

An alternative rail route to Bude, North Cornwall

Adrian Gannon - January 2026

Introduction

A study has been completed, on behalf of Connect North Cornwall to assess the potential of an extension of the railway (Dartmoor Line) beyond Okehampton toward and possibly through Launceston, down the spine of Cornwall (see Ref.1).

The investigation into the route proved that a line suitable for fast passenger and heavy freight, running close to the A30, is relatively easy, except for the descent from Sourton Down, west of Okehampton, and the crossing of the Tamar. Engineering options have been considered and documented for both these issues.

If this line were to serve only Launceston and the surrounding area it would be more cost effective to terminate it near Liftondown in Devon and avoid the cost of crossing the Tamar. It is suggested that this site, immediately adjacent to the A30, could be a good location for an intermodal logistics hub and rail freight terminal. In addition, it offers the potential for a possible branch line interchange for Bude, North Cornwall.

Proposed Route

Realistically, extending the branch line to Bude from Liftondown is unlikely to offer good value for money based on current Government policy. Alternatively, if a mainline solution were to be adopted, extending the line further along the A30 corridor, then the social/economic argument for a branch to Bude, North Cornwall could become more favourable, providing an East/West interchange at Launceston.

The studies to date have assumed a heavy rail solution. This offers a more sustainable, robust railway for remote rail operations but comes at a considerable engineering cost. It may well be credible to investigate a light rail solution for any branch line beyond Launceston particularly if heavy freight is not considered viable beyond any proposed mainline. Light rail would be cheaper to implement and would relax gradient constraints enabling easier route planning.

Extending the proposed line beyond Launceston to Bude or introducing a branch line from Launceston to Bude is a possibility. The topography of the area naturally leads one to consider a potential route following the upper Tamar valley. Historically, this route was chosen for the Launceston branch of the Bude Canal in the 1700's. Notably, the canal left its original mainline at Red Post Cross and then descended the upper Tamar valley towards a terminus at Druxton Wharf near Launceston.

A potential station at Liftondown, sitting above the Tamar valley, would provide a suitable interchange for a branch to Bude.

Using modern engineering practice to construct a new railway whether it be heavy or light rail should be relatively easy given the well defined structure of the valley, agricultural land and sparse population. Some engineering challenges exist and a preliminary engineering study will be required to investigate any issues. Earthworks will be required along the length of the route but given the contours there is the potential for a spoil neutral option along the length of the proposed line.

A table top exercise has been conducted using OS maps to assess potential route options at a high level, see below.

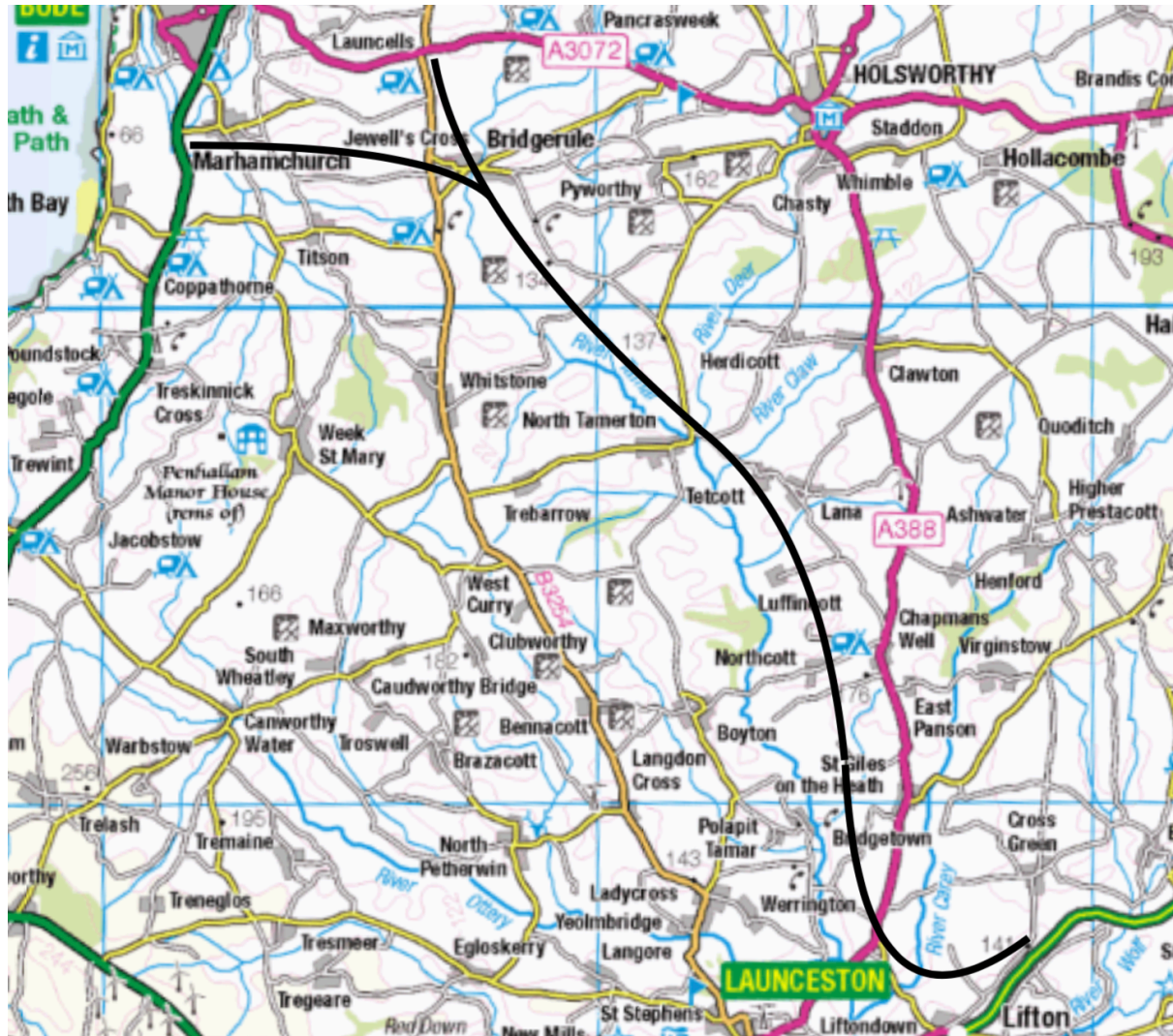
The following areas have been identified as “in need of further investigation”:

- (1) crossing the River Carey & A388 on leaving Liftondown;
- (2) routing near North Tamerton;
- (3) river Tamar crossing(s) where required

No significant engineering structures are envisaged but the railway may well need to transverse the upper river Tamar at more than one location as it progresses up the valley.

The upper Tamar valley has a flood plain and is subjected to flash flooding events therefore careful consideration will need to be given to the Environment Agency ~2050 flood predictions to ensure any proposed route is well clear of the water table over its likely lifespan.

Studies have been conducted previously to assess potential railway termini in the Bude area (see Ref.2). Two options considered were (1) Helscott Farm on the original LSWR route & (2) a new station at Red Post Cross. Both options appear viable for integration into an upper Tamar valley branch.



Red Post Cross offers the most potential, enabling the route to continue up the upper Tamar valley adjacent to the former Bude Canal branch from Launceston. A railhead at Red Post could serve the greater Bude area, Kilkhampton, North Devon and provide station access to developments on the west side of Holsworthy. Red Post Cross offers considerable development potential and requires less engineering to deliver a solution.

A station at Helscott Farm is unlikely to pass scrutiny due to limited transport interconnectivity, potential flood risk in the adjacent area and greater engineering challenge in accessing the original LSWR route from Bridgerule. It should be noted, the route of the existing railway has long since been released into private ownership and therefore the origin trackbed is no longer readily available. How to access the original LSWR line at Bridgerule from the new route would require further investigation. It would be wrong to discount this

option from the outset and any future study would need to at least consider the merits of this option.

Conclusion

No further studies are recommended until any potential extension of the existing Dartmoor line to Launceston has been fully considered and assessed.

Subject to the above, a preliminary engineering study is required particularly focused around the areas of interest identified to ensure a suitable sustainable, robust route can be delivered. It is assumed that a station at Red Post Cross would be the preferred railhead for North Cornwall but other sites may well be viable. The potential for a light rail option should be considered as part of any future engineering studies and would provide easier route planning.

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Reviewed: David Hill-Smith

Ref.1: "Reconnecting Launceston to the Rail Network: A30 Corridor: Okehampton to Launceston" dated 7 September 2025, David Hill-Smith.

Ref.2: "Okehampton to Bude Rail Reopening: The Challenges" dated 16 January 2025, David Hill-Smith.