

Dartmoor Line passes 250,000 journeys on first anniversary

November 28, 2022



There has been double cause for celebration for the Dartmoor Line. The renovated station building at Okehampton has been officially opened by Rail Minister Huw Merriman, and it has been revealed that the number of journey numbers on the line since it re-opened have passed 250,000.

The line reopened on 20 November 2021, restoring a regular, year-round service for the first time in almost 50 years following more than £40 million of government investment.

Rail Minister, Huw Merriman MP, who opened the fully refurbished station building and unveiled a plaque, said: "A big congratulations to everyone who has been involved in bringing this wonderful line back into regular use over the past year.

"With over 250,000 journeys made, restoring this vital route has undone 50 years of damage – we've reconnected a community and created new opportunities for jobs, tourism, education and leisure.

"Our Restoring Your Railway programme is making a real contribution to levelling up the country and breathing new life into previously cut-off areas."

The previously-mothballed rail line, which runs between Okehampton and Exeter, was restored in just nine months and delivered £10 million under budget, becoming the first former line to reopen under the government's £500 million Restoring Your Railway programme.

In the same week as it celebrated its one-year anniversary, the Dartmoor Line also saw its 250,000th journey, showing an incredible patronage on the line and more than double the demand originally forecast.

Since Great Western Railway increased services to hourly in May 2022, passenger use has continued to rise, with more than 500 journeys starting at Okehampton every day and a further 300 travelling into the town from across the rail network.

GWR Managing Director, Mark Hopwood, said: "It is hard to believe that it is already a year since we and our partners reopened the Dartmoor Line, ahead of time and under budget.

"This anniversary, with more than 250,000 journeys now made, is testament to the hard work of so many who campaigned for the line's reinstatement and those who worked day and night to deliver the project £10m under budget.

"The continued demand shows just how important good rail connections are for the community, and the economies, they serve."

Reinstatement of the Dartmoor Line was made possible by Network Rail's team of engineers who worked tirelessly to deliver a huge programme of work 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.

Network Rail's Wales and Western regional managing director, Michelle Handforth, said: "I am delighted to see the success of the Dartmoor Line as we celebrate the one-year anniversary of its reopening. To have passed over 250,000 journeys in the first year since reopening highlights just how greatly anticipated and popular this railway line is to Okehampton and nearby towns and communities.

"I am so pleased with the positive impact the Dartmoor Line is having on supporting greater connectivity, boosting local businesses, the tourism sector, and providing greater access to education and work for the thousands of people who live locally.

"This has truly been a team effort between Network Rail and our partners GWR and Devon County Council, and I remain ever so proud of our project team and engineers whose commitment and hard work enabled us to restore this mothballed former freight railway line in just nine months and under budget, becoming the first former line to reopen under the Government's Restoring Your Railway programme."

While the work to finish the Dartmoor Line is now complete, efforts are still being made to provide better connections from the Dartmoor Line, to surrounding towns and communities.

Devon County Council and local bus operators have worked with Great Western Railway to provide better bus links to Tavistock, seven days a week direct from Okehampton station. This now also includes new

routes to Launceston and Bude which run direct to the station.

Devon County Council Cabinet Member for Climate Change, Environment & Transport, Cllr Andrea Davis, said: "It's marvellous to see the Dartmoor Line celebrating its first anniversary, and passing a remarkable 250,000 journeys in the last 12 months demonstrates the transformational impact the return of rail services has had on Okehampton, West Devon and North Cornwall.

"I'm so pleased to see the station building brought back into use too. Much like the integrated bus services from the station to the likes of Tavistock, Bude and Launceston, it's another example of the first-class partnership working between Devon County Council, GWR, Network Rail and others that exemplifies rail as an economic driver, not just tracks and trains."

The Dartmoor Line offers links for work, study and leisure travel. It benefits students heading to the colleges in Exeter as well as tourists travelling to Dartmoor, easing congestion on local roads and helping boost the local economy.

Central Devon MP, Mel Stride, said: "The Dartmoor Line has been a huge success. It has done everything I hoped it would – it has boosted the local economy, provided a valuable service for more than 10,000 residents in and around Okehampton and it has taken cars off the A30.

"The key now is securing additional funds for a second station on the eastern edge of town – something I am working closely with local councillors and campaigners to achieve. This will maximise the economic benefit and reduce congestion in the town."

Photo credit: Great Western Railway