

## PROJECT TO RE-OPEN RAIL LINK REVIVED

A CAMPAIGN to get Radstock back on the rails is being relaunched. Rail enthusiasts have joined residents in a bid to reopen a line to Frome, saying it could bring huge benefits to the local economy, ease traffic congestion and create a huge tourist attraction.

The project is seeking the reintroduction of passenger rail services between a new station at Radstock and the national network station at Frome.

The service would also operate heritage trains.

George Bailey, from Radstock, director of the North Somerset Railway Company and secretary of the North Somerset Railway Heritage Trust, the main organisations working towards the reopening of the track, said supporters in Somerset would be contacted soon in a bid to get the campaign on the move locally.

In Bath and North East Somerset, the groups have linked up with the Radstock Action Group. Its members are behind a campaign to preserve the town's former railway land, which is earmarked for a massive regeneration plan including 210 homes, together with shops and community buildings.

"We will be contacting councillors to support the project," said Mr Bailey.

The last train left Radstock in 1988, after repairs at the wagon works that once occupied the railway land which stretches across the town centre.

The land, now derelict, is scheduled for development by its owner, Norton Radstock Regeneration Company (NRR), and Bellway Homes.

But the sustainable transport group Sustrans has built a cycle track and walkway along the route of the former line, and Mr Bailey said a legal agreement with developers protects the infrastructure of the route.

Since 1988, there have been several campaigns to reopen the line, but they were dealt a severe blow in 2003 when the NRR board voted not to safeguard land for a future railway link within its own masterplan.

Jeremy Smalley, NRR's general manager at the time, said a railway impact study had shown it would not bring "significant economic benefit to the area that would outweigh the extra investment needed to make it a reality".

Heavy costs were forecast by the railway company four years before this decision was taken.

David Edwards, then its chairman, estimated it would make annual losses of up to 141,605 a year for the first seven years of operation with freight and passengers, although he believed that freight services would contribute about 50,000 a year to eventual profits.

The campaign went quiet until recently, but now, said Mr Bailey, it was about to get lively again.

He said: "The aims of the railway remain unchanged: to join Radstock Museum and other heritage railways in attracting visitors, so helping the local economy.

"Far too many people who live outside the area are unaware of its natural attractions."

A second aim is to provide a commuter route.

Initially, this would be to a station at Frome, but when the link is re-established, the commuting could be extended to Westbury and beyond, he said.

Third, the campaigners want to establish a freight line.

Mr Bailey said: "I am sure everyone wants to see fewer long-distance heavy lorries on our congested roads. "Because of the way in which the original railway was built, in theory it would be possible to convey continental containers direct to Radstock, although that is unlikely in the near future."

An early estimate was that the reopening would cost 1.25 million.

The railway company is reluctant to put an exact price on it at present.

"But we do think there would be 6 worth of benefit to the community for every 1 invested," said Mr Bailey.

"This would come through visitors to the district.

"They spend money, and that includes accommodation and visits to the museum."

He also thinks there could be tourism links to Midsomer Norton Station and the East Somerset Railway at Cranmore.

The Radstock Action Group is putting the need for a revived rail link high on its agenda, but has warned the planned development of the railway land threatens the project.

In a statement made for a protest meeting against the development, the group said: "Radstock is the historic centre of the former North Somerset Coalfield.

"Its unique wildlife habitats, its acclaimed town centre - now a conservation area - its industrial heritage and its chances of a renewed rail link are now under severe threat."

Mr Bailey said his group had nothing against building homes, but thought the railway could be accommodated too, and it would be asking for the current development concept to be reconsidered.

He is asking people who support the railway plan to visit [www.northsomersetrailway.com](http://www.northsomersetrailway.com).

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