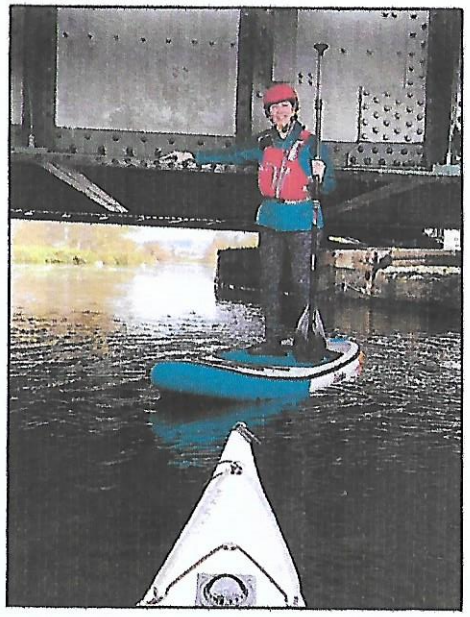
A379 CANAL BRIDGES PROPOSALS

Ray Alexander

Devon County Council held workshops for stakeholders on October 22, at which it presented the emerging proposals for two new replacement bridges carrying the A379 dual carriageway across Exeter Ship Canal.

Key points of interest emerging from this are as follows:

1. The new bridges will be bascules, similar in concept to the existing bascule bridge on the eastbound carriageway, but of a modern design.
2. Both the existing bridges have a maximum remaining life of no more than 10 years, they already have some issues and the bascule bridge is now subject to monthly inspections.
3. The Strategic Outline Business Case submitted by Devon County Council was successful and agreed by the Department for Transport.
4. Work is now ongoing on the Outline Business Case which will be submitted in 2026, following a public consultation this spring.
5. The control tower is likely to be moved to the south-east side of the westbound carriageway, closer to the University Rowing Club building. This will allow the existing dog-leg in the eastbound carriageway to be eased.
6. The width of the canal under the bridges is expected to be unchanged, i.e. continuing the historic 26ft or so.
7. It is not proposed to install a temporary road bridge whilst the construction works are taking place. This will cause traffic problems at rush hour times and other busy periods, with traffic restricted to a contra-flow on the remaining bridge in use.
8. Some environmental improvement works will be undertaken as part of the project at the western roundabout, where the road to Dawlish splits.
9. The County Council has examined five options for replacing the bridges; three of these it has discounted, leaving Option 2 which is to rebuild the bridges on the existing level and Option 4, which involves raising the road surface by 0.7m (just over 2ft), but possibly more if additional funding can be obtained. Option 4 could create sufficient room adjacent to the canal to enable cyclists and pedestrians to pass under the new bridges rather than crossing the A379 dual carriageway as now.



A stand up paddleboarder demonstrates the limited air draft below the A379 swing bridge. (Photo: Jane Evans)

Subject to the canal's fluctuating water levels, it is estimated that the resulting air drafts under the new bridges will be in the order of 2.4m, to be confirmed. This will enable some leisure craft to use the new bridges but compares with an ideal air draft of some 3.0m, also to be confirmed. These are currently being investigated.

IWA SOU'WESTER

ISSUE 201

JAN 2026