

East Midlands

By Anthony Kay
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■ ■ New timetable

The new timetable sees the biggest changes to service patterns in the East Midlands since 1999. Improvements heralded by East Midlands Trains include:

■ Many journey times on the Midland main line reduced by 10 to 15 minutes

■ Later evening departures from London, Nottingham and Leicester

■ The first Sunday services on the Robin Hood Line since it reopened

■ Increase in frequency of Matlock services to hourly, with all trains running beyond Derby to Nottingham

■ The new Lincoln to London service via the MML

However, we will have to wait until March for the opening of East Midlands Parkway, while the opening of Corby station has also been delayed because East Midlands Trains have been unable to secure sufficient rolling stock in time.

■ ■ East Midlands Parkway

After many delays, this new station near Ratcliffe-on-Soar power station (just across the Trent from Trent Junction) is expected to open in March, with East Midlands Trains hoping it will entice many London-bound travellers off the M1 and on to the train. They are also hoping people travelling to East Midlands Airport will use the station, but at the time of writing the plans for a bus link from the station to the airport hadn't been finalised.

■ ■ Geoff Hoon supports electrification

New Transport Secretary Geoff Hoon, whose constituency is in Nottinghamshire, has said that he takes a "deep personal interest" in the Midland main line and shares his "predecessor's enthusiasm for electrification". We aren't holding our breath for any imminent announcement.

■ ■ Blaby

An unusual expression of support for reopening Blaby station, south of Leicester, on the line to Nuneaton, has come from a farmer who has arranged for a steam locomotive to be placed in a field close to where the station used to be. Blaby and other nearby villages such as Whetstone and Glen Parva have grown substantially since the station closed in 1968, and a new station would surely be justified. Leicestershire County Council has stated that it is considering the possibility of reopening as part of their long-term view. Blaby's county councillor Alan Bailey has said he will "battle on until we have a new station".

■ ■ Loughborough station audit

The station audit that was required in connection with Loughborough's station travel plan was coordinated by Railfuture's Roger Bacon, with assistance from Alan Meredith of TravelWatch, Councillor Terry Holt of the Leicestershire and Northamptonshire Rail Action Committee, and Anthony Kay representing cycling interests. Among the deficiencies highlighted by the audit were the chaotic nature of the area in front of the station, where buses, pedestrians, cyclists, and taxis and private cars dropping off and picking up passengers all mix in the same space. The car park was full by 08.06 on the day of the survey, and many cycles were chained to railings because of the inadequate cycle parking.

By coincidence, plans for regeneration of the large area of derelict land (former railway sidings) next to the station have been unveiled at the same time that work is proceeding on the station travel plan. This gives a great opportunity to improve access to the station, especially for buses, pedestrians and cyclists, but only if there is some joined-up thinking between the regeneration plan and plans to improve the station itself.



Count on an Exeter Metro

By Gerard Duddridge
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Passenger numbers on the 11¼ mile Exmouth to Exeter railway continue to grow, with a mix of commuters, shoppers, tourists, and those making main line connections at Exeter.

The proximity of Exeter's Central station to the High street is a factor which favours this local rail service, as does the frequent half-hourly service.

The opening of Digby & Sowton station in 1995 has also helped the line, as it serves Exeter's Sowton industrial estate and a new housing development nearby.

This leads to the idea of an Exeter and Torbay Metro train service which would market all existing train services running via Exeter Central station, increase the frequency where and when justified, reopen stations, and restore selected feeder lines.

The Metro proposal was first published in March 2000 in a report under our Railway Development Society name entitled *South West Rail Strategy: A Discussion Document*.

Since then the official Devon local transport plan for 2006-2011 has made a reference to the Metro idea: "Local train services are becoming increasingly important and make a significant contribution to the congestion strategy."

As part of the new, and as yet to be adopted Regional Spatial Strategy, part five of the *Regional Approach to Transport* refers to "Development of the heavy rail network in Exeter, Greater Bristol, Bournemouth/Poole and Plymouth to provide for local and commuter journeys, and to deliver spatial growth and congestion targets."

The population contours of density, based on parish and ward data, show that it is possible to broadly identify the built-up zones where the settlements are close together.

The contours have the advantage of linking equal areas of population and so tend to indicate local transport corridors. The results should always be interpreted with care, and alongside the appropriate Ordnance Survey map, since the contours sometimes appear to show non-existent urban areas.

The map shows that the Exmouth to Torbay route links some of the most populated parts of Devon. If it was enhanced with new stations such as Kingskerswell and a feeder bus link to Brixham, it would serve 340,000 people. This represents about 31% of Devon's 1million population (total including Plymouth and Torbay).

The other stations within the map area such as Honiton and Crediton (excluding the private railways) serve a further 29,500 Devon residents. New stations such as

Cullompton and Willand and a reopened rail link to Tiverton would add another 33,000 Devon residents to the local railway network. A reopened station at Wellington, Somerset, would benefit a further 12,800 people and is supported by Taunton Deane District Council.

Eight numbered routes each giving an hourly service were shown on the full Metro map (*Railwatch* 117) and these are further outlined here.

Service 1 Torbay to Plymouth. This would stop at all existing stations between Torbay and Plymouth, and proposed new ones at Torbay Hospital, Kingskerswell, South Brent and Plympton. From Plymouth some trains would continue to Devonport and Cornwall.

Goodrington could be developed as a park and ride station for Brixham, using a separate platform from the private Paignton & Dartmouth Railway.

A bus link from Goodrington to Brixham has been suggested because there are problems in extending a frequent train service any further south.

The private line between Goodrington and Churston has always been single track, so capacity would be limited. In addition, on the two miles of the former Churston to Brixham line the station site and approach have been built on.

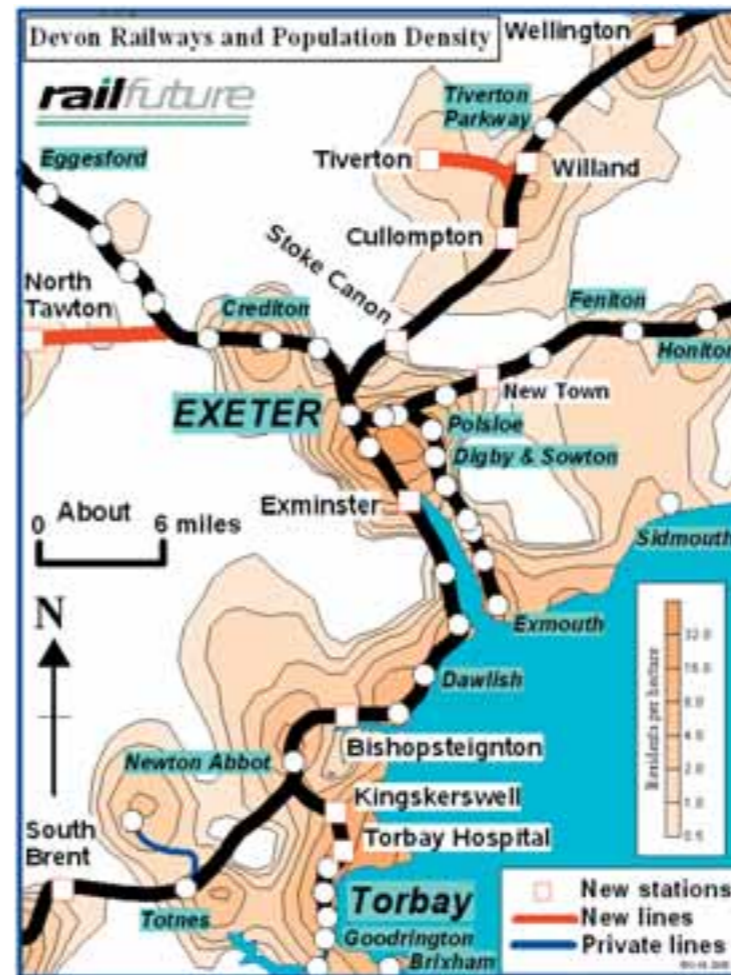
Service 2 and 3 Torbay to Exmouth via Exeter. Together with service 1, this could provide trains every 20 minutes between Goodrington and Newton Abbot. New stations would be opened at Bishopsteignton and Exminster. Exeter St Thomas station would be upgraded as an interchange point, with country bus routes and City bus routes A, E, F and P.

Staffing and disabled access would be provided. From Exeter the trains would run every half hour to Exmouth, and all would call at Polsloe.

Service 4 and 5 Crediton to Exeter and Honiton. A half-hourly service from Exeter to Crediton and Honiton. Service 4 would continue west of Exeter to Okehampton and on to Plymouth via Tavistock, following re-opening. Service 5 would continue to Barnstaple and over restored track to Bideford.

A new passing loop would be needed around Whimple. Some additional track to extend the existing double line west of Yeovil Junction would enable the trains to run up to half hourly from Exeter to Yeovil Junction. Then half hourly to Waterloo at busy times, and perhaps also Bournemouth via Dorchester.

To retain the current level of through trains from Waterloo to Paignton, some trains could be split at Exeter St David's to serve



both Torbay and North Devon. Alternatively, all hourly Waterloo to Exeter trains could run to Torbay in place of one of the Exmouth line 2 or 3 trains.

Service 6 and 7 Exeter to Taunton. This would start from Digby & Sowton station on the edge of Exeter and continue to Taunton. Together with service 2 and 3, the new trains could provide four journeys per hour from Digby & Sowton to Exeter. About one mile of track would need to be re-doubled near Polsloe. Digby station would be staffed and upgraded for good disabled access.

North of Exeter, the trains would serve a new Park and Ride station at Cullompton (population 7,700), convenient for the nearby M5 motorway junction.

A station at Cullompton is mentioned in the County Structure Plan. New stations would be opened at Willand (population 2,600) which is the closed Tiverton Junction station, and at Wellington in Somerset (population 12,800).

The railway would be rebuilt into Tiverton (population 18,300), giving the town an hourly service to Taunton, Exeter and Digby & Sowton.

Additional connections to Exeter would be possible via Willand. The direct journey time from Tiverton to Exeter Central would be less

than 25 minutes. A further option would be to stop some trains at reopened stations at Stoke Canon or Bradninch, but not both as it would slow the service too much. Stoke Canon would be the more useful of the two for times when the line is flooded at Stafford Bridge near Exeter, because a bus shuttle service would take about eight minutes between Stoke Canon and Exeter St Davids, compared to a minimum 35 minutes from Tiverton Parkway.

Service 8 East Devon services could be developed at a later date to serve Ottery St Mary and the proposed new town east of Exeter. It would run from a new short bay platform at Exeter St Davids. A further development would be the extension of the line to Sidmouth, but unfortunately the trackbed is becoming more obstructed by recent housing developments.

Elsewhere in Devon there is potential for new rail services on reopened lines to Okehampton, Tavistock and Bideford, and some use of private lines.

A reopened station at Plympton and good bus links within Plymouth are needed to improve access to the railway there. If all the developments mentioned here took place, then two thirds of Devon residents (737,000 people) would be just a short walk or bus ride away from a frequent local rail service.

Severnside

By Nigel Bray
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■ ■ Double battle

A letter-writing campaign aimed at persuading the Office of Rail Regulation to authorise Kemble-Swindon redoubling produced some very supportive replies from Network Rail, the South West Regional Assembly and the Department for Transport. Unfortunately ORR does not appear to recognise the strategic importance of the route and has again declined to include the scheme in its list of projects for NR to carry out between 2009 and 2014. The branch therefore issued a statement condemning the decision and reiterating the need to increase capacity on the Stroud Valley line, both for the growing local population and for South Wales to London diversions.

■ ■ Taunton tactics

In September the branch responded to the West Somerset Railway's Company Plan by welcoming WSR's statement that it would continue to look for affordable options for providing a rail link with Taunton. We pointed out that Taunton has more fast trains to other parts of the country than it had when British Rail closed the line in 1971, so the contributory revenue from long-distance journeys might well subsidise the cost of commuter trains. We were pleased to see recognition that in the longer term, fuel prices and road congestion were likely to tilt the economics in favour of through passenger and freight traffic.

Since then John Walker has convened two meetings, one with the three local authorities and former WSR chairman Chris Austin, the other with the chief executive of Taunton Deane Borough Council. Mr Walker believes that worthwhile progress was made towards the goal of daily, all-year train services between Minehead and Taunton.

■ ■ Bristol and beyond

The branch has written to the South West Regional Assembly asking it to bid for Regional Funding Allocation money from central Government to reopen the Portishead branch and the Henbury loop to passenger trains, develop cross-Bristol suburban services and lease additional trains for use in the Bristol area. On 23 September the *Western Daily Press* carried a feature in which Nigel Bray referred to the massive growth of Portishead and said the RFA finance could raise Bristol's rail system to the standard of those in other major UK cities.

Bruce Williamson gave interviews on three local radio stations. Our corporate member Friends of Suburban Bristol Railways is lobbying councillors who will decide what to include in the RFA bid. The Assembly has promised to invite Railfuture to its meeting on 26 November. Our response to the rewritten transport section of the South West Regional Spatial Strategy commended several broad principles such as the aim of reducing road traffic growth. The new draft recognises the need for transport networks to recover from disruption. We therefore emphasised the importance of diversionary routes, loops to segregate passenger and freight trains on main lines, and restoration of at least a third track through North Bristol between Dr Day's Junction and Filton Abbey Wood. The draft appears to understate the role of rail freight in the region, although it does have a policy to encourage the siting of industry near to suitable rail or water facilities. We have asked that all transport authorities be required to develop freight railheads in their areas, not only to encourage a shift to sustainable transport but also to receive bulk supplies in an emergency, as in 2007 when trains of bottled water ran to Ashchurch during the Gloucestershire floods.

