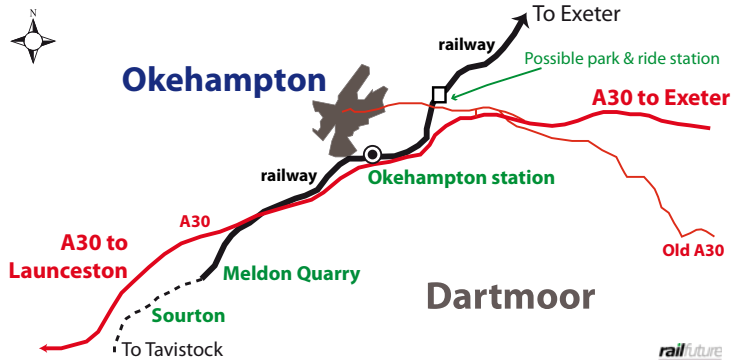


# Reopening hopes



Residents of the town of Okehampton in Devon are said to be excited by the prospect that they may see the return of an all-year-round regular Exeter-Okehampton passenger service.

Chamber of Trade chairman Ian Bailey says it will be a major factor in the regeneration of the town.

There is also renewed talk of a parkway station on the A30 road, an idea promoted by Railfuture since 2000.

The town has benefited from having a "heritage" train service on summer Sundays since 1997, thanks to financial help from Devon County Council.

But since 2008, the railway has been owned by British American Railway Services which wants to develop freight and passenger services on the line.

According to local news reports, the plans are currently being scrutinised by the Office of Rail Regulation. The case for a park

and ride station east of Okehampton has been strengthened by the construction of a nearby housing estate. An alternative for rail park and ride would be to restore the railway about one mile westward from Meldon taking the line across Okehampton viaduct to Sourton.

Both sites give direct access from North Cornwall and Launceston via the A30 trunk road. Many people drive to Exeter or Tiverton Parkway to catch trains from this area.

The Sourton site was suggested by the West of England rail passengers committee before its demise. Extending the track could also be seen as a first stage towards reopening the railway to Tavistock.

In a House of Commons debate on 10 November, transport minister Norman Baker said that if the line were to open, it would be welcome but not as a substitute for the main line along the coast.

## Bridge to a better rail service



Picture: DAVID SHEPHERD

This year marks the 25th anniversary of the closure of Lea Bridge station on the Lea Valley line between Stratford and Tottenham Hale. Both Railfuture and the Chingford Line Users Association want to see the station reopened. CLUA chairman Peter Woodrow is seen here on one of the closed platforms with London Assembly Member Jennette

Arnold, left, and Stella Creasy, the new MP for Walthamstow whose constituency includes Lea Bridge. The train service which runs through without stopping is increasingly popular as Stratford City, Docklands and the Lower Lea Valley grow. Lea Bridge station would be useful as a link to the nearby bus routes and also to serve newly built houses.

◆◆◆◆ You can buy our book *Britain's Growing Railway* online at [www.railfuture.org.uk](http://www.railfuture.org.uk)

LOCAL ACTION

## Thames Valley

By Chris Wright

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### ■ ■ East-West breakthrough

A meeting with rail minister Theresa Villiers in November has delighted campaigners for the East West rail link. She said the Department for Transport will consider the project for inclusion in the DfT's programme for the five-year period from 2014.

The business case is to be updated immediately to assess a twin-track, rather than single, railway from Oxford to Bedford.

The good news came after Ms Villiers' meeting with the two Tory MPs for Milton Keynes Iain Stewart and Mark Lancaster and the East West rail consortium's Neil Gibson. It is seen as a major achievement for the consortium which now has to establish working links with the new Local Enterprise Partnerships which will be crucial in unlocking funding. Railfuture officers attended an earlier meeting at Milton Keynes Partnership and were delighted to learn that the exceptional cost benefit ratio (6.3) of the scheme had been confirmed.

A Railfuture cycling team raised nearly £500 for the British Heart Foundation following an Oxford-Cambridge bike ride in October to raise awareness of the East West rail link. [www.eastwestrail.org](http://www.eastwestrail.org)

### ■ ■ Inquiry over plans for new London-Oxford rail link

The East West Rail Consortium's Neil Gibson and Patrick O'Sullivan gave evidence on 2 November on the first day of the public inquiry into Chiltern Railways' plan for a direct link from London Marylebone to Oxford via Bicester. Railfuture is also presenting evidence in support of Chiltern which wants a Transport and Works Act Order for its Evergreen 3 project. First Great Western is also being supportive. Objections include land take, the loss of property, access to farms and allotments, impact on a stables and golf club, noise, pollution, vibration, effects on wild life, archaeology and crossing closures. The impact of the proposed Water Eaton Parkway station on the Green Belt and traffic congestion is another area of concern while Hansons is concerned about the loss of its stone depot. The inquiry ends in January and should report in 2011. Inquiry news and documents: [www.chiltern-evergreen3.co.uk](http://www.chiltern-evergreen3.co.uk) and [www.obrag.org.uk](http://www.obrag.org.uk)

### ■ ■ Station upgrade axe will affect six million people

A major scheme to improve Oxford station by providing an extra platform has been caught in the government cuts even though it already has planning approval. It was meant to solve the problem of trains from the north, including the Cotswold Line, having to wait outside the station for access to a platform. Nearly six million people a year use the station.

### ■ ■ Railfuture members hear of Chiltern's achievement

Chiltern Railways provided the speaker for the October branch meeting and showed the progress that had been made on investment in new infrastructure, stations, rolling stock, new services and passenger growth.

### ■ ■ Passenger numbers rise in response to improvements

Improvements on the Oxford-Bicester services helped the county council win a community rail award. A 76% increase in users in just one year has been achieved at Bicester Town and a 40% increase at Islip. User group OBRAG welcomed the response of the county council, First Great Western and Bicester Village. Passenger numbers also grew on the Bedford-Bletchley line in two months from 29,401 to 34,336 as a result of increased reliability and promotional work. A Sunday and late evening service for the Bedford River Festival was a success and has resulted in calls for regular such services. There are concerns there will be overcrowding if the two-car class 150 units are sent elsewhere.