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Saltash – The case for better rail services

**Prepared by Saltash Town Council
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Introduction

Saltash is a thriving town in South East Cornwall. Saltash is the largest town between Plymouth and St Austell. It has a lively town centre and stunning Waterside areas along the Tamar and Lynher Rivers.

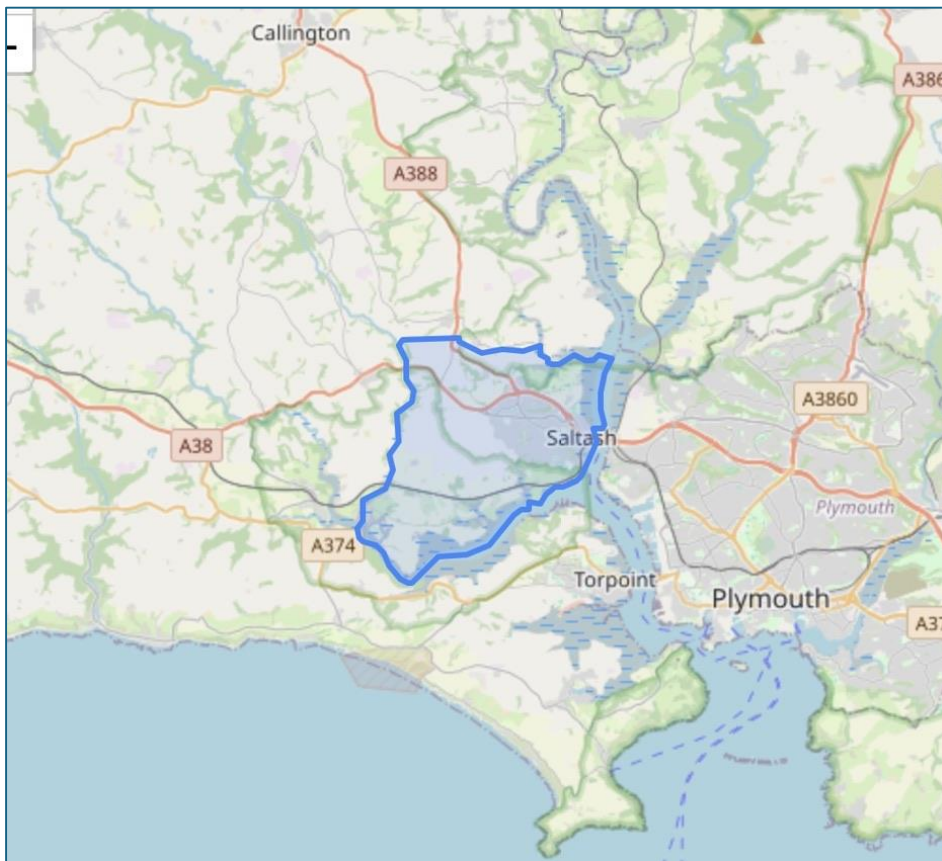
Saltash is largely dependent on the city of Plymouth for employment, healthcare, further education and large scale retail and leisure activities.

The population is around 20,000 with additional catchment to the north (Hatt, St Mellion, Callington, Cargreen, Landulph and beyond), east (western Plymouth) and west (Tideford, Landrake). The total catchment is around 40,000 people.

New housing currently under construction will provide an additional 1000 homes with potential for more.

Improving rail services and facilities will deliver well understood outcomes such as environmental and safety benefits alongside benefiting businesses and enabling better transport options for all.

You can see the town boundary is largely river to the east and south limiting access.



The A38 cuts right through Saltash east to west with only the A388 to the north. The railway therefore provides a vital alternative link to the road network. There are no other routes in or out of Saltash to the east and south due to the rivers.

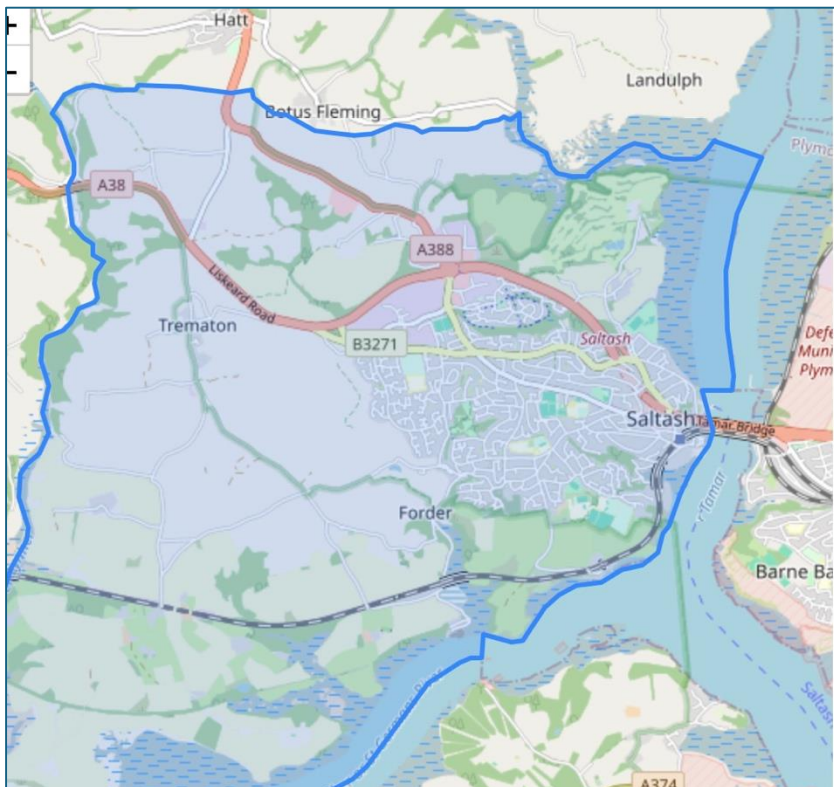
Saltash Tunnel refurbishment – from Summer 2025

Whilst this document is a stand alone case for rail improvements at Saltash. National Highways have announced extensive works to the Saltash Tunnel that are now scheduled for Summer 2025. This is considered to further increase the need and urgency for rail improvements, predominantly to the timetable.

National Highways have predicted that the disruption from works to the Saltash Tunnel are likely to cause up to 60 minute delays, 7 days a week for the duration of the works, estimated to be six months.

It is therefore likely that the A38 across the whole of the map below will form part of the tailback of traffic through Saltash as well as access from the town on and off the A38.

Last year, when the lane control system failed for a day, the actual disruption which included long tailbacks on the A38 and within Saltash were in line with the above predictions.



The map above shows how constrained Saltash is by the rivers with only the A38 and A388 as routes in or out of the town.

About Saltash Station

Saltash Station is in the town centre of Saltash, close to shops, businesses, bus routes, Beryl bike stands, Cornwall Council Car Parks and the river for ferry services.

Saltash Station is within walking distance of most of Saltash and we are focused on promoting and improving the walking routes, not only as a sustainable and healthy mode of travel, but as a way to avoid the traffic chaos predicted during the tunnel works.

Car Parking

The lack of rail related parking has often been cited as a reason why Saltash rail services have not been improved. This is an unnecessary distraction. There is significant car parking available within easy reach of the station, but more importantly most of Saltash is within 20 - 30 minutes walking time of the town centre and station.

Beyond the 10 free spaces at the station and a considerable amount of on street parking close by, in terms of car parks, there are two within a couple of minutes walk at Alexandra Square and Culver Road with 134 spaces between them. Two further Cornwall Council pay car parks are approximately 5 – 7 minutes away from the station at Belle View West and Belle View East with 116 spaces between them.

Further to this there are two free Cornwall Council car parks on Callington Road and Old Ferry Road that are around a 15 minutes walk from the station.



The image above shows Saltash station to the right and the closest two Cornwall Council car parks within a couple of minutes walk.

Footfall trends

Saltash station footfall is growing strongly, up around 55,000 in the last 5 years. Liskeard is down around 40,000 over the same period but is obviously higher due to having more calls. **NB** Liskeard has almost half the population of Saltash.

The 2022/23 footfall figures show 137,000 journeys recorded. (ORR data)

The 2023/24 figures released in November 2024 show a further 5.6% rise to 144,698 journeys.

Station Service enhancements

Saltash Town Council have developed the former station building over the last few years. The building now offers a wide range of events and opportunities. A café is also operational within the building, providing a good range of refreshments. Members of the public can use this as a waiting room which also provides an accessible public toilet with baby change facilities.

Lighting and footway improvements have been made by the Town Council and Cornwall Council which has improved safety and security in the station area. Further enhancements to the walking routes are planned in the next six months with new yellow lining and way finding.

Accessibility

As mentioned above, walking routes have been improved and there is a step free route between platforms via the Culver Road Bridge.

The stepping distance between a train and platform on Platform 2 is large and requires care when using. This has not prevented the large increases in footfall at Saltash station.

The lack of years of investment by the rail industry and government could be resolved through the latest initiative to bring forward the best possible plan to resolve the issue through platform modifications. Further increases in footfall are likely to increase the value of any accessibility improvements. The Pre-PACE Network Rail report is attached to this report and includes options to address the large gap between the platform edge and train as well as platform extension to the west of platform 2 to enable more carriages to be accessible.

Rail Timetable

The simple request, is that all passenger services that pass through Saltash should make a call. This would ensure there are no gaps in provision such as those that are currently around one hour at times and would offer better resilience when services are cancelled. Saltash deserves the 'Half hourly' service that much of Cornwall receives.

There is no reason to offer Saltash a lesser service than smaller population centres like Liskeard that currently have all trains calling.

We acknowledge that all station calls have an impact on timetables and the operation of the railways. It is considered that adding a call at Saltash into services that currently pass through will have a minor impact and could serve to make the timetable more even throughout the day. It would add a more consistent service pattern too with better connections throughout Cornwall, better connecting Saltash.

As the line speed through Saltash is just 15 mph, it is significantly easier for any non-stopping service to make a call with minimal timetable impact.

Supporting Strategic Transport aims

Improving rail services at Saltash by increasing the timetable and over time, increasing accessibility and facilities is in line with the Local Transport Plans for both Cornwall and Plymouth. There is support from our MP and our local Community Area Partnership. For the Town Council itself, improving and promoting sustainable public transport is a key strategic priority.

In particular, during the Saltash Tunnel works, rail is likely going to provide the only reliable, usable transport option for many in Saltash, and as such will see a significant increase in use. Improving the timetable will offer a complete service.

The result of the combined effect of the disruption caused by the Saltash Tunnel works and an improved timetable is likely to bring a very significant modal shift to rail that will in many cases be sustained once the works are complete.