

# New rail chief vows to end Devon's transport divide

Tim Steer now leads efforts to reconnect communities and revive a lost rail link

**DevonLive** NEWS By [Lewis Clarke](#)

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**December 2021, Bideford – early discussions for reinstating mainline services with local councillors and campaigners. [Photo: Rob Dark]**

It's not every day that someone from a quiet North Devon town finds themselves steering the conversation on regional rail development; but that's exactly where Tim Steer now finds himself.

With his recent appointment as chair of Railfuture's Devon and Cornwall branch, Tim isn't simply filling a role - he's continuing a campaign years in the making. From [Barnstaple](#) to [Bideford](#) and beyond, he's working to connect communities and unlock opportunities through strategic railway improvements.

And if you've been anywhere near the [North Devon](#) line over the past few years, you'll likely have heard his name before.

Born and bred in Barnstaple, Tim's journey into rail campaigning has been, by his own account, both personal and deeply rooted in the community. His passion found a formal outlet in 2021 with the creation of the ACE Rail campaign - a grassroots effort aimed at upgrading the North Devon (Tarka) line and ultimately restoring services to Bideford, a town with no current railway connection despite being the largest in the South West without one.

Tim recalls the motivation behind it all: "My ACE Rail campaign... has been to upgrade the existing North Devon line so that users get a better, faster service that is doubled in frequency, and then to extend the line's services to Bideford in the nationally-known deprived area of Torrington."

It's a pragmatic yet ambitious objective. At the heart of ACE Rail lies not nostalgia, but necessity. Torridge's socio-economic challenges are well documented, and better rail access could provide a vital link to employment, education and healthcare across the region.



**Tim Steer (centre) at the 2nd annual convention of the Northern Devon Railway Development Alliance, joined by local councillors, mayors, and national Railfuture representatives. [Photo: Lewis Clarke]**

Tim's work hasn't gone unnoticed. Within just a few years, he and his team earned Railfuture's Gold Award for Best New Group in 2022, followed by accolades for Best Social Media and, perhaps most significantly, Campaigner of the Year in 2023. These are not just ornamental titles - they reflect Tim's ability to mobilise support, engage the public, and maintain focus on deliverable change.

The campaign has since evolved into the Northern Devon Railway Development Alliance (NDRDA), formed in late 2023. It brings together over two dozen partner organisations and specialist advisers, working collectively to build credible business cases for both modernisation and expansion.

"What the Bideford line will look like and where exactly it will go is now in the hands of independent specialist advisers and representatives of over two dozen partner and stakeholder organisations in the still-growing Alliance," Tim explains. "The professionally-drafted business cases will prove that building a better railway for the area will improve community prosperity and help lead the area out of deprivation."

While Tim's roots are in North Devon, his new role demands a broader perspective. As chair of Railfuture's Devon and Cornwall branch, he's now turning his attention to rail campaigns across the entire region.

"As new chair for Devon & Cornwall, I will now look at all rail campaigns across the region and am ready to support them," he says. "I want Railfuture's membership to grow so that it represents students, parents, employers and their employees, patients and other rail users, future as well as existing."

This vision includes not just passengers, but freight transport too. And crucially, Tim aims to demystify railway campaigning — moving it beyond the realm of train enthusiasts and into the mainstream.

"For too long, I feel, railways campaigns have often been seen as the sole preserve of train enthusiasts," Tim notes. "Instead, my emphasis will be actively campaigning to represent the wider public who already use and want to use the railway."

It's a shift in tone and strategy that may well be what campaigns like ACE Rail need in order to become not only heard but acted upon.

Tim is also chair of the Friends of Barnstaple Railway Station (FOBRS), a local volunteer group that's garnered national recognition for its station enhancement work. The group is part of the Community Rail Network and has won awards four years in a row. This speaks volumes about Tim's leadership style - collaborative, local, and outcomes-focused.

Until recently, he was also a director at the Bideford Railway Heritage Centre and vice-chair of the former Tarka Rail Association. These roles give him a rich perspective on both heritage and modern infrastructure, allowing him to navigate the complex terrain between preserving the past and building the future.

The mix of experience, grassroots credibility and strategic foresight makes Tim particularly well-positioned for the chair role. And if past performance is anything to go by, the next few years could be transformative for rail in the South West.

Of course, campaigns like this are never simple. They involve navigating bureaucracy, building alliances, convincing funders, and often making a compelling case over and over again. Yet Tim seems undeterred.

"This work is now being taken forward... and I will continue the award-winning work to enhance the station as [Friends of Barnstaple Railway Station] chair as well," he states.

There's a sense that this is just the beginning - not of the campaign itself, which is already well underway, but of its next chapter. With independent advisors in place, strong local authority backing, and a growing alliance of partners, the campaign has matured from hopeful beginnings to tangible planning.

Tim's election marks a formal recognition of this progress - and an opportunity to scale that success across Devon and Cornwall.

As Tim puts it, "Please inform other rail user and campaign groups and potential members so I can represent them too." It's an open invitation to broaden the coalition - a key ingredient for long-term, sustainable impact.