

Dartmoor Line regular passenger services restart after almost 50 years

November 22, 2021



Regular passenger services have resumed on the Dartmoor Line.

Passengers have been waiting for this particular service quite a long time – nearly 50 years in fact, since the service was slashed through the Beeching cuts.

Now, because of the Restoring Your Railway initiative, a full passenger service has been put in place, starting last Saturday.

As a result, two-hourly seven-days-a-week services will be operated by Great Western Railway (GWR) with journey times between Okehampton and Exeter, including stopping at Crediton, taking approximately 40 minutes.

Network Rail, GWR and the Department for Transport (DfT) alongside project partners Devon County Council, Devon & Cornwall Rail Partnership and Dartmoor Railway Association (DRA) have worked collaboratively together to reopen this line ahead of schedule and under budget.

It received £40.5m of UK Government funding. Benefitting from the application of “Rail Project SPEED” approaches, this 14-mile stretch of mothballed former freight railway has been transformed in just nine months and completed more than £10m under budget.

To make the restoration possible, Network Rail’s team of engineers carried out a project which involved laying 11 miles of new track, installing 24,000 concrete sleepers and 29,000 tonnes of ballast in a record-breaking 20-day period.

Network Rail has also repaired 21 structures along the route, including four 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.

The route connects Exeter St Davids, Crediton and Okehampton, providing a launchpad for visitors to explore Dartmoor and regional links for local commuters. Around half of services, including at peak times, will also carry on to Exeter Central. Passengers travelling between Crediton and Exeter will also benefit from an increase in service frequency.

It is expected the reopening will boost local businesses, the tourism sector, and provide greater access to education and work for thousands of people who live locally.

Station facilities at Okehampton include new information screens, a help point, smartcard validation points, ticket vending machines, and a waiting room. More work will be carried out over the winter, including further work on the station buildings to enable the restoration of the café and other facilities.

Network Rail’s Wales & Western regional managing director, Michelle Handforth, said: “I am delighted that today marks the return of much anticipated regular passenger services between Exeter and Okehampton.

“This is something that the local community and our partners have wanted for a very long time and I am thrilled through the close working of the project partners, the Dartmoor Line is opening ahead of schedule and under budget.

“I would like to pay tribute to our project team and engineers whose commitment and hard work has got us here today as we celebrate the return of regular passenger services for the first time in nearly 50 years.”

GWR managing director, Mark Hopwood, 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

“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.”