

# Western Morning News

THE VOICE OF THE WESTCOUNTRY

## Westcountry voice must be loud enough to be heard

It will be hoped that the latest commentary on the Dawlish rail line can provide the impetus for a long-term solution to finally be found for an issue which has dragged on for too long already.

But Sir John Armit's comments, at a round table conference in Exeter last week, suggest that there is more at stake for the region than simply a rail connection.

A former chief of Network Rail, Sir John is amply qualified to speak about the problems of the rail line at Dawlish, which is a vital link between the Westcountry and the rest of the country as a whole.

However, in calling for the region to pull together, and become unified in putting itself forward to the Government in the same way as the Midlands Engine or the Northern Powerhouse, Sir John is the latest to suggest that our political scene is in need of a shake-up before it is capable of making further steps forward in terms of central funding.

Some kind of regional political organisation – perhaps even led by a single, elected mayor – is something that has been resisted in the region, possibly for fear that the differing needs of the various parts of our region would not be able to be adequately represented by a 'South West powerhouse'.

Yet the issue of the Dawlish rail line is a prime example of a problem which has taken far longer to solve than is reasonable or justifiable.

To think such an issue would be allowed to drag on in a more prominent region or major city would be almost unthinkable, yet because it is in the South West, it has taken longer to gain the necessary momentum.

In the interim, campaigns such as #BackTheSouthWest are a must to shine the light on issues which our region needs solving imminently; not solely for the benefit of those who live here, but also because it is a region which has so much to offer as a driver of growth for the country as a whole.

Although growth is something which the Government should of course be focused on, the more short-term issues such as Brexit are drawing attention away from matters which would otherwise perhaps have greater prominence.

Suggesting that unity is the key for gaining the necessary support from Westminster to solve the vulnerability of Dawlish rail link is Sir John's way of saying our voice needs to be loud enough to be heard.

But our region deserves to be heard no matter what the issue is that is on the table.



While parts of the UK still struggle with 4G coverage, Japan is preparing to launch 5G

## From global telecoms leaders to also-rans in connectivity race

Other countries look likely to leave us further behind in the future, writes **Dave Millett**

Over the 40 years I've been in the telecoms industry a lot has changed and I've no doubt that there are plenty more changes on the horizon.

In 1985 Cellnet and Vodafone launched Britain's first cellular telephone service. Cellnet was partly owned by BT who short-sightedly sold it and then spent £12.5 billion in 2015 to buy its way back into the market. The UK was ahead of France and Germany in launching the technology as it often was in those days.

Four years later, British scientist Tim Berners Lee wrote down his ideas for the web and followed that up a year later by specifying HTML (the hypertext language) and HTTP (the protocol).

In 1991, British company, Orbitel created the first GSM phone. Unfortunately, they didn't capitalise on it and Orbitel ultimately ended up part of Ericsson.

It was another Brit, Neil Papworth, who in 1992 sent the first ever text message to Vodafone director Richard Jarvis. That same year saw dial-up internet access first introduced in the UK by Pipex. That's probably the last year that the UK was ahead of the rest of the world.

In 1995 an Israeli company, Voac!Tec, developed voice over internet protocol (VoIP). It would be five years before ADSL broadband was commercially launched in the UK. And it would be a further seven years (2007) that VoIP became prevalent enough for Ofcom to feel the need to publish "Regulation of VoIP Services".

Meanwhile, Japan launched the world's first commercial 3G network on 1 October 2001. The technology wasn't available in the UK until 2003 and still hasn't reached some parts today. In 2002 Nokia launched the first ever camera phone in Europe, and Skype was born. 2002 was also the start of the decline in international call revenues for operators.

By 2007, the world of mobiles was revolutionised by the iPhone. This was undoubtedly helped by the arrival of 4G, which was first launched in 2009 in Stockholm and Oslo. As a sign of the ever-increasing gap between the

beginning to see the end of the keyboard. The growth of AI is likely to make devices more intuitive and able to anticipate our needs. Keyboards on smartphones disappeared with the demise of the Blackberry, and future devices could be more like a piece of glass. Corning is already developing the embedding of circuitry within Gorilla glass which could lead to a transparent flat, and even flexible, indestructible device. Samsung has recently announced that foldable devices are coming.

Devices will not only give you the ability to view videos but will be able to project them

by 2020. Even if they meet their target, the UK will still only reach the level that the rest of Europe currently averages.

The Government has said we should be fully FTTP by 2033 when countries such as South Korea and Japan who are leading the new technical advances are already in the high 80s % level. We're just starting the first trial of 5G in one city, whereas Japan plans to launch it commercially in 2020. In South Korea the three mobile operators have combined forces to build a single 5G network which is planned for launch in March 2019. Consequently, Samsung will be able to steal a lead on bringing 5G devices to the market.

What have the last 40 years taught us? Firstly, despite having invented many of the technologies we now take for granted, the UK has failed to exploit them. Secondly, various governments, of all political colours, have made promises to improve our infrastructure and consistently failed to do so. And although they have announced plans, the dates are so far in the future that at least two elections will be fought beforehand. We're becoming increasingly dependent on our handheld devices – but we may find we're able to use them for fewer activities and in fewer places than users in many other countries.

Dave Millett is a telecoms expert who has been director of several global companies. He runs Equinox, a consultancy firm, equinoxcomms.co.uk



### We want to hear your views

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### On this day

**1891:** The first street collection for charity in Britain took place in Manchester and Salford, for Lifeboat Day.

**1905:** Charles Nessler first used a permanent waving machine on a woman's hair. The cost for the seven-hour treatment was 10 guineas.

**1908:** The Wind In The Willows, Kenneth Grahame's children's book, was published. It has never been out of print.

**1952:** A rail crash in Harrow left 112 dead and nearly 340 injured.

**1965:** The Post Office Tower in London became operational. It was opened by Prime Minister Harold Wilson.

**1967:** The first breathalyser test in Britain was administered to a motorist in Somerset.

**1973:** The first commercial radio station in Britain opened when LBC went on the air.

### Birthdays

**Rev Jesse Jackson,** US politician, 77

**Chevy Chase,** actor, 75

**Sigourney Weaver,** actress, 69

**Ardal O'Hanlon,** actor and comedian, 53

**Matt Damon,** actor, 48 *pictured*



### Thought for the day

**Proverbs 22:6** – Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it.



### Tomorrow:

**Columnist** Chris Moncrieff turns his attention to the week in politics

UK and leading tech countries, we had to wait almost three years before EE launched 4G in 11 cities.

By 2008, Virgin had launched one of the first fibre broadband services, and a year later BT announced it would connect 2.5 million homes to fibre by 2012. They achieved 10% of that number by 2015.

Governments began making broadband promises; most of which totally underestimated the growth of the digital age and the inadequacy of the current plans.

So, what does the future hold?

As we become more familiar with virtual assistants such as Alexa and Siri, we're

and link into augmented reality (AR). Whilst video calling has been around for a while the next step will likely be the ability for the device to project a 3D hologram of the person you're talking to making it appear as though you are having a real face-to-face conversation.

For these technologies to become real and for us to benefit from them we need the appropriate underlying infrastructure. And right now the UK is lagging far behind – and slipping further all the time.

In February 2018, BT confirmed that it will be spending at least £3 billion to roll out fibre to the premises (FTTP) broadband in the UK