The Train at Platform 1

The Friends of Honiton Station Newsletter 73 - April 2026

Welcome to the April newsletter. This month's newsletter focuses on the theme of All Change. There are reports about the opening of the Railway Kitchen, work to re-decorate the station and engineering work near the station. We report on future engineering work, including some which sees the return of the Honiton Shuttle over the Easter weekend, and on the latest news from SWR about work to re-frame the timetable next year and to create a long-term plan for the line. There is much to hope for, much to anticipate, but also much to keep campaigning for.

All Change: Work Continues to Improve Honiton Station

March saw several important projects undertaken at Honiton Station. As previously announced, contractors were on site painting the station.

Areas worked on included the light poles, the metal fence on Platform 2, the wooden fences, and the external surfaces of the waiting room, including the canopy and supports. The inside of the waiting room was also given a coat of paint, despite the fact that this received attention more recently than the rest of the station, when it was completely redecorated inside.

Train services were replaced by buses during the weekend of March 7th and 8th, while work was carried out on several parts of the line. While the main focus was replacing track west of Yeovil

Junction, the opportunity was also taken to complete a project to improve the area used by Network Rail to access the track just west of the platform at Honiton to store and move equipment to and from the line. During the works, which continued after the line was re-opened, a new access gate was built, new solid surfaces constructed to and across the tracks for the carrying of equipment, and a new base was built to the storage area near the track.

This work shows a long-term commitment by Network Rail to using Honiton Station as a base for work in the area. The key downside of this, of course, is that the location of the access is such that when it is in use, trains are unable to use the station from either direction, negating the possibility of a shuttle service during line closures.

Important Engineering Work Sees Changes to Easter Train Services

Over the Easter weekend, Friday 3rd to Monday 6 April, Network Rail engineers will be replacing the stretch of track on the West of England Line that runs through Seaton Junction, to the west of Axminster. Buses will replace trains between Yeovil Junction and Honiton all day and then extend between Yeovil Junction and Exeter St Davids after 1800.

Network Rail say that the track through Seaton Junction has reached the end of its natural life and this renewal will ensure passengers have a smoother and more reliable journey. Once this track has been replaced, a tamper will be brought in to ensure it is in its optimal alignment to allow services to run smoothly over the line.

Engineers will also assess drainage and inspect structures in the Crewkerne area to ensure the continued safe running of trains.

Trains from London Waterloo to Exeter St Davids will finish their journeys at Yeovil Junction.
A two-hourly shuttle train service will run between Honiton and Exeter St Davids during the day.

Trains from Honiton to Exeter will run between 0814 and 1814. Train services from Exeter to Honiton will run between 0725 and 1725. On Sunday 5 April, the shuttle train service will start later, but will finish at the same time.

Buses will replace trains between Yeovil Junction and Honiton and will call at both Crewkerne and Axminster.

From 1800 until the end of service, two buses will run between Yeovil and Exeter Central.
Both buses will call at Crewkerne, Axminster and Honiton and Exeter Central with one of those buses also calling at Cranbrook and Pinhoe.

Speaking on behalf of South Western Railway and Network Rail Wessex, George Murrell, Route Renewals Director, said:

“We are sorry to be closing the West of England Line between Yeovil Junction and Honiton this weekend. We understand that the railway is important to the communities we serve on this line and we have endeavoured to minimise the disruption this closure will bring.

“This essential work will help improve reliability and future journeys for passengers.”

Railway Kitchen Opens at Honiton Station

We were delighted to welcome the Railway Kitchen to Honiton recently, as it officially opened its hatch on Thursday 12th March. This marks the brand's second location on the South Western Railway estate, following the successful launch of its first café at Axminster.

The new Honiton outlet strengthens Railway Kitchen's growing presence across the rail network, providing passengers with a convenient, high-quality refreshment offer tailored to the station environment. Due to the compact nature of the premises, the café will focus on a carefully curated range of hot and cold drinks, freshly baked pastries, and grab-and-go snacks, ensuring quick service for both regular commuters and leisure travellers.

Designed to complement the character of Honiton station, the unit offers a practical and welcoming stop for customers looking for a quality refreshment option before travelling or while waiting for services. The opening reflects ongoing investment in improving station facilities and enhancing the customer experience across the South Western Railway estate.
Jack Price, Managing Director of Railway Kitchen, commented:

"We're delighted to be opening at Honiton station today and to be bringing Railway Kitchen to its second South Western Railway location. Following the positive response at Axminster, Honiton felt like a natural next step. "While the space is compact, we've designed the offer to deliver exactly what passengers want, great coffee, quality drinks and fresh pastries, served quickly and consistently. We're proud to be part of the station and look forward to serving the local community and rail users alike."

Photograph: The Mayor and Deputy Mayor officially open The Railway Kitchen Honiton

In a statement, South Western Railway said that the opening of Railway Kitchen at Honiton continues their commitment to supporting independent operators and enhancing station amenities, ensuring that even smaller stations benefit from thoughtful, high-quality retail investment.

Revised Opening Hours:

Monday to Friday 7.30 a.m. to 2 p.m. Saturday 7.30 a.m. to 12.30 p.m.

Easter Opening Hours: Good Friday and Easter Saturday 8.30 a.m. to 11.30 a.m.
(hours may be extended, depending on customer demand)

Please note that the Railway Kitchen will be closed on Easter Sunday and Bank Holiday Monday

East Devon Forum Discusses Future of Line

On Thursday March 12th, key stakeholders met at The Beehive in Honiton as part of the East Devon Line Stakeholder Forum.

The meeting was chaired by Councillor Todd Olive, and featured presentations by Andrew Ardley, Regional Development Manager for SWR, and Richard Burningham, Manager of the Devon and Cornwall Rail Partnership. Also in attendance was Councillor Richard Jefferies, County Councillor for Honiton and Feniton.

Richard Burningham confirmed at the start of the meeting that he is retiring at the beginning of June. He has been of huge importance to the development of Community Rail in the two counties, and indeed nationally. And he was worked closely with us here at Honiton over so many years; he will be sorely missed. We will write a proper appreciation of Richard and his legacy nearer the time of his retirement, but we wish him well in all that he does when he retires.

Much of Andrew's presentation to the meeting drew on SWR's detailed report to the SERUG AGM (see previous newsletters). However, throughout his talk, Andrew updated everyone on progress since that time.

He confirmed that the Access for All plan for Yeovil Junction is now at the "Detailed Design" phase, hoping to progress further shortly to seek Government approval. The new access to the platform at Feniton is now in place; sadly the car park there is no longer free to use!

He reported that, with further franchises entering nationalisation shortly, the whole of the southern and south eastern parts of England will be in public ownership from May this year.

The Inspiration Train for Railway 200 had paid a very successful visit to Salisbury Station recently. Wherever it has gone on the SWR network, it had been a success.

Throughout his talk, Andrew demonstrated that the key driver in everything SWR is doing is improving performance. Whether the 3-year Business Plan, the timetable project or the West of England Line Modernisation Plan, everything was oriented towards improving performance.

Andrew updated the graphs on service performance. There were still days when performance falls off, often due to infrastructure failures, such as the recent signalling issues west of Salisbury and at Grateley. Looking forward, a number of things might help the line recover more effectively from such failures as GBR progresses, such as being able to share crew between operators or to use other units.

The Timetable Transformation project is now well under way. Formal proposals are expected to go out to consultation this Autumn. Ideas can already be fed into the process through a dedicated website.

Much now depends on the success of the WOE Line Modernisation Plan. The central part of this is the replacement of the rolling stock by the mid-2030s. Seat capacity on the service will be crucial, as demand continues to rise, and with Local Plans estimating that as many as 72 000 new homes could be built along the line between Exeter and Basingstoke.

The DfT is believed to be keen to see rolling stock plans be more integrated across the wider network, so that, for instance, GWR and SWR do not pursue different procurement strategies. All this is made more complex because the trains will continue to leased from companies which will be remaining in private hands.

A first draft of what the plan might look like is due this Spring. A Stakeholder Board is being formed to be part of the continuing process, as the plan evolves into its final form. A group of local MPs is also being brought together, to encourage them to work together in supporting the line.

In the meanwhile, efforts continue to explore how to fund and secure go ahead for the line improvements necessary for Devon Metro in East Devon. In response to a question from Todd, everyone was reminded that is likely to be a long process, although hopes continue for meeting the mid-2030s target.

Richard updated attendees about the Jurassic Coast by Train project as it continues to develop and grow. Integrated transport, through ticketing and other initiatives are being developed with a range of partners. The Seaton Sunday bus to Axminster is returning for the Summer season. Posters across the SWR network and social media are promoting the Jurassic Coast as a destination.

Richard highlighted plans for a range of projects over the next year linked to local stations including Honiton and Axminster, involving the Poetry Postie (look out for further details later) led by Sally Crabtree. He also trailed the possibility of a walk across Cannington Viaduct in September.

At the end of the meeting, Martin thanked SWR and Richard to supporting the Railway 200 event at the station last July, which included a cake cutting and the unveiling of a plaque as a permanent reminder of the anniversary.

He also thanked SWR for supporting the Friends as they raised awareness of the Samaritans and their Brew Monday campaign at an event at the station. It is hoped to build on this event further in 2027 with another local event.

It was sad to note that several times during his report Andrew had had to reflect on the death of people who had come to the railway with the intention of taking their own life. Everything that we can continue to do to support the work of Samaritans, railway companies, the British Transport Police, Network Rail and others to reduce the tragic toll that we have continued to see recently (for instance at Raynes Park) is so important.

News from Looe: An Interesting Project Idea

It is always interesting to shine a light on relevant projects being undertaken at other stations in the region. Therefore, we were pleased to hear about how pupils from Looe Primary School has visited Looe Station on Wednesday 11 March to launch a new poster they designed to promote rail travel on the Looe Valley Line. With support from GWR, the children were taken on a familiarisation trip along the scenic line between Looe and Liskeard with the Devon and Cornwall Rail Partnership.

They drew sketches of everything they saw on the trip and learnt about the history of the railway and how it shaped Looe. Back in class, the sketches were turned into bright and colourful pictures of beach scenes, the town and the children's favourite things about living in Looe.

The posters will be on display at a number of stations across the Great Western Railway network.

Rebecca Catterall, development officer with Devon and Cornwall Rail Partnership, said:

"The children had a great day, enjoying travelling by train and learning about the railway. We are hoping this new poster will encourage people to visit Looe by train too."

Nick Bowden, class teacher from Looe Primary school, said:

"We were really excited to be involved in this project. The children are so proud of their artwork and are looking forward to spotting it at stations."

Sharon Holloway, Great Western Railway station manager for East Cornwall, said:

"We're delighted to support this wonderful project and see the Looe Valley Line through the eyes of local children. Their artwork brilliantly captures what makes this scenic route so special and we hope it inspires families across the region to discover Looe by train. Projects like this remind us that railways aren't just about getting from A to B; they're about connecting communities, sparking curiosity, and creating memories that last a lifetime."

News from Looe: DCRP Wins Community Rail Award

And talking of Looe, among the winners at March's Community Rail Awards Community Rail Awards were our good friends at the Devon & Cornwall Rail Partnership (DCRP), who scooped the Tourism and Leisure Award. for their project 'More Time in Looe.'

The Looe Valley line's improved May 2025 timetable was a story of community rail and the tourism sector working together to deliver greater value for the rail network, visitor economy and local communities.

The project began when a hotelier in Looe reported to DCRP that her guests would benefit from quicker connections with the main line at Liskeard and improved stopping patterns at intermediate stations.

DCRP liaised with GWR, who were able to turn these local transport priorities into a reality. The timetable changes meant that journeys to Looe from Plymouth were up to 20 minutes quicker than before. DCRP took the initiative further, working with a range of tourism partners across a variety of media to promote the timetable and Looe's leisure offer, helping the line enjoy its busiest summer on record.

Visit Looe and Looe Town Council spokesperson, Tegan Bould, said:

"The DCRP team has been an outstanding support to Visit Looe. As a very small team, the videos they have created have been a huge win for us: high quality, informative and extremely well received. The content brilliantly showcases the railway links while also promoting Looe as a destination.

"By highlighting local attractions and involving businesses, the team has not only raised the profile of the area but also helped to support and strengthen the local economy."

In deciding on these prestigious awards, judges reviewed more than 300 entries from across Britain, showcasing the extraordinary work taking place in towns, villages and cities to connect communities with their railways.

Community Rail Network chief executive, Jools Townsend, said:

"Our Community Rail Awards are a national celebration of the remarkable partnerships and community led innovation taking place across Britain to strengthen the bond between railways and the communities they serve.

"This year's winners show how community rail enriches local places, builds travel confidence, champions inclusion, and turns stations into catalysts for connection, opportunity and positive change."

GWR Managing Director, Mark Hopwood, said:

"We're incredibly proud of the work our Community Rail Partnerships do. They continue to deliver a host of worthwhile projects and I was delighted to see them gain such deserved recognition at the 21st Community Rail Awards. They have great local knowledge and I know that they all work incredibly hard, as volunteers, inspiring sustainable improvements to their communities and the local economy."

Engineering Report for April and May

Friday 3rd to Monday 6th April

The line will be closed between Yeovil and Honiton between the 3rd and 6th inclusive, for work on the Crewkerne Tunnel Cutting earthworks and track replacement at Seaton Junction (see separate notice in this newsletter).

Waterloo to Exeter St Davids services will terminate and start at Yeovil Junction, and a two-hourly rail shuttle service will operate between Honiton and Exeter St Davids during what SWR describe as "daylight hours". The shuttle trains will call at all stations.

The first train will leave Exeter St Davids at 0725 (0925 on Sunday), returning from Honiton at 0810 (Friday), 0815 (Saturday and Monday), or 1016 (on Sunday).

The last train will leave Exeter at 1725, returning from Honiton at 1814. Replacement buses will run every two hours between Yeovil Junction and Honiton calling at Crewkerne and Axminster to connect with the shuttle service.

On opposite hours to the shuttle service, two buses will operate between Yeovil Junction and Exeter St Davids, with one calling at Crewkerne, Axminster, Honiton and Exeter Central, and one calling at Crewkerne, Axminster, Honiton, Cranbrook, Pinhoe and Exeter Central.

The latter services become hourly after shuttle service stops running. Some evening buses will call additionally at Feniton and Whimple.

Sunday April 19th

The lines in the Salisbury area will be closed all day due to maintenance work.

London Waterloo to Exeter services will start from Gillingham. A revised service will run between London Waterloo and Andover.

Buses will run between Andover and Gillingham (non-stop). Buses will also run between Andover and Gillingham via Salisbury.

Saturday April 25th

The lines between Woking and Basingstoke will be closed all day due to maintenance work.

London Waterloo to Exeter St Davids services will start from Basingstoke.

London Waterloo to Salisbury stopping services will start from Reading.

London Waterloo to Basingstoke stopping services will not run. Additional services will run between London Waterloo and Woking.

Buses will run between Woking and Basingstoke (non-stop). Buses will also run between Woking and Basingstoke via Farnborough.

Sunday April 26th

The lines in the Basingstoke area will be closed all day due to maintenance work.

London Waterloo to Exeter St Davids services will start from Andover and will call additionally at Grateley.

London Waterloo to Basingstoke stopping services will not run.

Buses will run between Woking and Andover via Guildford and Basingstoke.

Saturday May 9th

The lines between Woking and Basingstoke will be closed all day due to maintenance work.

London Waterloo to Exeter St Davids services will start from Basingstoke.

Buses will run between Woking and Basingstoke (non-stop).

Buses will run between Woking and Basingstoke via Farnborough.

Additional services will run between London Waterloo and Woking.

Sunday May 10th

The lines in the Basingstoke area will be closed all day due to maintenance work.

London Waterloo to Exeter St Davids services will start from Andover and will call additionally at Grateley.

A revised service will run between London Waterloo and Woking.

Buses will run between Woking and Basingstoke.

Buses will also run between Woking and Andover via Basingstoke.

Sunday May 17th

The lines in the Salisbury area will be closed all day due to maintenance work.

London Waterloo to Exeter St Davids services will start from Gillingham.

A revised service will run between London Waterloo and Andover.

Buses will run between Andover and Gillingham (non-stop).

Buses will run between Andover and Gillingham via Salisbury.

Saturday 30th and Sunday May 31st

The lines in the New Malden area will be closed all weekend due to maintenance work.

Saturday

London Waterloo to Exeter St Davids services will be revised (see further announcements later).

London Waterloo to Salisbury stopping services will start from Basingstoke.

London Waterloo to Basingstoke stopping services will start from Woking.

London Waterloo to Woking stopping services will start from Surbiton.

Sunday

London Waterloo to Exeter St Davids services will be revised with some services starting from Basingstoke.

London Waterloo to Basingstoke stopping services will start from Woking and will run hourly.

Class 175 Update

Our friends at the Avocet Line Rail Users Group (ALRUG) recently gave its members an update on the introduction of the Class 175 diesel units which were previously operated by Transport for Wales. We previously reported that these are to be gradually introduced on local routes operated by GWR.

ALRUG reports that, in their words, *"the units did not take kindly to their storage between leaving Wales and subsequently making their way to the West Country, resulting in the need for remedial work and unreliability."*

Hopefully the necessary work can be completed quickly so that these trains can be introduced more widely as soon as possible.

Initially the Class 175 units are due to operate Exeter to Penzance services. The plan is that they will then form Barnstaple and Okehampton services, replacing the Class 150 units on those lines.

ALRUG believes that it is unlikely that these units will operate on the North Devon lines out of Exeter much before the end of this year. This is likely to lead to some short-formed trains.

Honiton Through Time

We learned last month that Honiton Town Council (HTC) is considering ways to: *"transform Honiton from a brief stop-over town into a place where visitors slow down, explore, and understand its history. The concept aligns with growing tourism trends including: slow travel, walking tourism, heritage storytelling (and) car-free exploration."*

One of the ways proposed in a paper, written by Councillor Chris Doran and submitted to a council committee, is a Walking Heritage Experience which they called Honiton Through Time.

This walk was described as “a self-guided walking experience that allows visitors to explore the town through several historical layers while also connecting the High Street to the surrounding countryside.”

The project would include physical interpretation points along the High Street, digital storytelling accessible by mobile phone, walking routes beginning at the railway station, and connections to the Trafalgar Way and the wider East Devon landscape.

We have explored the possibilities of guided and self-guided walks over some years, with the Friends involved in creating the interpretive board and self-guided walk that were part of the Telling Our Stories, Finding Our Roots project.

We have been part of trialling several guided walks, both those created by our Chairman and those written by local historical researcher and author Terry Darrant.

We also worked with our colleagues at Devon and Cornwall Rail Partnership and the Blackmore Vale Community Rail Partnership to create a design for a self-guided walk and quiz.

Therefore, we support wholeheartedly work to examine how such a project might be taken forward. We note that HTC is considering how local groups and organisations might be involved in the planning and delivery of such a project. They mention as possible partners:

The Trafalgar Way organisation - Honiton Museum – Ignyte – Friends of Honiton Station – Devon Tourism Board - Heritage Lottery Fund – Arts Council – local charities – volunteer groups - walking groups - cycling groups.

As The Friends of Honiton Station, we would look forward to playing our role in developing this project.

Those behind it suggest that the project could be developed in four phases:

Phase 1 – Feasibility and Research: confirm historical themes - map potential walking route locations - consult local organisations - confirm project partners.

Phase 2 – Content Creation: commission historical illustrations - write short interpretive stories - develop audio narration.

Phase 3 – Design and Installation: create the digital walking experience - install plaques and route markers - print maps and promotional materials.

Phase 4 – Launch and Promotion: coordinate with local tourism promotion - link to Trafalgar Way heritage routes - promote through Visit Devon and rail tourism channels.

Should Honiton Town Council decide to explore this project, we look forward to being involved from Phase 1.

We believe that we would be able to provide assistance, support and insights in a number of areas, as part of the project components outlined in HTC's brief, which are:

- Historical research and content development;
- Creation of illustrations showing the town in different eras;
- Recording of short audio narratives;
- Design of a mobile-friendly digital walking experience ;
- Installation of plaques or markers along the route;
- Creation of printed maps and online promotion ;
- Integration with Trafalgar Way heritage promotion.

Engineering Work Affects Crediton, Okehampton and Barnstaple

Services between Exeter and stations to Okehampton and to Barnstaple were cancelled for a week last month, while Network Rail carried out essential track renewals, structural surveys and other work at Chenson and between Barnstaple and Taw.

Between Saturday 21 and Sunday 29 March, engineers installed:
· 2.7 kilometres of track,
· 3,000 tonnes of ballast (track stone), and
· 4,236 sleepers.

The job involved teams of up to 80 workers out on track at the two locations, with engineering trains and Road Rail Vehicles (specialist diggers) and a tamping train to compact the new stone.

Making the most of the opportunity while trains aren't running, engineers also carried out:
· minor track adjustments,
· drainage checks and clearance,
· inspections on bridges, viaducts, retaining walls and signals, and
· minor lineside vegetation management.

Buses replaced trains throughout this period.

Young People Urged to Stay Off Railway Tracks Over Easter Holidays

With the Easter school holidays upon us, Network Rail issued a renewed safety appeal for young people to stay safe around the railway.

Trespassing is not only illegal but extremely dangerous. High-risk trespass incidents occur across the network, with many involving young people during school holiday periods.

These incidents are often driven by risk-taking behaviour, curiosity, peer pressure, or attempts to take shortcuts, rather than intentional criminal activity. However, the consequences can be life-changing.

Just one moment of poor judgement can result in life-altering injuries, emotional trauma for families and communities, and in the worst cases, a tragic loss of life.

By raising awareness ahead of the school holidays, Network Rail hopes to encourage young people to think twice, stay alert, and understand that the railway is never a place to take chances.

A spokesperson for Network Rail said:

"Easter brings more young people outdoors, and we want everyone to enjoy the break safely. The railway is never a place to take risks.

"We're asking families to speak openly about rail safety and remind children that the tracks are not a shortcut or a place to explore. A moment of curiosity can have serious consequences, and we're urging everyone to stay alert, stay safe, and stay off the tracks."

British Transport Police chief inspector Joe Gorman said:

"Trespassing on the railway is never worth the risk. It's illegal and puts lives in immediate danger. Trains travel far faster and quieter than people expect, they can't stop quickly, and electrified rails are always live. Every incident not only risks serious injury or worse but also causes major disruption for passengers and freight across the network."

Anyone who witnesses trespass on the railway is urged to contact BTP by texting 61016 or calling 999 in an emergency.

Railway to Unlock One Million Jobs and £79bn For UK Economy by 2036

In our latest "explainer" article, we highlight a recently published report - Growing Places - which tries to quantify some of the economy benefits our railway network brings, and the key ways in which railway stations can act as "catalysts for investment" and "anchors for growth", two phrases we should all get used to quoting at sceptical politicians and those who need to be persuaded as to why we think railways are so important.

Railway stations across the UK could unlock 1 million jobs and deliver £79 billion in economic value by 2036, according to new research published in March.

The findings, revealed in a new report from leading economic research consultancy Development Economics show how stations are anchors for growth. The report reveals the "Rail Catalyst Effect": how stations act as catalysts for investment, opportunity and prosperity across the UK.

Commissioned by Great Western Railway, the study analysed 11 locations on the GWR network, looking at how development around railway stations supports new homes, businesses and skilled jobs. The research uses these case studies to model the wider economic impact of regional rail investment across Britain.

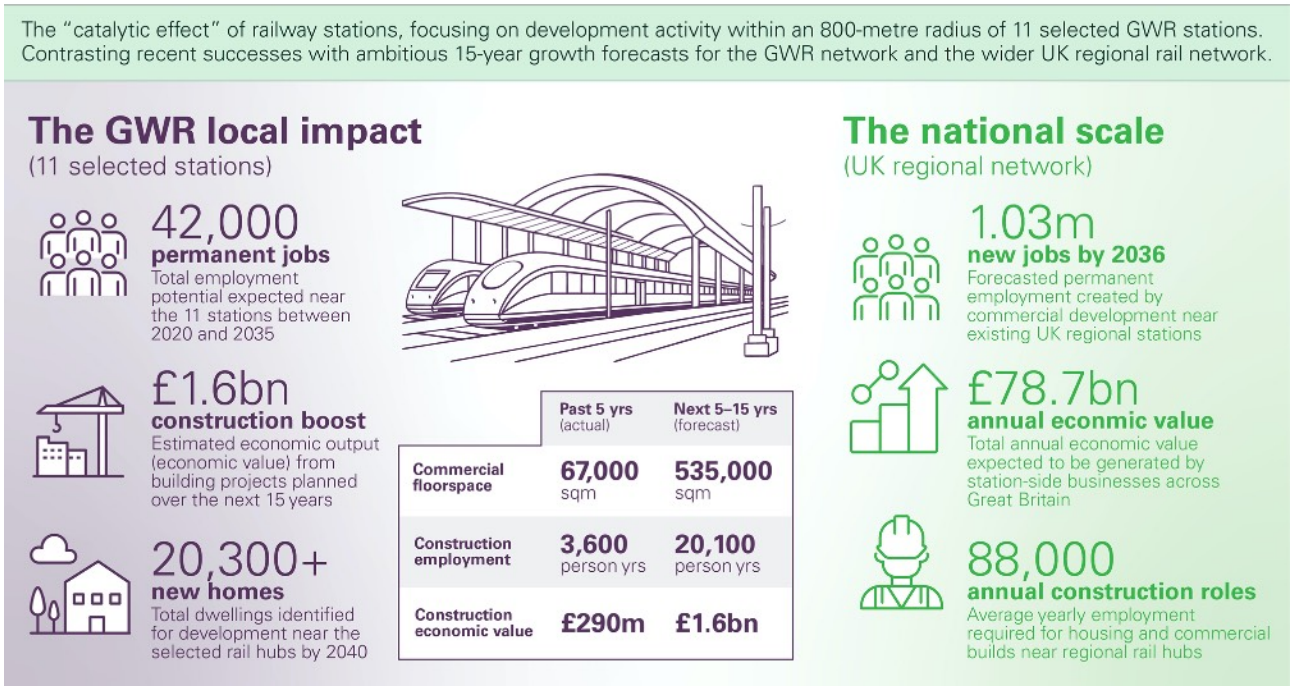
As new figures show unemployment in the UK sits at a five-year high of 5.2%, the report makes the case that continued investment in rail supports regional economies and unlocks future prosperity for communities across the UK. The research finds that development around UK railway stations could support more than 1 million permanent jobs by 2036, generating £78.7 billion for local and regional economies.

Around £64.6 billion - 82% of projected economic value - is expected to be generated near larger stations, with at least 580,000 passengers a year, such as Cambridge South and Birmingham Interchange. Over the next decade, construction activity alone near regional stations is expected to contribute £7.1 billion, providing an immediate boost to jobs, businesses and supply chains.

Mark Hopwood, Managing Director, GWR, said:

"The findings of this report are clear: the railway, its stations, and the trains that serve them are powerful drivers of economic growth, community prosperity and regeneration.

"Across our network, development around the railway is delivering thousands of homes, new commercial space and thousands of jobs, generating hundreds of millions of pounds in economic value for the communities we serve. I'm pleased to see the railway recognised as a key part of the Government's plans to support the continued growth of towns and cities across the country."



When applying the same model across the Great Western Railway network, railway stations are projected to create 238,000 jobs and £14.25 billion in annual economic value by 2036, much of it in high-skilled sectors such as professional services and technology, bringing opportunity closer to where people live.

Similarly, across just nine stations in the South West and South Wales, development within an 800-metre radius over the past five years has delivered 3,500 new homes, 67,000 square metres of commercial space, supported 4,500 jobs, and generated £328 million in annual economic value.

Beyond the economic impact, railway stations play a vital role in driving social mobility and widening opportunity, particularly for those without access to a car, which accounts for around 22% of households in England. With over 1.6 billion passenger journeys made each year, rail is enabling access to opportunity at scale, shaping where people can work, learn and build their futures.

Jon Shaw, Professor of Transport Geography at University of Plymouth, and Chair of the Devon & Cornwall Rail Partnership said:

"Across the South West and Wales and the UK as a whole, rail plays a critical social and economic role in the communities it serves. It connects people to jobs, skills and education, and supports housing growth by linking new and existing communities to centres of employment.

"At the same time it underpins sectors like construction, enabling the movement of materials and people we need to build the places we live and work in. It sustains our vibrant hospitality and tourism economy by bringing visitors into our towns, cities and coastal communities.

"For many businesses, reliable rail services are not simply a convenience; they are part of the foundation on which investment decisions are made."

To read the full report, go to: www.gwr.com/about-gwr/what-you-can-expect/community/growing-places