

*The Thinking Woman's Railway  
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All members,  
Dartmoor National Park Authority

## RAILWAY RECONSTRUCTION

Dear

### Ashburton Station

In 2004, at my own expense, I sent Dr. Atkinson a copy of the 300-page Railway Development Society (now *Railfuture*) *South West Rail Strategy*. It had no authority but was intended to provide information and perhaps guidance in the absence of any government directives on the subject. It mentioned Ashburton and the South Devon Railway's ambition to rebuild the line to the terminus. Officers, including Dr. Bishop, refuse to say whether the discussion document can be found at Parke.

If members of the forward planning team had consulted the paper merely as a pointer, they would surely have gone straight to the South Devon Railway. Instead it is clear that officers set their faces against the railway from the start, wrongly dubbing the site Chuley Road when by any reckoning the biggest and oldest feature is the former terminus.

Had the complex been called Ashburton Station, the railway interests would surely have mobilized immediately and by now would either have concrete plans or have had ample time to exhaust the idea of railway reconstruction. As it is, there are only the vaguest proposals which are all that is has been possible to table with such urgency.

But it is no use laying blame at any door. Taken from now, the task must be to satisfy the short term interests of the businesses that wish to relocate in a way that does not hamper future railway reconstruction.

At least another year is needed by the railway promoters to:-

- (i). complete a new engineering feasibility study;
- (ii). establish the real level of support within Ashburton and beyond for railway reconstruction; and
- (iii). present a preliminary case to funding bodies.

The multi-million pound sum that would be spent reinstating the line would not come to Ashburton by any other route. In any case, it may be

decades before the different elements of the present masterplan are brought to fruition. And yet what about this dull, conventional approach would really be such a great advantage to the town?

Please try to picture the gentle wave of people that would emerge from St. Lawrence Lane after the arrival of a train - the passengers looking for grub and gifts and things to do. Imagine the town's traders eyeing the clock in expectation of the swell. And all without a single extra car pushing into the narrow streets.

It should be understood that a steam railway is a form of public transport; it could be said that proponents are laying the ground for the future, when the line again becomes part of the national network.

The Exmoor authority has got behind the Lynton & Barnstaple Railway. Snowdonia rightly anticipated the effects of the Welsh Highland line. I would urge Dartmoor to embrace its railways. It could be that Ashburton is the first stirring of a general revival.

Yours sincerely,

Colin Burges

Encl.