

**Submission on the Examination of the Exmoor National Park Authority (ENPA) Local Plan
on behalf of the Lynton & Barnstaple Railway Trust (L&BRT)
16 June 2016**

INTRODUCTION

The question for the Hearing session is: "Is there justification for the provisions in policies RT-D13 and RT-S2 regarding the reinstatement of the Lynton & Barnstaple railway?". We understand this to refer to the merits and therefore justification of the reinstatement, rather than the details of the policies, RT-S2 in particular, intended to guide the detail of the reinstatement, with which the Trust is content. This paper therefore focuses on the merits and justification of reinstatement of the Railway within the National Park.

An annex is included containing detailed comments on the objections by the Grob family to these parts of the LP. Those objections have been numbered (1 to 44) and grouped into general categories as follows:

- Railway History and Heritage re-instatement** (1, 2, 4, 6, 12, 23, 32, 37, 40)
- Construction** (3, 10, 14, 44)
- Land impacts and Consultation** (13, 15, 17, 28, 29, 31, 34, 35, 36, 41, 43)
- Ecology and Landscape** (18, 19, 21, 22, 24, 30)
- Economic Benefit** (9, 20, 26, 42)
- Viability and Tourism Impacts** (5, 7, 8, 11, 16, 25, 27, 33, 38, 39)

RAILWAY HISTORY AND HERITAGE RE-INSTATEMENT

The original Lynton to Barnstaple railway was opened in 1898 and was amalgamated into the Southern Railway in 1923, operating as such until 1935. Annual passenger numbers before closure were 32,000 (1934) down from 72,000 in 1925 and a peak of around 100,000 during the period 1906-1913. The Railway served the communities of Barnstaple, Chelfham, Goodleigh, Bratton Fleming, Blackmoor Gate, Parracombe and Lynton providing a transport link for goods and passengers, and was strongly linked to the development of Lynton as a tourist destination.

In 1979 the Lynton & Barnstaple Railway Association was formed which is now the Trust.

In 2007 L&BRT launched the project known as Exmoor Enterprise to extend the railway. We started discussing and consulting about the project with local organisations and councils to determine what were the attitudes towards the project and we found considerable support. We consulted widely among our local communities during 2012 and again in April 2015 when the draft plans were prepared for the next phase.

The complete re-instatement of this railway is physically possible between Lynton and Barnstaple because there is only one residential property which obstructs the 19 mile route.

Phase I is the existing one-mile railway. The remainder of the project is divided into three parts.

Phase IIA, is the four and a half mile extension from our current terminus at Killington Lane to Blackmoor Gate and Wistlandpound Reservoir.

Phase IIB is a four mile extension from Woody Bay Station into Lynton

Phase III is the remaining ten miles to central Barnstaple at Pilton Yard.

Blackmoor Gate is the only place where we can sensibly establish the facilities to support railway operations and create the base for future expansion. There is space for a rolling stock shed and existing barns that can be used for engineering activity. The site is a transport hub and we have land to use as additional parking. The plans for Blackmoor Gate unlock the entire railway re-instatement.

The railway Trust has 2700 members and area support groups around the country who have contributed towards the costs to date of more than £400,000 to prepare the planning applications for the next Phase.

What has been achieved by the Railway ?

The railway opened to the public at Woody Bay Station with 400 yards of track in 2004. It was extended to one mile in 2006 to our current terminus at Killington Lane. To date we have carried over 400,000 passengers with more than 48,000 of these in 2015 during 232 operating days. During the last three years our passenger numbers have grown by 50%. Our anticipated future passenger numbers for Phase IIA, of 70,000, must be a conservative estimate.

In our published accounts for 2015 the total net assets of the railway Trust and the operating company the CIC total more than £2.6 million which has doubled over five years.

This growth reflects the investment our members have made to re-instate the railway in an authentic manner. We are about to complete a re-build of one of the original engines LYN and have re-built 4 of the original carriages from 1898 and 1911.

The railway has won a number of national awards including one for our signalling installation at Woody Bay Station in competition with both heritage railways and Network Rail.

The re-instatement of the Lynton & Barnstaple Railway has been described as “the last great narrow-gauge railway adventure”. Indeed in England this is the only re-instatement of a narrow gauge railway of this length that is physically possible. The recent re-opening of the Welsh Highland Railway from Porthmadoc to Caernarvon, passing through the Snowdonia National Park, demonstrates what can be achieved.

CONSTRUCTION

The original construction of the railway was sound, and this is evidenced by the remaining structures and formation. A number of the road bridges still carry road traffic which is much heavier than when the original railway operated. Chelfham Viaduct has stood the test of time, and was restored in 2000 to a standard where it can carry trains again.

At Parracombe Bank the embankment was washed away at the time of the 1952 Lynmouth floods and will be reconstructed. A large culvert has been designed to encompass the banks of the river and is many times larger than the culvert underneath the A39 at this point. As a result of this there is no risk of flooding, as the required Flood Risk Assessment underlines. The construction plan for this site adequately demonstrates how the site will be accessed and the manner in which the river and local ecology will be protected during construction. The applications for the reinstatement of the line are accompanied by an EIA, ensuring that all impacts are rigorously assessed.

Specialists have been used to prepare the construction plans including major input from directors at Ove-Arup and W.S. Atkins which are both major international engineering businesses and senior engineering input from Halcrow with specific experience of the construction of other railways including the Welsh Highland Railway

LAND IMPACTS AND CONSULTATION

The railway Trust has been acquiring the former track-bed land for some years and all landowners have been made an offer for their track-bed.

The railway will inevitably divide some fields as it did when it was previously operating. To mitigate these effects the railway has and will continue to:

- Provide and maintain stock-proof fencing

- Provide access routes across the track as cattle creeps, bridges, accommodation crossings or footpath crossings

- Provide an alternative water supply for stock if the railway construction prevents access to a current supply

Offers to purchase agricultural land have been based on the area required for the track-bed priced at a multiple of current agricultural values.

There is no requirement for any buildings currently owned by landowners, and used for agriculture, to be taken over by the railway. The only buildings, other than station buildings, which will be used for the railway are either in the ownership of the Trust, or to be built on land owned by the Trust. Phase IIA does require the demolition of one dwelling in Churchtown, which has been built on the track-bed, and the Trust is in the process of buying another, which is alongside the track-bed.

The current planning applications have received support from many statutory consultees, local organisations, local councils and individuals. When we have surveyed residents we get around 90% expressing support. There is also support from afar as would be expected for a heritage project of national significance.

We have widespread support from Parish Councils who know the local area. This includes Kentisbury and Trentishoe, Challacombe, Combe Martin, Berrynarbor and East Down plus Lynton & Lynmouth, Barnstaple and Ilfracombe Town Councils.

ECOLOGY & LANDSCAPE

The current applications are accompanied by a full Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA). The ecological impacts of railway will be minimal and sometimes positive. Ecological studies have informed the construction plan so that the methods and timing of construction will minimise disruption to wildlife as the EIA clearly shows.

The structures and remaining formation of the original railway already exist in the area, and these together with the overgrown areas around them will be restored to their former appearance. Of the proposed 4.5 mile extension 85% of the original railway track-bed is still visible. The remainder (about 1200 yards) is mainly cuttings that have been in-filled which will be re-excavated.

At Blackmoor Gate great care has been taken to ensure that the appearance of the area will be enhanced to create a suitable 'gateway' to Exmoor National Park with additional planting to provide new and improved habitat.

The EIA contains a full LVIA which finds the landscape impacts minimal and often positive.

The noise and vibration studies have demonstrated that the peace and tranquillity of the area will not noticeably be affected, and there is a clear argument that, by reducing the number of vehicles using the A39, the extended railway will, in future, reduce traffic noise and disturbance.

ECONOMIC BENEFIT

The local plans for North Devon and Exmoor National Park support tourism and the establishment of good quality tourist attractions. The Lynton & Barnstaple Railway is, year on year, attracting an increasing number of visitors, all of whom are adding to the tourism spend in the local area.

Based on commercial records from operating the current railway and conservative assumptions, it is possible to produce a reliable plan for the future phases in terms of costs and revenues. The Business Plan for Phase IIA calculates a £62 million economic benefit during the first 10 years. Similar plans have been prepared for the whole of Phase II and the whole railway when Phase III is completed.

Extension of the railway to Wistlandpound Reservoir will result in a net gain of 16 directly employed persons on the railway and an assessed increase in other tourism related full time equivalent jobs of 62. The type of jobs associated with the railway will be paid jobs with benefits from increased engineering opportunities and some apprentice places.

Direct income and secondary spend in the local area will increase by £2.2m. per year rising to £3.7m. once the planned passenger numbers of 70,000 are reached. With a 'Keynesian' multiplier of 2.5 applied the overall benefit to the local economy becomes more than £9m. per year. This will be on top of the direct benefits that will come from the expenditure with local firms during construction of the railway.

VIABILITY AND TOURISM IMPACTS

The railway is viable as a business now, and the business plans for the phases of extension have been tested to ensure that the railway will remain viable at each phase.

Heritage railways are a valuable part of local economies wherever they are located and the Railway makes a sizeable contribution to the local economy even in its current, reduced size. The heritage railway industry is a growing business sector that brings significant benefits to many areas of the country. With visitor numbers growing year on year over the past three years, it seems that the Lynton & Barnstaple Railway is very much in touch with current trends and tourist requirements.

The railway's timetable for 2015 included 235 operating days for public services, with only 8 weeks of the year when no trains operated. Once the railway is extended further the timetable will be expanded to at least 250 days per year.

The railway is a long term project to reconstruct the rail link between Barnstaple and Lynton and to maintain it into the future. The railway Trust has no interest in commencing a scheme that cannot be finished as planned or in operating a service that is not viable. That is why, for Phase IIA, a two year period has been allowed, after planning permission is granted, to secure complete funding, prepare detailed designs (where needed), obtain any licences required and to contract with suitable suppliers to deliver within the budget.

It should be noted that the railway has consistently won grants for projects (now totalling nearly £400,000).

CONCLUSION

L&BRT plans to extend the railway are viable and demonstrate significant economic benefit without harm to the National Park ecology or landscape.

The re-instatement of this railway is not a toy or hobby project but a serious undertaking that is something of national significance without which part of Exmoor's cultural heritage would be lost.

It can bring great benefits to the area and be in keeping with the National Park objectives to retain the Park's cultural heritage and encourage visitors to the Park. Phase IIA of the re-instatement reduces traffic on the A39 and provides a park and ride service from the edge of the Park not only to Woody Bay Station but onwards to Lynton and Lynmouth.