

Report for: Cabinet

Date of Meeting:	13 January 2026
Subject:	Northern Devon Railway Development Alliance
Cabinet Member:	Cllr Steve Keable, Planning & Regeneration
Responsible Officer:	Adrian Welsh, Strategic Manager Growth, Economy & Delivery
Exempt:	N/A
Wards Affected:	Crediton Boniface, Crediton Lawrence, Sandford & Creedy, Taw Vale, Upper Yeo & Taw, Yeo
Enclosures:	N/A

Section 1 – Summary and Recommendation(s)

This report introduces to Members the work of the Northern Devon Railway Development Alliance (NDRDA) to develop a Strategic Outline Business Case (SOBC) for significant capital investment in the North Devon Line (NDL) between Exeter and Barnstaple.

The report requests consideration of The Council becoming a member of this alliance (NDRDA), and for Cabinet to consider a financial contribution towards the cost of the next NDRDA Annual Convention to be held in Mid Devon.

Recommendation(s):

The Planning Environment and Sustainability PDG recommends to Cabinet:

- 1. That Mid Devon District Council supports the Northern Devon Railway Development Alliance (NDRDA) by officially joining the alliance to achieve delivery of a modernisation programme for the North Devon (Tarka) Line passenger rail services between Exeter and Barnstaple, to achieve the associated economic, social and environmental benefits for our local communities and businesses.**

2. To consider a financial contribution of £1,000 to support the third annual convention of the NDRDA scheduled for March 2026 at a location in Mid Devon.

Section 2 – Report

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 The North Devon Line, which is also known as the Tarka Line, opened in 1851 and operates between Exeter and Barnstaple. It serves settlements between these towns including Newton St Cyres, Crediton, Yeoford, Copplestone, Morchard Road, Lapford and Eggesford in Mid Devon (as shown on the map in Appendix 1). The service is operated by Great Western Railway and in recent years patronage numbers have been increasing significantly. The service is approximately hourly, although currently not all stations are served on an hourly basis. In recent years the rolling stock has been upgraded to Class 158 diesel multiple units.
- 1.2 The Northern Devon Railway Development Alliance (NDRDA) was founded in late 2023 and formally established in 2024 at the first Annual Convention held in Bideford. Aspirations of the alliance include upgrading the current line and to investigate potential for extension of services to Bideford. Current members of the alliance include:
 - Torridge District Council
 - North Devon Council
 - Devon County Council
 - Devon & Torbay Combined County Authority
 - Various Parish & Town Councils on the line
 - Great Western Railway (GWR)
 - Network Rail
 - RailFuture (Devon & Cornwall)
 - Devon & Cornwall Rail Partnership
 - Friends Of Barnstaple Railway Station
 - North Devon Line Rail Promotion Group
- 1.3 In addition to the organisations listed above there are a wide range of other active partners and stakeholders in support of the improvements to the line.
- 1.4 A second 2025 Annual Convention ([link here](#)) hosted in Barnstaple brought together local government representatives, rail industry leaders, and transport planners. Each contributed insight into the progress made, challenges encountered, and future priorities for a region whose transport infrastructure is increasingly under strain from rising demand and constrained capacity.

2.0 Strategic Outline Business Case

- 2.1 The alliance is committed to developing a Strategic Outline Business Case to assess the viability and scope of proposals. A Preliminary Strategic Business Case is being finalised by the Alliance, in alignment with a Network Rail report following the same approach as for the successful Dartmoor Line reopening. Both workstreams are targeting the Alliance's next annual Convention for presentation and discussion. The business case will be prepared to align with the requirements under the Department of Transport's Rail Network Enhancement Pipeline (RNEP). This business case will also have a strategic fit with the Devon & Torbay Local Transport Plan 4 (LTP4) 2025-2040, adopted by Devon & Torbay Combined County Authority in July 2025, [\(link here\)](#) and Peninsular Transport Strategic Transport Priorities to 2050 [\(link here\)](#).
- 2.2 It should also be noted that the future role of the rail line has significance with regard to the review of the Mid Devon Local Plan. The Local Plan, in line with national planning policy, will be looking to encourage sustainable travel patterns wherever possible. Work is currently underway with regard to developing a settlement hierarchy for the emerging new plan, which is being informed by the recently published Government accessibility tool. This tool recognises the accessibility benefits of this rail corridor.
- 2.3 The business case objectives include:
- Increased capacity and double hourly frequency to two trains per hour;
 - Reduced Exeter- Barnstaple journey times from 75 minutes to 60 minutes;
 - Enhanced green travel and journey time competitiveness with roads;
 - Boost line reliability, resilience and reduce disruption;
 - Support to economy, jobs, tourism, housing and unlock development;
 - Improved active travel and connectivity corridors of the Taw Torridge Estuary, Okehampton, Exeter city region, Cullompton, Tiverton, Exmouth, Newton Abbott and beyond.
- 2.4 The Alliance also identifies other benefits of improving the rail line which include:
- Reducing congestion on A377 and A361;
 - Increasing labour market and skills training access;
 - Time savings valued at £11m per annum;
 - Enhances tourism and inward investment with connectivity improvements;
 - Carbon reduction through transport mode shift.

- 2.5 Key partners of the Alliance are the rail industry, as delivery will be through Great British Railways (GBR), who will replace Network Rail, bringing together the management of the rail network and passenger services under one public body. GBR will be responsible for infrastructure, planning, and operations, setting fares and timetables, and will own the network infrastructure.
- 2.6 The key interventions currently being considered are:
- Reinstatement of double track between Newton St. Cyres and Coleford Junction, via Crediton;
 - Additional passing loops between Coleford Junction and Barnstaple;
 - Signalling modernisation; and
 - Station improvements and rolling stock enhancements.

3.0 2026 Annual Convention

- 3.1 A third Annual Convention is at the planning stage with a proposal for this to be held within Mid Devon on Friday 6th March 2026. The purpose of this convention is for all the Alliance to meet as stakeholders and be updated on the progress of the business case preparation. It is anticipated that any subsequent submission to Government for funding would be in close collaboration with the Local Transport Authority.
- 3.2 An appropriate resolution to join membership of NDRDA is sought through this report. Whilst membership is free, MDDC is being requested to help fund the NDRDA, to the value of £1,000, to host the next annual convention in Mid Devon. The proposed venue is the Eggesford Fox & Hounds Hotel in Taw Vale Ward.

Financial Implications

Membership of the alliance is free; however this report recommends that a financial contribution of £1,000 to support the third annual convention of the NDRDA at a location in Mid Devon, be found from existing budgets.

Any future capital funding for proposals identified through the business case work will be sought from Government by the NDRDA, Devon County Council and Network Rail through the DfT Rail Network Enhancement Pipeline major schemes fund.

Legal Implications

There are no legal implications arising from this report.

Risk Assessment

There are no significant negative risks identified with regard to joining the alliance; however there is potentially a risk, should the District Council not formally join the alliance, that the District's interests and those of its residents and businesses could be marginalised.

As projects develop through the Alliance they will be subject to their own risk management processes.

Impact on Climate Change

Climate change will be an underlying theme through the future work streams of the NDRDA and an important part of the Strategic Outline Business Case.

Equalities Impact Assessment

No equality issues are identified for this report at this stage. As the project goes forward it will need to consider the views from representatives from protected groups that the project has the potential to impact upon. Equality issues, such as the importance of accessibility provision for the mobility impaired will form part of the Strategic Outline Business Case.

Relationship to Corporate Plan

Improvements to the North Devon rail line are relevant to the following corporate themes:

- Planning, Environment & Sustainability
- Community, People & Equalities
- Homes
- Economy & Assets

Section 3 – Statutory Officer sign-off/mandatory checks

Statutory Officer: Andrew Jarrett

Agreed by or on behalf of the Section 151 Officer

Date: 12.11.25

Statutory Officer: Maria De Leburne

Agreed on behalf of the Monitoring Officer

Date: 12.11.25

Chief Officer: Stephen Walford

Agreed by or on behalf of the Chief Executive/Corporate Director

Date: 12.11.25

Performance and risk: Dr Steve Carr

Agreed on behalf of the Corporate Performance & Improvement Manager

Date: 12 November 2025

Cabinet member notified: (yes)

Section 4 - Contact Details and Background Papers

Contact: Adrian Welsh, Strategic Manager for Growth, Economy & Delivery

Email: awelsh@middevon.gov.uk

Telephone: 01884 234398

Background papers:

Rail Network Enhancement Pipeline 'A New Approach for Rail Enhancements'. DCLG prospectus locally led garden villages, towns and cities (2018) <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/rail-network-enhancements-pipeline>

Railfuture Website – Promotion of NRDRA 2nd Convention and supporting information (March 2025)
[NRDRA 2nd Annual Convention Promotion](#)