



Above – Marsh Barton Station on the official opening day of 3rd July 2023, but the first services were not until the next day.

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Our next Devon and Cornwall Branch Meeting will be an on-line AGM at 14:30 on Saturday 30th September 2023.

Zoom login details from alan@almatan.plus.com

CHAIRMAN'S INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the July issue of the Railfuture Devon and Cornwall newsletter and to our new acting Secretary Alan Clark. Alan has been a committee member for a number of years and is also Secretary / Stations Officer of the Tarka Rail Association. Joining as acting committee members are Roger Dixon of the Torbay Rail Users Group and Tim Steer who is actively involved in the campaign to restore the Barnstaple to Bideford line. Thanks are due to Philip Shelton who has served as Secretary up until now.

After a very long wait Devon gained its latest new station at Marsh Barton in Exeter. Welcome though the new station is, it does perhaps come at the expense of reopening Exminster and other stations on the route to Paignton. Extra stops reduce line capacity and lengthen journey times.

North of Exeter progress is being made on reopening Cullompton station and Wellington in Railfuture's Severnside Branch area. The new Wellington station will be on a new site about ¾ mile north of the old one. Formal business cases are being drafted for both stations. If all goes well passenger services will start in September 2025. There will be car parking.

Unfortunately not all is well at our station ticket offices which are under threat of closure. For the Railfuture national response see <https://www.railfuture.org.uk/Ticket-Offices> The argument is that most tickets are now sold on-line, but not everyone has access to the Internet or suitable device if away from home. TVMs (ticket vending machines) do not issue refunds or make changes to a ticket. They can be difficult to use without detailed instructions and particularly for those with sight problems.

At the moment it is possible to buy through tickets from staffed stations, such as Exeter to St. Davids, to Dublin to travel on the next available train. However, this is conditional on making a reservation on the sailing from Holyhead and it is not clear how this and similar situations would work with a TVM. Just to think that Exeter St. Davids used to have a continental ticket clerk who could book almost any ticket or seat reservation. Milan to Rome seat reservation – No Problem!

Railfuture Devon and Cornwall

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MARSH BARTON STATION OPENING

The official opening was on 3rd July 2023 with the transport minister Mark Harper in attendance as well as GWR's Mark Hopwood. Services started from the new station on a very wet Tuesday 4th July. The service consists of stops on the Paignton to Exeter and Exmouth service. For most of the day Paignton bound trains call at around 35 minutes past the hour and to Exeter and Exmouth just after the hour. However, note that in this direction many are none stop from Dawlish and then do not call at Exeter St. Thomas.

The new station is well placed to serve the adjacent Marsh Barton industrial estate and gives access to walks alongside the Exeter Ship Canal as pictured below. For the registered disabled 3 car parking spaces are provided, but none for other passengers or those less able to walk the long



distance involved in getting to the down platform for the Paignton direction.

The Exeter Ship Canal, easily accessible from the new Marsh Barton Station.

EDGINSWELL NEW STATION DELAYED

This other long proposed station at Edginswell is delayed due to Torbay Council having a £10 million funding shortfall. Construction was to have started this July. The aim of the station is to serve Torbay Hospital, the Edginswell Business Park, the adjacent Shiphay residential area and the Willows area on the north side of Torbay. It would be located between the closed Kingskerswell station and Torre station and with pedestrian access from both Newton Road and Riviera Way .

RAILFUTURE AGM DEVON AWARDS

Best campaigner Gold Award (plus 2 other awards) to Tim Steer, Ace Rail.

Best Website Gold Award, Dartmoor Railway Association

Judges' Special Award, Devon County Council

For further details - <https://www.railfuture.org.uk/RUG+Awards>

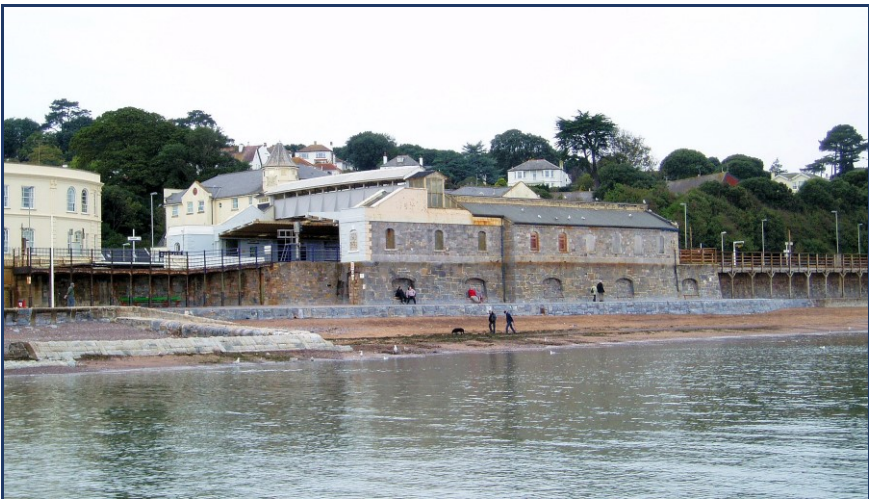
DAWLISH SEA WALL REBUILDING

The second stage of the £80 million sea wall rebuilding alongside Dawlish station has been completed and was opened on the 25th May. This now provides a more resilient railway from Kennaway Tunnel to just beyond the station, where it joins the section of sea wall rebuilt following the February 2014 collapse.



The completed sea wall as seen in July 2023, but part of the new footbridge is still seen being built.

The new footbridge is still under construction and will save disabled passengers having to use the barrow crossing to reach platform 1 on the seaward side of the station. Station and passengers are now better protected from the sea. On 16th January 2020 a passenger was slightly injured when a wave broke a window on the 10:57 from Exmouth to Paignton.



The exposed beach location of Dawlish station before the building of the new outer sea wall encased much of the attractive grey limestone in white concrete.

RAILFUTURE & POLITICS, THE NEXT GENERAL ELECTION.”

A personal view by Stewart Palmer.

Railfuture is a non-political organisation and all members should be careful not to “take sides” in their comments when speaking or writing on behalf of Railfuture. Their personal views are of course a matter for them and they can say and do what they like when they are not representing Railfuture. I am writing this a few days after the local elections and there is of course increasing speculation about the fact that Labour will win a majority at the next General Election, probably to be held in the Autumn of 2024.

So, what should Railfuture do over the next year or so to influence all political parties in developing their policies about how our railways should be run? Most members would agree that there is something very wrong with the way our railways are being run at present and that they are not meeting users’ expectations, nor delivering good value for taxpayers. More of the same is not the answer.

Railfuture of course has no executive authority to do anything in terms of deciding what kind of railway the country needs and is prepared to pay for. We can only try to influence. So how should Railfuture exercise its influence in the coming months with the main political parties? Firstly, we must show that we are serious players who can offer real insight into the issues facing the industry and importantly to suggest practical ways to improve matters. Secondly, we must remember that most of the population do not use trains and the General Election will be fought on the issues that affect most people day to day, the cost of living, the health service, finding a place to live etc, not on how the railways should be organised and operated. Thirdly we must recognise that there is no certainly who will win (remember Harold Wilson famously said “a week is a long time in politics”), indeed a coalition government looks a distinct possibility if you believe political analysts, so Railfuture must make sure that it treats all parties equally. If we call the result wrongly, we will lose any influence we have with the next government.

So, what should members be asking of all parties and their candidates? For me there are 5 simple questions that the rail policy of any political party must address.

1. How will you make sure that rail users (both passenger and freight) are put first in terms of the future of rail?

2. How will you simplify the rail industry structure to improve accountability and to get costs down?
3. How will your rail policy support the carbon reduction targets the Country has legally signed up to?
4. How will you ensure that rail policy supports economic growth, access to employment and education and improves social inclusion?
5. How will you ensure that your rail policy provides value for money to taxpayers whilst improving the quality of rail services?

You will get lots of “motherhood and apple pie” statements of intent, but we need to get beyond that, to what in practical terms a future Blue, Red, Green, Yellow etc. Government would actually do.

Find out who the likely candidates are for the next General Election where you live. Ask to see them and enquire about their policies on rail and put these questions to them. The South West will be a key political battle ground whenever the election comes. Rail policy wont decide the overall result, but in certain key constituencies it may be a critical factor in deciding who wins there and if we have a hung Parliament a few M.P.’s may have extraordinary power. Don’t waste this opportunity.

Stewart is a Railfuture Director, Vice President and worked in the rail industry for 38 years.

THE TORBAY RAIL USERS GROUP

One of the prime aims of the Torbay Rail Users Group is to campaign to achieve a Torbay rail service which support the Torbay economy. Torbay is a major English seaside resort. Roughly 25% of the Torbay economy is generated by overnight visitors with an additional 8% generated by day visitors.

In numbers, pre-COVID, Torbay had 1.25 million overnight visitor per annum and about 3 million day visitors per annum. The number of overnight visitors is roughly the same as Bournemouth and more than the million or so visiting Brighton overnight. Bournemouth has roughly 6-7 million day visitors and Brighton 9-10 million day visitors. In comparison Blackpool has 2.5-3 million overnight visitors and about 15 million day

visitors. About 80% of overnight visitors to Torbay are leisure visitors. This compares with about 60% of overnight visitors to Bournemouth.

The nature of holidays in coastal resorts has changed over the years. The stay durations are no longer summer Saturdays to summer Saturdays. That pattern of holidays faded two generations ago, although Train Operating Companies are still concentrating their services on meeting this demand. Nowadays no major seaside resort can survive by just addressing the summer weekly market.

Two thirds of overnight visits to Torbay are short break holidays, typically 3-4 nights. Furthermore 2/3 of overnight stays in Torbay are outside the peak holiday season. Torbay needs train services that satisfy these requirements.

With respect to the mode of travel to Torbay by overnight visitors, 15% come on coaching holidays, 7% by rail and 5% by scheduled coach services, the rest by private transport. Research by the National Coastal Tourism Academy showed, that, on average, 14% of overnight visitors to English coastal resorts travel by train.

Clearly the current Torbay train service is underperforming.

by Roger Dixon



One of only a few long distance trains, the 14:54 Torbay Express leaves Paignton for London Paddington on 21st May 2018, when HSTs were still the main train type in service.

OKEHAMPTON STATION

The Okehampton route continues its successful growth. At the Modern Railways conference held in Bristol on 29th March 2023, 'Rail in Wales and the West 2023', GWR reported 350,000 journeys so far. This is double the forecast numbers. Crediton has seen 85,000 additional journeys helped by there now being 2 trains per hour into Exeter.

The buffet is now open and normally until around 16:00. The menu board includes a variety of breakfast items served in a bap, jacket potatoes, cakes, coffee and teas. The quarterly Dartmoor



A busy scene on Coronation day 6th May 2023. The last few passengers boarding the 12:37 Okehampton to Exeter Central. Below – the well stocked Bullied buffet.



Magazine and weekly Okehampton Times were on sale. At the back of the buffet there is a view into the recreated traditional booking office from around the 1960s. On the far left of the notice board the paper explains that this display was organised by the Devon and Cornwall Rail Partnership and with funding from GWR's Community Rail Major Project Fund, the Railway Heritage Trust and the Community Rail Development Fund.



There is a bookshop selling mainly new and second hand railway books and normally open on Friday, Saturday and Sunday. Across the footbridge on platform 2 there is a railway museum.

*Above – the recreated traditional booking office.
Below – the bookshop run by the Dartmoor Railway Association.*



BRIDGE 662 AND THE FUTURE TAVISTOCK STATION(S) Part 1

Bridge 662, is a former railway underbridge on the south west side of Tavistock and more commonly known as the Abbotsfield road bridge. It took the Southern Railway Tavistock line across the A390 Callington Road (Figure 1). The bridge is significant for two reasons. Firstly, if restored to its original form with an iron decking it would only leave a clearance of around 12' 8" (less than 4 metres) for road traffic. This would be too low for modern day standards which require a 5 metre height and also not high enough for a double decker bus to pass underneath. Figure 2 shows the north side abutment and ruler used to estimate the original bridge height.



Figure 1 (left) The Abbotsfield bridge abutments viewed towards Tavistock on the A390 road from Callington. The right hand abutment is on the south, Plymouth side of the disused railway line. Also seen is the dip in the road which would have helped with clearance for tall vehicles when the railway was last operational. Figure 2 (right) shows the northside abutment with 2 foot ruler.

Secondly, the Abbotsfield bridge also marks the northern limit of the unobstructed trackbed from the Bere Alston direction. For these reasons Local Authority schemes to reopen the Tavistock to Bere Alston line for Plymouth trains, have gone no further north that the Abbotsfield bridge.

Earlier ideas from the 1990s would probably have given a new Tavistock park and ride station very close to this bridge and similar to the relocated 1994 Gunnislake station. In Gunnislake the old station was closed and rebuilt on the Plymouth side of the same A390 Road (Figure 3 and 4). This allowed the restrictive 3.6 metre (12 foot) high bridge for road traffic to be removed.

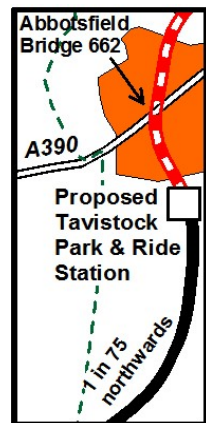


Figure 3 (left) . The railway underbridge with restricted 3.6 metre clearance over the A390 Callington Road at Gunnislake. The track seen on 5th February 1994 has just been removed from it. Viewed towards Plymouth and closed Gunnislake station behind the camera. Figure 4 (right). The new station pictured on 23rd July 1994 and taken from about the same view point. The railway underbridge has been removed and no longer obstructs the A390. Note the lower level of the railway. Pictures copyright of Roger Winnen - reproduced with permission.

On the Plymouth side of the bridge the original line climbed at 1 in 45 to cross the A390 Callington Road and so the embankment was lowered by around 2 metres and made level for the new station. Terminating trains can therefore be safely left unmanned whilst the driver changes cabs for the return journey to Plymouth. The disadvantage is that the line could never be re-extended over the 1966 closed Gunnislake to Callington section, except by restoring the bridge as it was or creating a level crossing.

In Tavistock the closed railway from Bere Alston also climbs (1 in 75) to the A390 Callington Road. A similar strategy to Gunnislake is possible, but must be ruled out so as to retain the option of extending north to Okehampton (Figure 7 top). This is to provide a diversionary Plymouth to Exeter railway. This is probably why the latest Local Authority plans have moved the new Tavistock station further south towards Bere Alston. It is where there is some straight track between two curves (Figure 5, 6 and 7 middle). It is also where new housing is being built, so Section 106 developer funding can be used.

Figure 5. The proposed station site on the far south west periphery of Tavistock. Okehampton extension in red dash, parish boundary in green. Map width about a ¼ mile.



The new station would have one platform of 112.5 metre length so suitable for a 4 coach train. There would be a passenger shelter, ticket machines, information screens and help points. Relating to station access there would be cycle racks, a bus turning circle and shelter plus a station car park.



Figure 6. Descending on the 1 in 75 from the Abbotsfield bridge, this section of disused trackbed would be restored and regraded for the new station.

Unfortunately the site is on a 1 in 75 gradient (Figure 7 middle) and needs a levels section for the new platform and so a loss of 1.5 metres of northward ascent. To compensate for this will requires around 1200 metres (¾ mile) of regrading to around 1 in 68 from the short level section over the Shillamill Viaduct.

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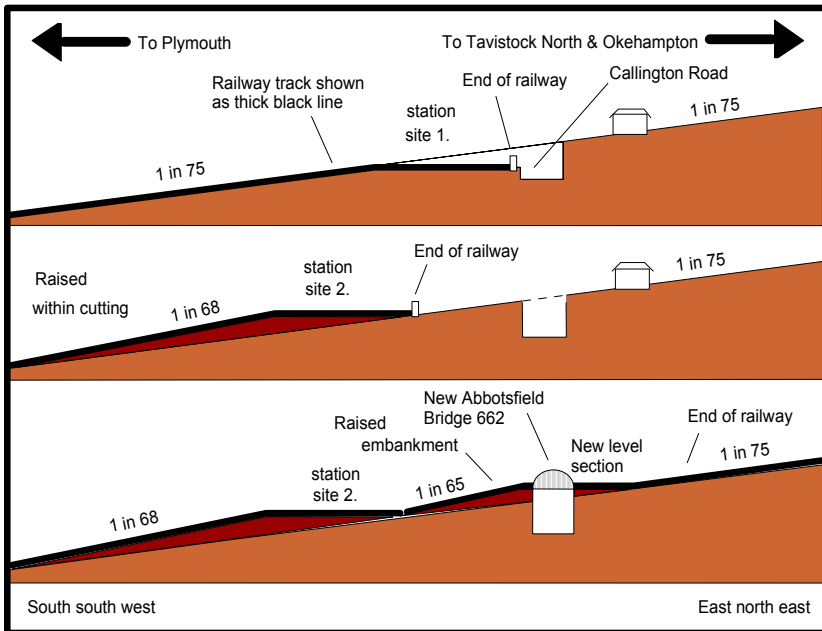


Figure 7. A profile of the Tavistock line showing the challenge of providing a level site for a new station on the south side of the town, but still allowing for extension northwards across the removed Abbotsfield road bridge. Further explained in the text. Not to scale. Adapted from the March 2000 Rail Strategy.

Recrossing the A390 Callington Road requires the Abbotsfield bridge height to be raised for high vehicles and to protect the future railway extension from bridge strike disruption. The gradient would steepen to an estimated 1 in 65. This assumes a bow string design resting on slightly higher abutments to give the necessary bridging height. For a conventional iron decking the gradient would need to be still steeper.

This article suggests that the design of the Abbotsfield bridge is completed now rather than later. This would enable the new gradients to be more accurately determined and made equal to either side of the new Tavistock station. Completing the regrading work as well for the future Abbotsfield bridge would enable the footpath alongside the railway to be finalised.

Tavistock to Plymouth services planned by the Local Authorities will include a stop at Keyham to serve the dockyard. This station on the mainline from Penzance to Plymouth is built on a gradient of around 1 in 68. Assuming that Tavistock trains terminate on new level track further on, could dispensation be sought to build the new Tavistock station on the existing 1 in 75 gradient? If yes, replacing the Abbotsfield bridge at a higher level would give the necessary level trackbed (Figure 7 bottom). The cost of regrading a 1300 metre length of route from Shillamill Viaduct would be saved and instead one of the structures for extension to Okehampton would be completed.

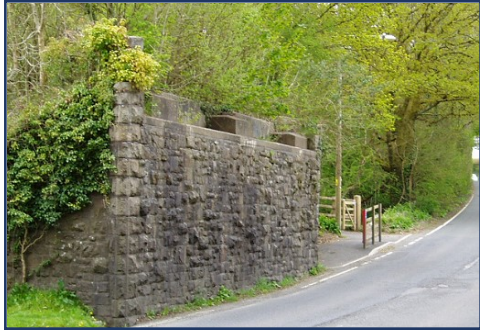


Figure 8. The Abbotsfield bridge south side abutment showing insert area at the top for the former iron deck. The abutments could be built up to provide adequate clearance below. A bow string bridge is suggested.



Figure 9. The start of the footpath alongside the railway at the Abbotsfield Bridge. Viewed towards Okehampton.

The one problem is a 3 bedroomed detached bungalow (Beeches) built on the trackbed and dating most probably from the 1970s. The property was last sold in October 2018 and at below market value since a planning application to build 7 further houses on the trackbed was refused on 9th March 2017, '*The proposed development will result in the residential development of land, identified in the South-West Peninsula strategic rail blueprint as being necessary for the delivery of the Tavistock to Okehampton railway line.....*' (Planning Application WD/0425/17). Regarding the existing property there is room to rebuild it away from the trackbed. This should have been done originally.

The Tavistock to Plymouth, 'Restoring Your Railway: Ideas Fund Application' (web copy October 2021) states. 'The proposed station site is slightly less than 1 mile from Tavistock town centre, corresponding to an approximately 15 minute walk, via a route with existing footways.' However, the centre of Tavistock around the parish church and Bedford Square is slightly more than 1 mile. With a 14 metre rise and fall and then a 31 metre climb on the way to the Abbotsfield Road bridge it is a good 18 minutes walk. However, this still leave a further quarter of a mile (400 metres) to walk, assuming that a path is maintained alongside the railway, or half a mile via the new Staple Tor access road. To attract visitors to Tavistock and for pedestrian access from much of the town, the railway needs to be further extended into Tavistock and closer to the town centre and bus station. This will be explored further in a newsletter article.

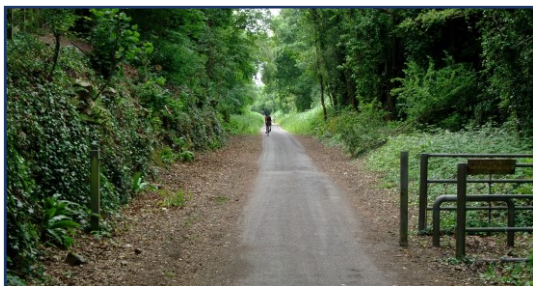
NORTH DEVON AND BIDEFORD REPORT FROM TIM STEER

In January, GWR's Managing Director (MD) Mark Hopwood gave evidence relating to the Tarka line and its infrastructure and service issues at Parliament's Rural transport committee. These issues were openly spoken about by Mark's team on LinkedIn with GWR staff saying that they have left passengers standing on stations due to being already overflowing leaving Barnstaple.



This was not the only time Barnstaple was spoken about in Parliament as the previous day North Devon MP Selaine Saxby gave evidence at the Restoring your railway fund debate about why Barnstaple is now suffering from serious traffic congestion making Bideford to Barnstaple buses

impossible to timetable. The North Devon MP delivered a very good speech about the need for extending the line to Bideford and upgrading the existing Tarka line; that speech was jointly written by Tarka Rail Association and Railfuture.



The Tarka line continues to show around 60,000 passengers a month meaning that the peak time services are struggling with capacity.

The Barnstaple to Bideford railway still awaiting restored track at Fremington cutting and showing there is space to retain the path alongside (17th June 2023).

GWR's MD Mark Hopwood has come to Barnstaple to meet with Devon County Council's transport lead Andrea Davis and the Tarka Rail Association to speak about the line which Mark believes is suffering from 'Victorian style infrastructure'. The fully commissioned railway consultant working on the ACE Rail project explained to the principle funders why we are need of developing the existing line first for service capacity and frequency before we even dream of an extension; the line's hourly services are in danger of overflowing with passengers (just imagine what challenges the Tarka line would have if extended to Bideford tomorrow!).

April saw a gathering at Okehampton's newly restored railway station: a specially commissioned set of BR station signs were made by Rydon signs all thanks to Colin Burges from Exeter and Teign Valley Railway. The station signs were for Bude, Bideford, Christow and Tavistock and given to members representing the various restoring your railway groups.

In May OkeRail hosted a coffee morning at the Charter Hall in Okehampton, with stands from Tarka Rail Association's ACE Rail, Tavy Rail, Connect Bude, Dartmoor Rail Association and of course the hosts. This was a great chance for members of the public to learn about the different railway groups and their ambitions with two presentation screens showing the work going on with OkeRail and ACE Rail. Many railway enthusiasts would have noticed that Colin Burges' commissioned railway signs were at each table. Railfuture had its logos on the ACE Rail banner and brand-new fold-up banner showing Bideford as the missing part to the rail network.

by Tim Steer

GWR BUS RAIL LINKS

Motor bus services were originally introduced on the 17th August 1903 by the Great Western Railway as feeders to their train services and were a cheaper alternative to building new railways to more remote less densely populated areas. They were the first successful railway services operated by a railway company. The first route introduced was from Helston to the Lizard using Milnes-Daimler vehicles. The success of this service led to a network of services in Penzance, Slough and London.

Fast forward to the 2020's and GWR are promoting various bus links from some of their railway stations. Service 118 (currently operated by Dartline) is hourly from Okehampton West Street to Tavistock during the main part of the day and some start at Okehampton Railway Station at 07:20, 09:30, 11:30, 13:30, 15:30 and 18:30. The service skirts the edge of Dartmoor and is very scenic. <https://www.railfuture.org.uk/The-Okehampton-Line>

There are also new bus connections at Okehampton station. Go Cornwall Bus service 306 to Launceston has four Mondays to Saturday departures at 07:35, 10:25, 14:25 and 18:25. Stagecoach service 6 serves Holsworthy and Bude and offers five journeys on Monday to Friday at 07:25, 10:25, 13:25, 16:25 and 19:25 (plus 1800 on college days). On Saturdays there are five journeys departing at 07:25, 10:25, 13:25, 16:25 and 19:25.

Services 309 and 310 is operated by Filers Travel between Barnstaple station and Lynton/Lynmouth and is an hourly service on Mondays to Saturdays (2 journeys on Sundays until 29th October). Stagecoach service 301, from Barnstaple station to Combe Martin via Ilfracombe, is now hourly with support from GWR and Devon County Council through the Bus Services Improvement Plan funding from the Department for Transport.

Services 164 is a service currently operated by Tally Ho between Totnes (via station forecourt) and Salcombe, as mainly an hourly service on Monday to Saturdays and a limited service on Sundays.

National bus passes are valid on these services after 09:30 on Mondays to Fridays and all day at weekends and bank holidays. To confirm times and days of running please refer to the Devonbus website.

by Alan Clark

Note – since 5th June 2023 bus service 345 from Okehampton to Exeter via Hatherleigh is back with Stagecoach as service 5A, but no longer serves Exeter St. Davids. The 315 (now Stagecoach 5B) from North Devon still calls at Exeter St. David's.