

New trains aim to improve life for passengers on Tarka Line

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NORTH Devon's Tarka Line is set to be boosted with a fleet of new trains in the near future following a £75 million maintenance deal between manufacturer Alstom and Great Western Railway.

The eight-year services contract will support the reintroduction of Class 175 diesel trains across GWR routes in Devon and Cornwall including Barnstaple to Exeter.

While not 'new', the 26 Class 175s, which were built between 1999 and 2001, will replace older and more inefficient diesels, with the first trains expected to enter passenger service later this year, following recommissioning and driver training.

Owned by Angel Trains, the Class 175s will predominantly operate on key regional routes, including services between Exeter St David's, Penzance, Barnstaple and Okehampton.

They can be connected in four, five and six-car formations and will improve reliability, efficiency and passenger comfort, GWR has said, supporting its plans to rejuvenate regional and suburban services, while preparing the way for decarbonisation.

North Devon's Tim Steer, Railfuture Devon and Cornwall regional branch chair, said: "The arrival of the Class 175 trains, from Alstom's Coradia 1000 family, is eagerly anticipated by passengers across the South West and Railfuture Devon and Cornwall welcomes the £75 million contract.

"Initially to replace GWR's few remaining and much-loved but now veteran InterCity High-Speed Trains, they will also release some

new InterCity Express Trains to strengthen much-needed capacity on Paddington services.

"GWR need a larger fleet for the very welcome additional services on the Mid-Cornwall Metro from Newquay starting later this year, all being well and to strengthen existing services on their regional network.

"The Dartmoor Line will gain a new station just off the A30 outside Okehampton next year, while Barnstaple to Exeter services in particular continue to set new usage records, far in excess of pre-pandemic volumes.

"Extra capacity for GWR's customers especially at peak times is long overdue on the North Devon Line (Tarka) Line, additional carriages coming into Barnstaple station will help solve this challenge and bring more users to the rail network."

Under the eight-year agreement, Alstom will deliver ongoing maintenance support from GWR's Laira depot in Plymouth. The contract supports more than 15 roles, including engineers, material planners and administrators, as well as many more in Alstom's wider supply chain.

Dr Simon Green, engineering director for GWR, said: "We are really pleased to be able to reach agreement with Alstom to support this major investment in our train fleet.

"The Class 175 are a welcome addition to the GWR train fleet and will provide a tangible boost as we seek to rejuvenate our regional and suburban services."

David Jordan, chief operating officer at Angel Trains, added: "We're pleased to support Great Western Railway as they work to further improve the passenger experience.

"In partnership with GWR and Al-



The 'new' Class 175 diesel trains, pictured below, will begin to replace more outdated models on regional rail lines across Devon and Cornwall. The Alstom contract will see maintenance and support provided from the GWR Laira depot in Plymouth, above. Pictures: GWR



stom, the reintroduction of the Class 175 fleet will provide additional capacity and improved reliability that will benefit customers across the network."

The Class 175 trains are also the first in the GWR fleet to use Alstom's HealthHub digital solution, which analyses and displays all the data captured by the train.

Every 30 seconds, a train will send data on more than 200 factors - from the speed of the train to the temperature inside the carriages and its exact location.

This provides real-time information that alerts the team if there is anything wrong with the train and helps to prevent incidents before they can affect passengers.

Road repair procedures under trial

DEVON County Council is to begin a seven-week trial of changes to its pothole repair procedures next week - starting in North Devon.

At a full council meeting on September 4, councillors heard that a pilot will get under way from Monday, September 15 in parts of Barnstaple as well as the West Devon areas of Hatherleigh, Chagford and North Tawton.

These locations have been chosen based on data of pothole numbers, and highways teams will be filling all potholes, not just safety defects, when visiting sites in these areas through to the end of October, the council said.

When investigating potholes reported by the public, highway safety inspectors will be asked to record all other potholes on that road within 500 metres in each direction, or to the nearest highway junction. Repair teams will then repair those potholes within their traffic management set-up - although different teams may be required depending on the size and type of repair needed.

The council said that while not everything will be repaired, this trial will establish the budget implications of taking a more proactive approach to fixing potholes before they become safety defects, and it's an opportunity to see if this new approach to pothole repairs leads to a reduction in pothole reports.

Councillor Dan Thomas, Devon cabinet member for highways, said: "Improving Devon's roads is a priority for the county council. We said we'd make changes and we want to see if this provides longer term benefits for the condition of our roads. Trialling this new approach will test whether it is a more efficient way of working and better value for money to fix potholes before they become a safety defect.

"The frustrations you hear from people are that a workforce will go out and fill in one pothole but possibly don't fill in others that you would consider road defects, because they don't have them on their list. While they're out on the ground it makes sense for them to be looking to fill as many road defects as possible to ensure they're not having to go back in short order. I don't believe the current way of working is cost effective and the purpose of the trial is to prove that's the case.

"We have a repair backlog of £390 million and every year we need £102 million a year from government just to keep our roads in their current condition, but we simply don't get anywhere near that amount from government each year for the whole highways department, let alone just roads.

"This trial is exploring whether traditional maintenance policies can be adapted to drive further efficiencies and get even better value for money."

Roundabout upgrade work completed

THE project to upgrade Bishops Tawton roundabout in Barnstaple has been completed.

The scheme has added extra lanes to the roundabout to increase its capacity, and pedestrian and cycle links have been improved with the installation of a signal-controlled crossing.

Work has also included drainage improvements, installation of new street lighting, surfacing of the footpaths, and the road from Bishops Tawton roundabout to Portmore Roundabout has been resurfaced as part of the project.

The upgrade of the roundabout is part of the wider North Devon Link Road improvements which were supported with £60 million of De-



Bishops Tawton roundabout now has extra capacity

partment for Transport funding.

Councillor Dan Thomas, Devon County Council cabinet member for highways, said: "I'm pleased to see that this scheme has been completed and hopefully it's helping traffic to flow that bit more easily for anyone

that travels regularly on this route. The scheme hasn't only increased capacity of the roundabout, it's also provided improved active travel links and a number of other important improvements such as extensive resurfacing."

The scheme at Bishops Tawton roundabout follows the county council's improvements to the A39 Westleigh Junction in July 2021 and A39 Buckleigh Road Junction in July 2022, as well as the "main scheme" on the A361 between South Molton and Portmore roundabout carried out by contractor Griffiths.

A number of unforeseen issues came up during the Bishops Tawton roundabout scheme which delayed work. This included relocation of an existing gas main, a collapsed drain within the site area, and an unmapped telecommunications cable which had to be diverted.

Work has been carried out by Cormac Ltd on behalf of Devon County Council.