

Dartmoor line rail services will be restored for first time in half a century

- first Restoring Your Railway scheme delivered, with rail passengers to benefit from return of daily services between Okehampton and Exeter later this year
- scheme will reconnect communities across Devon, reinvigorating local economies, boosting tourism to Dartmoor National Park, and improving access to jobs and education
- more than a third of a billion pounds-worth of government investment in the south-west, including £37.4 million for upgrades of the coastal rail line between Holcombe and Dawlish

Regular passenger services are set to be restored on a popular railway line in the south-west of England for the first time in almost 50 years, thanks to £40.5 million of investment, the government has announced today (19 March 2021).

The Department for Transport, Network Rail and Great Western Railway (GWR) are working together to reopen the line between Exeter and Okehampton to passengers all year round. Since 1997, the line has only been open during the summer after a regular service was withdrawn in 1972.

A service will initially run every 2 hours later this year, with the expectation it will increase to an hourly service towards the end of 2022. This will benefit students heading to colleges in Exeter as well as tourists travelling in the other direction towards Okehampton for Dartmoor, easing congestion on local roads.

This is the first project to see services restored under the government's [Restoring Your Railway Fund](#), launched in January 2020 to reinstate axed local services and restore closed stations. The fund is focused on delivering schemes that can level up the country, reinvigorating high streets, reconnecting cut-off communities and boosting opportunity across the country.

The government has also announced £37.4 million of funding for the critical third phase of works to improve resilience on the coastal railway between Holcombe and Dawlish. This is in addition to a £341 million package of rail enhancements already committed across the south-west.

Prime Minister Boris Johnson said:

Restoring the connections between our communities and building new ones is key to unlocking our nation's potential and levelling up across the UK.

The massive investment we are making into the railways of the south-west will quite literally lay the tracks to more jobs, tourism and opportunities across the region.

Transport Secretary Grant Shapps said:

The return of all-year services to the picturesque Dartmoor line for the first time in half a century is a milestone moment in our efforts to restore our railways.

Reversing lost railway connections breathes new life into our high streets, drives tourism and investment in businesses and housing, and opens new opportunities for work and education.

Rail Minister Chris Heaton-Harris said:

Building on vital new investment to protect the coastal railway between Holcombe and Dawlish and a host of upgrades and new stations, we're delivering on our ambitious plans in Devon and Cornwall.

This funding will provide passengers with reliable, punctual journeys, and improve connections between communities as we build back better from coronavirus (COVID-19).

[Network Rail](#) is set to begin work later this summer on a rockfall shelter and netting to address instability on an area of steep, high cliffs to the north of Parson's Tunnel between Holcombe and Dawlish.

This is part of the [South West Rail Resilience Programme](#) to create a more resilient railway after storms caused significant damage to the line in 2014, closing the railway for 8 weeks and severing the south-west peninsula from the rest of the network.

Phase 1 of the programme – to build a new £80 million seawall on the seafront west of Dawlish station to protect 360m of railway and homes behind it – was completed in July 2020 and opened by the Rail Minister in September.

Work on the second phase of the new seawall – to extend it a further 415m eastwards from Colonnades to Coastguards – began in November 2020 with support from an innovative 8-legged jack-up barge, known as a 'Wavewalker'. Work is ongoing and is expected to be completed by 2023.

Exeter College Principal and Chief Executive John Laramy CBE said:

The return of the Okehampton to Exeter rail line full-time is great news for the region as we look to build connectivity across the south-west. As we all know, enhanced connectivity is a key driver

for productivity and this development will open up new opportunities to support the growth of our economy within this area.

We have students study with us from across the south-west region and another rail route into the heart of Exeter can only be a good thing, not only for learners themselves but also for the city of Exeter.

Pamela Woods, Chair of Dartmoor National Park Authority, said,

Opening up the line to Dartmoor with a regular train service is very much welcome as we celebrate our 70th year as a national park. Providing a sustainable route to access Dartmoor via regular rail links supports our green travel strategy, reduces congestion and provides a more accessible way for all to enjoy the national park.

We are looking forward to working with GWR to provide visitor information at Okehampton station, to make the most of the opportunities this presents to support our tourism businesses and the local economy.

Today's news comes on top of £341 million of rail enhancements already announced in the south-west, including:

- the development of a new £53 million depot in Exeter, providing enhanced servicing facilities for trains and improving the availability of trains in the region, including for the Dartmoor line
- ongoing capacity upgrades at Bristol East Junction, worth £132 million, and £60 million station improvements at Bristol Temple Meads as part of the [Bristol Rail Regeneration Programme](#)
- contribution of £7.8 million for Edginswell station in Torbay from the third round of the [New Stations Fund](#) – the station is planned to be opened in 2024
- investment of more than £8.48 million for improvements at a number of stations across the region including:
 - £1.7 million for delivery of accessibility and car parking improvements at Castle Cary station, with construction to start in spring 2021
 - £6.6 million for station improvements and new car parking at Taunton station, with construction to finish in spring 2021
 - £183,000 to upgrade the previously derelict station building at Saltash station
 - contractual support through the [GWR franchise agreement](#) for the Plymouth station scheme, with construction ongoing until 2029