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Light Rail Group**

House of Commons
London SW1A 0AA

Light Rail & Trams, Affordable & Sustainable Transport

"The past we inherit, the future we build ourselves"



"TramTrain does it Greener and Cheaper on lightly used railway lines and in the streets"

Combe Rail is proposing a modern, light railway between Barnstaple and Braunton

Ilfracombe Branch Project



Combe Rail is proposing a modern, light railway between Barnstaple and Braunton.

The North Devon Local Plan already urges the protection of former railway routes, to allow for future re-instatement.

This former railway route is 98% intact, with sufficient width to accommodate a new single-track railway line alongside the Tarka Trail cycle path

These meetings are by invitation only, where MPs, Stakeholders etc., within the Light Rail industry and invited members of the Public will have a chance to discuss debate and raise questions concerning Light Rail.

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Light Rail (UK)

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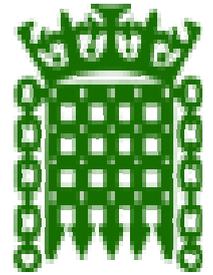
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Why is a railway needed?



Two pressing reasons – Braintree traffic and Braintree parking. The A361 through Braintree is at capacity, and Braintree's rush-hour air quality is a source of serious concern.

The local population, and therefore also traffic, are expected to increase significantly in the next 20 years. Braintree, meanwhile urgently needs an effective park-and-ride solution. More positively, it's now accepted that new and re-opened railways unlock economic growth.

The success of the Borders Railway in Scotland is a spectacular example of this. North Devon's ever-growing population demands forward-looking infrastructure planning.

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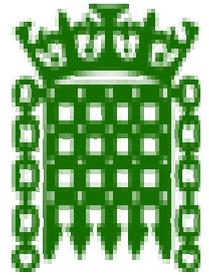


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What sort of railway would it be?

This will be a modern community- and commuter railway, which will run throughout the year. Its scenic location will also make it highly attractive to tourists.

It will use lightweight, battery-electric vehicles – like trams, but without the overhead wires – capable of running safely on-road, and quickly off-road.

These vehicles are environmentally-friendly, and very quiet. Visually, and in terms of infrastructure, the railway will be low-impact.



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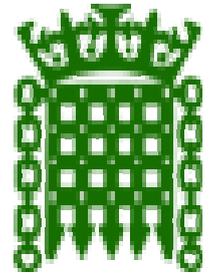


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Where would it run?

Starting from Caen Street in Braunton, it would run tramway-style along Station Road, and then use the old railway formation all the way to the Civic Centre car park in Barnstaple.

It would then street-run past the front of the former Town Station and along Castle Street to a convenient tram stop terminus in The Strand in the heart of Barnstaple.

Intermediate stations will be provided at Wrafton Laboratories, at the new Landings housing development, at Chivenor Cross, and at a new Barnstaple Park-and-Ride facility near the A39 downstream bridge – which could potentially have a huge catchment area.



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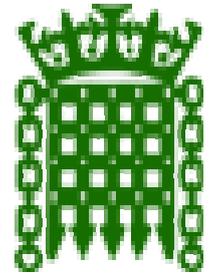


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Are there obstacles?

The old railway formation is now occupied by the Tarka Trail cycle path. There is ample width (25 feet/ 8 metres) for the new railway to share the formation alongside the cycle path, and the railway's low-impact construction will be sympathetic to the popular leisure trail.



The formation is also used by concrete flood defences and by a transatlantic data cable. In the not-too-distant future, these will both be due for renewal, at which point the new railway can be accommodated.

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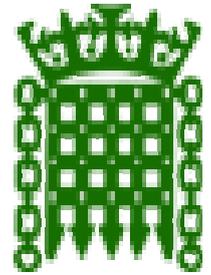


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The Route Described

The Ilfracombe line began its journey at Barnstaple Junction station, the station that younger readers know today as plain "Barnstaple" – the end of the branch line from Exeter. Back then, this was where not only the Ilfracombe line joined but also the line to Bideford and Torrington and also the cross-country line to Taunton.

Barnstaple Junction station was always a hive of activity, with frequent trains arriving from London Waterloo via Exeter, and dividing, with some coaches going to Bideford and Torrington and the main part going to Ilfracombe.

On leaving Barnstaple Junction, our train took a sharp right-hand curve passing beneath the old bridge carrying the road out of town and up Sticklepath hill. The line eventually came alongside the road just before it crossed the long bridge into the town centre, and the railway took a tight left-hand curve through 90 degrees on its own bridge to cross the river Taw.

After a few hundred yards we arrive at Barnstaple Town station. Although this station was simple enough, with just the one platform for Ilfracombe line trains, it also formed a terminus for the Lynton and Barnstaple narrow gauge railway (1898-1935.)

Leaving the station, the train would cross the river Yeo at Pottington on a swing bridge. The bridge had to swing open to give access to Rolles Quay for small coastal vessels.

Crossing Pottington swing bridge, the line became double track for the rest of the journey to Ilfracombe.

For the first few miles the line ran alongside the river Taw on what is now the Tarka Trail before cutting inland for a short way to Wrafton station, a simple station with one siding. The line then carried on for about another mile to Braunton.

Braunton was particularly busy in the summer as passengers would alight to visit Saunton Sands and Croyde Bay; but it was also interesting because it was the start of the long climb to Morteheo and Woolacombe station, which was 6 miles away but 600 feet higher.

This meant all but the lightest of trains had to be "banked", which was a case of a second engine pushing from the rear to assist the main engine.

At Morteheo the banking engine would normally leave the train and head back down to Braunton to assist another train.

Our train would leave Braunton running alongside the river Caen and the main road to Ilfracombe, and make its way up the beautiful "Hidden Valley", climbing hard at gradients of around 1 in 40. Once the valley opens out, the railway veered off left, leaving the road and still climbing hard, and headed across the fields to Willingcott level crossing before continuing the climb through lonely countryside to the summit at Morteheo and Woolacombe station.

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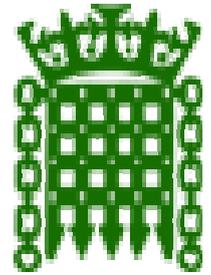
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Like Braunton, Morteohoe was also a busy place, particularly in the summer.

The station was the point where the banking engines would come off the rear of the trains from both Braunton and from the back of trains that had just climbed the even steeper gradient from Ilfracombe.

This gradient was 1 in 36 from the platform end at Ilfracombe until Morteohoe – one of the steepest climbs anywhere on Britain's main-line rail network.

Leaving Morteohoe station and start the 3-mile descent to Ilfracombe, along the Slade Valley and past the Slade reservoirs and the 69 yard-long Slade tunnels before seeing Ilfracombe station perched high above the town.

We are therefore urging North Devon Council to factor the new railway into its planning strategy and to protect the entire route.

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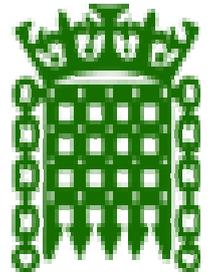


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Into the future?

The obvious next step would be to re-connect to the national rail network, so that the railway becomes an extension of the existing and popular Tarka Line.

A lightweight Supertram (like the ones currently being trialled in Sheffield) could street-run over Barnstaple Long Bridge and Station Road to Barnstaple station, and then run fast to Exeter and beyond.



Examples of TramTrain street running in Nordhausen, Germany track sharing with a Light Rail Car and a tourist steam train



A TramTrain in Kassel Germany on a line that was saved by this type of operation and includes street running

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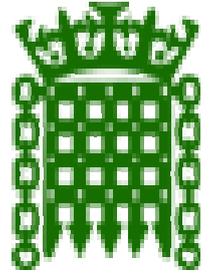


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French TramTrain similar to Sheffield

Catapult Rail Car development due 2018 Approx £360000

This is a railway for the future, but the planning and route protection need to start today

Combe Rail was registered as a Charitable Incorporated Organisation (Registered Charity 1164083) on 23rd October 2015. The current Trustees are: Richard Heacock (Chair) Yvonne Hin (Secretary) and Daniel Roche (Treasurer)

Courtesy: Combe Rail, Geoff Spong



Registered Charity 1164083

Contact: info@combe-rail.org.uk

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