latter being the sort of growth that the Tarka Line has experienced in recent times. We believe that the likely increase will be in the region of 10%. This is because of the following factors:

- a) The proposed growth in population implied by the additional housing, quite apart from the net inward migration that this part of Devon has, and will continue to, experience, plus the likely year round occupation of many of what have hitherto been holiday or second homes.
- b) The Tarka Line is almost 40 miles long. Thus a round trip is 80 miles and the choice of travel mode will be dependent on the price and availability of fuel plus the cost of parking.
- c) Increasing congestion, especially on the approaches to Exeter and Barnstaple and on the A361 North Devon Link Road.
- d) Potential line speed enhancements, and, in the longer term, additional infrastructure will make rail the mode of choice for journeys to local destinations as well as for longer distance passengers.
- e) People are increasingly aware of their green credentials and there is clear evidence that rail is being chosen over road, both for environmental and health reasons, in an increasing number of cases.

### Tarka Line Passenger Growth Forecast



Tarka Line – Passenger Growth Forecast			
Year	5% yoy increase	10% yoy increase	15% yoy increase
2010	446,000	446,000	446,000
2011	468,300	490,600	512,900
2012	491,715	539,660	589,835
2013	516,300	<b>593,626</b>	678,310
2014	542,115	<b>652,988</b>	780,056
2015	569,220	<b>718,286</b>	897,064
2016	597,681	<b>788,114</b>	1,031,623
2017	627,565	<b>866,925</b>	1,186,366
2018	658,943	<b>953,617</b>	1,364,320
2019	691,890	<b>1,048,978</b>	1,568,968
2020	726,484	<b>1,153,875</b>	1,804,313
2021	762,808	<b>1,269,262</b>	2,074,959
2022	800,948	<b>1,396,228</b>	2,386,202
2023	840,995	<b>1,535,850</b>	2,744,132
2024	883,044	<b>1,689,435</b>	3,155,751
2025	927,196	<b>1,858,378</b>	3,629,113

yoy = year on year

2026	973,555	<b>2,044,215</b>	4,173,479
2027	1,022,232	<b>2,248,636</b>	4,799,500

We believe that continued growth at 15% cannot be assumed. This is because capacity constraints, certainly in the early years of the new franchise, will limit the amount of growth; also we do not know what the various policies of the new Franchisee will be and how that may affect passenger numbers.

14 Tourism, especially in the summer, is vital to the local economy and at peak times, the local population is almost doubled with North Devon having some of the highest number of bed-nights in the south west. This has an impact on the railway, not only for visitors arriving and departing at the start and end of their holidays, but also for days out to places such as Exeter, Torbay, Plymouth and south Devon.

15 Therefore, we base our aspirations on all of the above factors and at a realistic continued growth rate of around 10% year on year, reaching some 2.2 million passengers by 2027.

## **ASPIRATIONS**

16 Against this background, therefore, our aspirations, broadly in order of importance, are:

- A. In the short term, provide adequate capacity to deal with the daily overcrowding, which frequently is very severe. This can be overcome partly through the introduction of longer three (and ultimately four) coach trains on most services, especially those trains referred to above and partly by filling the current 103 minute gap between the first and second morning departures from Barnstaple and, **most crucially**, the 90 minute gap between the 1527 and 1657 departures from Exeter St Davids (1517 and 1653 from Exeter Central). As part of this work, we see the need for platforms at Eggesford Station to be lengthened to accommodate three and four car trains. As at Copplestone (see F below) such work would best be carried out during an engineering blockade.
- B. Again in the short term and in consultation with Network Rail, works to improve line speeds, resulting in journey time reductions, initially to under one hour for standard stopping pattern trains. Also Network Rail are asked to remove the 30mph speed restriction for loco hauled trains north of Crediton and to examine any time savings that might be possible through the possible closure or barrier installation at Salmon Pool level crossing and modifications to the operation of Eggesford level crossing.

- C. A facility to stable more than one train at Barnstaple. We see this as an essential first step in providing additional line capacity. Points and a ground-frame already exist and the spare platform has been cleared by TRA and is ready for re-surfacing, a new shelter and lighting in order to receive trains. As well as providing operational flexibility, it would also facilitate the operation of excursion trains as well as extending the possibility of freight trains, not least to serve the large number of supermarkets in North Devon and for which a small rail served yard exists nearby.
- D. Following the outstanding success of the Friday late evening train from Exeter to Barnstaple, this should be extended to six evenings a week, especially if the train is to provide a realistic alternative to the private car. Tiverton Parkway has tended to draw traffic, and especially business travellers, away from Barnstaple, even though the fare to London is the same as Barnstaple. However, despite the provision of a large new car park at Parkway, essentially there is no spare capacity on weekdays and traffic congestion also makes this a less attractive proposition. Consequently a later train would not only facilitate wider leisure travel in Exeter and Barnstaple (and therefore fill early evening seats in the opposite direction) but also encourage longer distance business users to make the most of their local train service. In this latter connection, there is also a call for an early train (at around 0600) from Barnstaple connecting with trains to London, Bristol and the Midlands at Exeter.
- E. Sunday travel is fast catching up with the rest of the week, especially as a consequence of changing work and leisure patterns and also because shopping is such a popular leisure pursuit. Consequently, we believe that an hourly service for most of the day is needed.
- F. There are platform height issues at a number of stations, but the worst is at Copplestone, where the low platform acts as a constraint on use by those with mobility problems and could have health and safety implications. We see this as an important short term issue needing to be addressed and strongly recommend that the work be undertaken during a blockade for track renewals in order to avoid the need for a separate possession to carry out the work.
- G. There is a pressing need for additional car parking at Eggesford Station. A scheme exists which would provide a car park and associated improved safe access and lighting at this notoriously difficult and dangerous location. However, this has been seriously delayed over land ownership issues.
- H. Similarly, there is a need for additional car parking space of up to 20 spaces at Morchard Road Station. This is supported by local residents in

their response to a consultation on the Parish Plan. Options are limited, but a small scale relatively low cost scheme has been designed, and awaits funding.

- I. The Ticket Office at Barnstaple nominally closes at 1815 Monday – Saturday & 1740 on Sundays. In practice, because of single manning, this means that the toilets and other facilities are withdrawn earlier than needed and so we consider that there is a need for the facilities to be available until after the departure of the 1916 train Mondays – Saturdays and 1920 on Sundays.
- J. For the medium term, and based upon the projections set out above, we see the need for a more frequent service, initially around the peak periods, but eventually a twice hourly service of alternate fast and slower services. The opportunity to carry out a single platform passing facility (as at Penryn on the Falmouth line) may be available at Copplestone associated with the provision of a substantial car park to create a Parkway Station.
- K. We receive a large number of suggestions for through trains to London. As noted above, Tiverton Parkway effectively has no spare capacity and yet, despite this, the largest number of off route ticket sales from the Tarka Line are to London. We therefore strongly support and would favour such trains to either London Paddington or to London Waterloo, where portion working of trains that terminate from there at Exeter St Davids would be relatively straightforward. A possible alternative Class 180 route, which would also open up new journey opportunities, would be from Barnstaple via Honiton and Yeovil to Paddington. A single return journey each day could be introduced initially and the service could then be developed over time as demand increases. We appreciate that, depending on which option is decided upon, this could have implications for the South West Trains franchise, but is a relatively minor matter.
- L. Localism is high on the national Agenda and the Tarka Rail Association is always willing to play its part and also take on new challenges. As has been shown above, the Association has done much in practical terms to support and promote the railway. For example, should any further opportunities such as former railway premises become available, the Association would be very willing to consider operating, say, a ticket and information office.
- M. We consider that it is essential that the new Franchise continues the present requirement for the franchisee to actively support the

Community Rail initiatives, as set out in the current Franchise, and that the franchisee be required to provide adequate funding to enable these initiatives to continue.

- N. Finally, there will always be a need for printed information, especially journey details. It is important that this is clear, including for those with poor eyesight, and so we would ask that all essential printed information is produced in a minimum 12pt sans serif typeface as used in this document.

## **CONCLUSION**

17 Following local consultation with local stakeholders, this paper is being sent to:

*The Department for Transport  
The Office for Rail Regulation  
Network Rail  
Arriva plc  
DB Regio  
First Group plc  
Go-Ahead Group  
National Express Group Ltd  
Serco  
Abellio  
Stagecoach Group plc  
Virgin Trains  
Renfe  
The Dartmoor Railway  
Members of Parliament  
Devon County Council  
Exeter City Council  
Mid Devon District Council  
North Devon District Council  
Torrige District Council  
Devon & Cornwall Rail Partnership*

18 We very much hope that the above aspirations (which have been very carefully considered) can be taken on board, and we would be very pleased to meet and discuss them with any of the foregoing.

19 The TRA contact is John Phillips, External Relations Officer. He can be reached on 01363 84221 or [j.phillips142@btinternet.com](mailto:j.phillips142@btinternet.com).

JOHN BURCH  
CHAIRMAN

November 2011



## Tarka Line Journey Figures

Calendar year - by four week periods

Compiled by the Devon & Cornwall Rail Partnership  
 Figures supplied by Wessex Trains/First Great Western

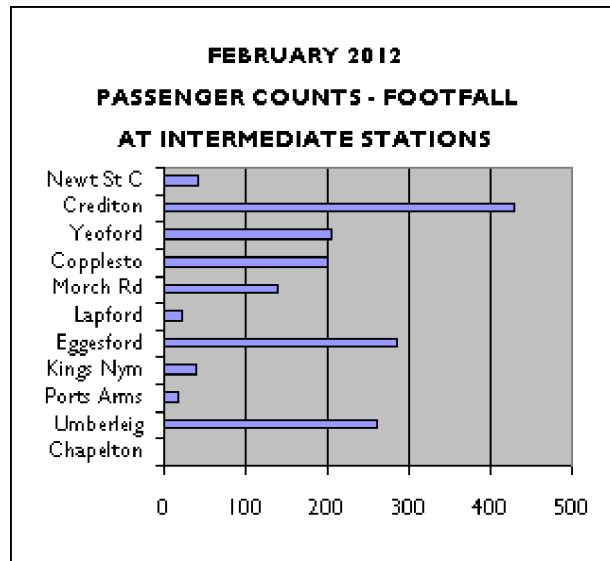
Period	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	%	%	%	%	%
												01 - 11	06 - 11	08 - 11	09 - 11	10 - 11
1 (4 Jan - 31 Jan 09)	10.000	10.584	12.738	14.389	14.613	18.036	17.952	21.340	22.253	26.780	30.921	209.2	71.4	44.9	39.0	15.5
2 (1 Feb - 28 Feb)	11.000	13.506	14.870	14.768	14.329	22.050	18.924	26.461	26.146	30.455	35.498	222.7	61.0	34.2	35.8	16.6
3 (1 Mar - 31 Mar)	13.000	14.641	16.007	16.618	16.635	16.088	18.207	20.931	25.793	24.343	29.751	128.9	84.9	42.1	15.3	22.2
4 (1 Apr - 2 May)	13.436	14.523	15.187	20.273	18.942	22.545	22.564	24.560	32.967	38.849	41.439	208.4	83.8	68.7	25.7	6.7
5 (3 May - 30 May)	16.086	16.460	15.431	17.800	18.376	21.982	22.741	25.442	28.857	32.218	36.708	128.2	67.0	44.3	27.2	13.9
6 (31 May - 27 Jun)	18.838	18.253	18.780	19.396	21.932	23.560	26.004	27.892	29.916	35.818	42.405	125.1	80.0	52.0	41.7	18.4
7 (28 Jun - 25 Jul)	19.714	20.509	21.212	21.915	22.239	26.198	25.320	30.271	33.042	37.203	43.456	120.4	65.9	43.6	31.5	16.8
8 (26 Jul - 22 Aug)	21.913	23.814	24.437	25.405	26.014	31.064	29.400	34.216	38.558	44.356	49.539	126.1	59.5	44.8	28.5	11.7
9 (23 Aug - 19 Sep)	20.359	20.790	22.319	21.538	23.900	29.615	27.633	32.735	34.296	39.708	44.980	120.9	51.9	37.4	31.2	13.3
10 (20 Sep - 17 Oct)	15.329	17.282	18.436	16.890	21.000	26.841	24.481	27.920	30.414	34.917	40.716	165.6	51.7	45.8	33.9	16.6
11 (18 Oct - 14 Nov)	14.338	16.493	14.131	16.797	16.619	23.849	26.658	29.220	29.649	36.588						
12 (15 Nov - 12 Dec)	13.418	14.928	16.967	18.689	18.765	24.872	20.218	21.229	28.342	34.194						
13 (13 Dec - 9 Jan 10)	11.864	13.962	14.837	15.519	16.737	19.469	21.028	25.676	26.782	31.366						
<b>Total</b>	<b>199.295</b>	<b>215.745</b>	<b>225.352</b>	<b>239.997</b>	<b>250.102</b>	<b>306.169</b>	<b>301.131</b>	<b>347.893</b>	<b>387.015</b>	<b>446.795</b>	<b>395.413</b>	<b>98.4</b>	<b>29.1</b>	<b>13.7</b>	<b>2.2</b>	<b>-11.5</b>

FOOTFALL AT BRANCH LINE STATIONS

Winter 2011 and 2012 comparison

	Barnstaple	Chapelton	Umberleigh	Ports Arms	Kings Nym	Eggesford	Lapford	Morch Rd	Copplestone	Yeoford	Crediton	Newt St C
2012 totals	2802	0	261	18	38	286	22	139	200	206	429	42
2011 totals	2868	1	180	12	30	233	28	102	162	179	341	15
Fri 03/02/12	1003	0	70	4	19	69	9	43	72	64	125	9
Fri 04/02/11	974	1	44	4	10	74	11	31	46	59	106	5
Sat 04/02/12	1062	0	123	10	6	137	4	58	66	106	189	29
Sat 05/02/11	1157	0	89	2	5	88	6	37	71	68	127	1
Tues 07/02/12	737	0	68	4	13	80	9	38	62	36	115	4
Tues 08/02/11	737	0	47	6	15	71	11	34	45	52	108	9

2011	
Barnstaple	2868
All intermediates	1283
<b>Total</b>	<b>4151</b>
Intermediates	
	% of total
Railhead	1197 29.3%
Non Railhead	86 2.1%
<b>Railhead stations</b>	
Crediton	
Yeoford	
Copplestone	
Morchar Rd	
Eggesford	
Umberleigh	



2012	
Barnstaple	2802
All intermediates	1641
<b>Total</b>	<b>4443</b>
Intermediates	
	% of total
Railhead	1521 34.2%
Non Railhead	120 2.7%
<b>Non Railhead stations</b>	
Newton St Cyres	
Lapford	
Kings Nympton	
Portsmouth Arms	
Chapelton	