

Community rail looks to the future, and helping our communities and railways rebuild

As communities around Britain face unprecedented challenges, the grassroots network engaging local people in rail, and running community activities at stations, is looking positively to the future.

The [Community Rail Network](#), known until today (6 Apr) as the Association of Community Rail Partnerships (ACoRP), brings together a [growing membership](#) of 70 community rail partnerships, hundreds of station 'friends' and other groups around Britain. These community-based organisations, volunteer groups and social enterprises work tirelessly to increase mobility and access to opportunity, promote sustainable travel and create a sense of pride and cohesion locally. They also help rail industry partners put local communities' needs at the forefront of their thinking.

While events and face-to-face engagement have paused due to Covid-19, work is ongoing to strengthen the place of community rail, and our railways, at the heart of Britain's communities, while helping our communities to cope, bolster resilience, and look to the future.

Supported by the Community Rail Network team, community rail partnerships and groups are finding alternative ways to work, keeping in touch with volunteers and partners, and supporting local efforts to maintain positivity and build resilience. Many are also looking to the future, considering how they can step up their role as we rebuild, and develop their work to help communities, our railways, and transport, become more sustainable, inclusive and caring. **This will become increasingly important as the government, industry and communities work to [decarbonise transport](#) and make public transport and active travel the 'natural choice'.** ⁽¹⁾

Jools Townsend, chief executive of the Community Rail Network, said: "As well as supporting our members through these unprecedented times, we are very much looking to the future. Becoming the Community Rail Network marks our commitment to helping community rail, and our railways, to make an ever-growing contribution to sustainable development, inclusion and wellbeing.

"As we rebuild from Covid-19, this work will be more important than ever. Within community rail, and across the wider community sector, we will need to redouble efforts, with our partners, to create confidence and connectedness, and re-orientate ways of thinking and living around more socially and environmentally-responsible means, especially as we grapple with the longer-term crisis we face, the climate emergency. This is at the heart of our community rail network."

Richard Burningham, chair of the Community Rail Network, said: "The essence of community rail is the enthusiasm, inventiveness and quiet determination to make a difference, while celebrating your locality and the railway's place in it. Our community rail network stretches right across England, Scotland and Wales, from big cities to the most rural parts of Britain. Our members do amazing things. We're committed to helping them thrive and to shining a spotlight on more of their great projects so that many more people know the contribution that community rail makes."

More about community rail:

There are now 70 community rail partnerships – community-based organisations working to promote and enhance local railway lines – plus at least 1,000 station 'friends' groups across Britain. These numbers are growing each year.

We conservatively estimate that there are 8,500 volunteers giving nearly 400,000 hours of their time per year, worth £5.6m annually to the rail industry and £27.6m in social value to the volunteers and their communities. There is a range of **evidence that community rail matters**, in terms of inclusion and diversity, health and wellbeing, sustainability and regeneration. It also enhances use of rail: passenger numbers on lines with community rail partnerships rose by 42% 2008/9 to 2017/18, compared to the overall increase across the network of 35%. (2)

Community Rail Network members are involved in a huge range of activities – from community events and arts projects, to social enterprise and volunteering at stations, to sustainable tourism promotion, to active travel integration – linked to the Department for Transport’s [Community Rail Development Strategy](#) (3) and its four themes:

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

For examples of community rail in action, see our [case studies](#).

More about the Community Rail Network:

Previously called the Association of Community Rail Partnerships (ACoRP), the Community Rail Network is an umbrella body for community partnerships, groups and social enterprises working to connect communities with their railways to benefit sustainability, inclusion, health and wellbeing, and local development.

The organisation has worked with experienced agency David Carroll & Co to develop its new brand, working with members and partners to create a new, inclusive identity for the movement. The Community Rail Network plans to use the new brand to further champion community rail and raise its profile as a vital part of the community and voluntary sector, working to make our transport network increasingly sustainable and inclusive.

For further information and to access resources on the new brand, visit communityrail.org.uk.

Our vision and mission:

The Community Rail Network’s vision is to create a flourishing community rail movement connecting people and their railways, contributing to inclusive, empowered, sustainable and healthy communities.

As the umbrella body for community rail, it helps community rail partnerships and groups 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.

See communityrail.org.uk, follow and tweet us [@CommunityRail](#), or [sign up to Community Rail News](#).

End notes:

1 -

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/876251/decarbonising-transport-setting-the-challenge.pdf

2 - communityrail.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/ACoRP-Value-of-Community-Rail-2019-final-for-web-141019.pdf

3 - www.gov.uk/government/publications/community-rail-development-strategy

For further details, contact Nik Schofield, communications and marketing manager, on news@communityrail.org.uk or 07376 124964. Images, logo and brand guidelines available on request.