

Railway restored: regular trains to run on Dartmoor Line for first time in 50 years

- first passenger train on the first Restoring Your Railway reopening will run on 17 November 2021, ahead of public services resuming on 20 November
- restored in just 9 months, and delivered £10 million under budget, transforming a mothballed former freight railway to regular services
- reopening is the first of the government's Restoring Your Railway schemes to return to service, fulfilling a manifesto commitment

Transport Secretary Grant Shapps will today (17 November 2021) dispatch the first passenger train to run on the Dartmoor Line for over 50 years, as the line once again becomes part of the UK rail network for passengers.

This has been made possible thanks to over £40 million of government investment through the Restoring your Railway programme.

The line links Okehampton to Exeter and will officially reopen to the public for regular year-round, all-week passenger services on 20 November.

The first train runs this Wednesday, travelling from Okehampton, and will carry local schoolchildren, campaigners, railway staff and supporters who all helped make the project happen.

The Department for Transport (DfT), [Network Rail](#) and [Great Western Railway \(GWR\)](#) have worked together to reopen this line ahead of time and under budget. Benefitting from the application of [Rail Project SPEED](#) approaches, the Dartmoor Line has been transformed from a mothballed former freight railway with occasional summer Sunday services to a full 7 days a week passenger operation in a mere 9 months since confirmation of funding, coming in more than £10 million under budget.

A service will run every 2 hours, with plans to expand to an hourly service in 2022. This will benefit students heading to colleges in Exeter as well as tourists travelling towards Dartmoor, easing congestion on local roads and helping boost local economies.

Since 1997, the line has only been open on some Sundays in summer after regular services were withdrawn in 1972.

Prime Minister Boris Johnson said:

Improving transport links is essential to levelling up and spreading opportunity across the country, which is why we are driving forward our pledge to reverse the Beeching cuts in Devon

today.

As we reopen the Dartmoor Line, we are rightly reconnecting communities, giving passengers the chance to choose rail over the road and travel from Exeter to Okehampton on greener, cleaner modes of transport.

Transport Secretary Grant Shapps said:

By restoring the Dartmoor Line, we are undoing 50 years of damage, reconnecting a community and creating new opportunities for jobs, tourism, education and recreation.

We have made it our mission to reverse cuts made in the Beeching era of the 1960s. The passion, nostalgia and enthusiasm for that ambition is clear right across the country.

People love their railways and rightly miss them when they're gone. Today – ahead of time and under budget – we've made a decisive step in fixing that, cutting the ribbon on a line and making a real difference to people's lives.

The [Restoring Your Railway Fund](#) was launched in January 2020 to reinstate axed local services and restore closed stations, many of which were cut following Dr Beeching's report on 'The Reshaping of British Railways' in 1963.

The fund is focused on delivering schemes that can level up the country, reconnect cut-off communities, improve access to jobs, homes and education and boost opportunity across the country.

DfT and its partners have accelerated the reopening of the railway, delivering passenger services in only 9 months from the original funding being approved to entry into service and saving money at the same time. As the government continues its overhaul of the railways following the [Williams-Shapps Plan for Rail](#), more lines and stations will be reopened.

To make the restoration possible, Network Rail's team of engineers worked tirelessly to deliver a huge programme of work to physically reopen the line in just 9 months, including laying 11 miles of new track and installing 24,000 concrete sleepers and 29,000 tonnes of ballast in a record-breaking 20-day period.

Repairs have also been made to 21 structures along the route including 4 bridges. Other infrastructure work has included level crossing improvements and the installation of railway communications equipment. Vegetation clearance, earth and drainage works and fencing have also been completed and further infrastructure work will continue to take place to increase the line speed to enable an hourly service in 2022.

Michelle Handforth, Network Rail's Wales & Western regional managing director, said:

Today marks a significant milestone for the railway and the local community and I am delighted to have been able to welcome the Secretary of State to Okehampton to mark this special occasion.

I am so proud of our engineers whose hard work and dedication has resulted in this line reopening ahead of schedule and today enable the Secretary of State, campaigners and supporters of the Dartmoor Line to enjoy a first passenger journey.

I would like to thank the local community, our partners and everyone who has supported us in reopening this railway line and I am excited to think that this Saturday, regular passenger services will resume for the first time in nearly 50 years.

GWR identified suitable rolling stock and developed a robust timetable with franchise funding ahead of funding being agreed for the infrastructure elements of the project. The project has also hugely benefitted from strong local support spearheaded by [Devon County Council](#), without which it would have taken far longer to reach the point where regular year-round services can be restored after almost 50 years.

GWR, [Dartline Coaches](#) and Devon County Council have also made sure that local transport is all coordinated, ensuring easy bus and train connections to the rest of Britain are easily accessible from the Dartmoor Line.

More work will be carried out over the winter including on the station buildings to enable the restoration of the cafe and other facilities.

Mark Hopwood, GWR Managing Director, said:

This has been a key aspiration for the community and the rail industry for some time and today is a significant day for everyone who has been involved. I am delighted to have been able to invite the Secretary of State and leading community campaigners to enjoy a first passenger journey on this restored line.

The support and advocacy of the local campaigners over the years has helped deliver a fantastic new service for customers, which we hope will grow from strength to strength.