

Press release | **Thursday 11 April 2019**

From the Association of Community Rail Partnerships (ACoRP) | [news@acorp.uk.com](mailto:news@acorp.uk.com)

## Thousands of volunteers across Britain bring stations and railways into the heart of communities

A report out today (11 April) has revealed that a hidden army of 8,500 ‘community rail’ volunteers give nearly 400,000 hours a year to bring local railway lines and stations back into the heart of their communities – promoting sustainable travel, empowering communities, and benefitting health, wellbeing and social inclusion.

The report, by the [Association of Community Rail Partnerships](#) and supported by [Rail Delivery Group](#), finds that the community rail movement has seen huge growth in recent years, now with 1,000 station ‘friends’ groups and 61 regional or line-based community rail partnerships across Britain. Its work ranges from community hubs and gardening at stations, to promoting green tourism on community rail lines, to working with the rail industry towards a more accessible railway.

Community rail volunteering alone is calculated to be worth £33.1m annually,<sup>i</sup> through work contributed to local stations and communities, and the social value to the volunteers themselves through improved health and wellbeing.

The *Value of Community Rail* report evaluates the scale and growth of the community rail movement – which now spans Britain – and the way it delivers benefit to local people, and helps our railways serve their customers. It is produced by the Association of Community Rail Partnerships (ACoRP), the national umbrella body for community rail partnerships and groups, with support from the Rail Delivery Group, which exists to enable rail companies to succeed in delivering a successful railway.

Community rail is a grassroots movement that has grown enormously in scope and influence. It is made up of 61 community rail partnerships, community-based organisations that work along railway lines or across regions, and 1,000+ station-based voluntary groups, all aiming to connect communities with their railways and help communities get the most from local lines and stations. Comparing to a 2015 report suggests that **community rail partnerships have increased by 50% and station groups have doubled in number in just four years.**<sup>ii</sup>

The *Value of Community Rail* report found that lines with community rail partnerships performed well in terms of passenger numbers, showing a 42% increase from 2008/9 to 2017/18, compared to an overall increase of 35%. This reinforces the idea that engaging communities in their local railways helps people get maximum use from them, as well as attracting visitors using sustainable means.

The report also found evidence of social value being delivered aligned to the four themes of the **Department for Transport’s recently-launched national [Community Rail Development Strategy](#):**

- providing a voice for the community;
- promoting sustainable, healthy and accessible travel;
- bringing communities together and supporting diversity and inclusion; and
- supporting social and economic development.

The report features many examples of community rail groups providing vital connections between communities and railways, and delivering benefits to sustainability, access to opportunity, health, wellbeing, social inclusion and community development. This includes:

- [Friends of Glossop Station](#) – bringing local volunteers together and turning the station into a welcoming hub and gateway to the community that local people can take pride in;
- [Sevenside CRP](#) – partnering with local charities to help disadvantaged groups make use of the railway and gain confidence;
- [Kilmarnock Station Railway Heritage Trust](#) – transforming disused station space into a hub for the community, promoting social inclusion, and offering work experience and training;
- [Conwy Valley CRP](#) – promoting sustainable tourism to the area using the line, and building better links between rail and bus;
- [Highland Mainline Community Rail Partnership](#) working with the rail industry as a critical friend, to ensure local needs are understood in line improvements;
- First Impressions (Elstree & Borehamwood) playing a key role in the station’s redevelopment as a transport interchange, ensuring it reflected local heritage and character;
- [Sussex Community Rail Partnership](#) helping school children learn about and gain familiarity with rail as a part of sustainable and healthy travel;
- [Community Rail Cumbria](#) working with the train operator to achieve major service and station improvements and engaging local employers to promote sustainable commuting.

**Rail Minister Andrew Jones MP, Under-Secretary of State for Transport, said:** “Our rail network is simply better for the work of Community Rail Partnerships. I have seen first-hand the vital work that they do, having met with the inspiring volunteers at the ‘Rail Journey To Recovery’ project in Cumbria last November.

“They transform our stations into community hubs, provide purpose and pride, and give people a say in how their local rail network can work for them.

“In 15 years we have seen hundreds of successful projects created across the UK, and through a new Community Rail Strategy this government is committed to supporting even more schemes.”

**Jools Townsend, chief executive of ACoRP, said:** “Community rail empowers local people to have a greater stake in their local railways and stations, and to access opportunities that may otherwise be out of reach, through sustainable and healthy means. There are now more than 1,000 community rail partnerships and groups across Britain, and thousands of volunteers benefitting their local communities. Our research shows not only that their numbers have grown, but that they are working with passion to help local people get the most from their railway lines and stations, and they are delivering all sorts of benefits. Community rail is playing a unique role, working at a grassroots level so more people can get around through sustainable travel, and helping people to connect with their locality and those around them.”

**Paul Plummer, chief executive of the Rail Delivery Group, added:** “The rail industry is helping to transform communities across the country, investing millions of pounds to enhance stations, connect people and boost local economies.

“This report shows that community rail partnerships, working together with rail companies, are enabling people to come together and make a positive difference to the railway and the communities we serve. We encourage anyone who wants to make a difference in their community to get involved.”

Media can access an advance media copy, embargoed until 11 April at:

<https://communityrail.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/Acorp-Value-of-Community-Rail-090419.pdf> . The report will be published at 09:00 on 11 April.

For further details, contact Nik Schofield (ACoRP's communications and marketing manager) on [news@acorp.uk.com](mailto:news@acorp.uk.com) or 01484 481057 or 07376 124964.

### **Background information:**

**ACoRP** – ACoRP's vision is of a flourishing community rail movement, connecting communities and their railways, and enhancing the wellbeing, sustainability and development of communities and railways across Britain.

As the umbrella body for community rail, it works to empower and support community rail partnerships and groups through membership services, resources and events, to: enhance the railways' contribution to local sustainable development and community wellbeing, including by maximising access to and use of the railways; ensure the community has a voice and plays a part in the development and improvement of our railways; and communicate the development and importance of our railways to communities, enhancing understanding and pride, and promoting rail as a key part of sustainable, healthy travel.

All 61 community rail partnerships are members of ACoRP, alongside more than 160 station friends/adoption groups, with members continuing to grow.

See [communityrail.org.uk](http://communityrail.org.uk), follow and tweet us @ACORPOffice, find us on Facebook, or sign up to our monthly e-news (<http://bit.ly/tol18>) to keep up to date.

**Rail Delivery Group** – The Rail Delivery Group (RDG) brings together the companies that run Britain's railway into a single team with one goal - to deliver a better railway for you and your community. All the passenger and freight rail companies are members of the RDG, as well as Network Rail and HS2.

RDG provides services and support to enable members to succeed in transforming and delivering a successful railway. Rail is fundamental to the country's prosperity. After enormous growth, Britain's railway is increasingly important in connecting workers to jobs, businesses to markets, and people to their families and friends.

RDG continues to work with ACoRP to further the case for community rail activity and support for it, as well as improving train operators' knowledge of how the community role can help them and the communities they serve through practical examples.

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<sup>i</sup> Calculated by multiplying the 390,000 annual volunteering hours calculated with the average hourly wage, plus the social value to volunteers as per the HACT Social Value Bank.

<sup>ii</sup> Comparing new data published in the 2019 *Value of Community Rail* report from ACoRP membership and train operating companies, to data published in a 2015 report by Transport Regeneration, [The Value of Community Rail Partnerships and The Value of Community Rail Volunteering](#), which suggested there were 42 community rail partnerships and c. 500 station groups.