

Enabling young people to engage with, use and have a voice in local railways can be transformative, report shows

Engaging and empowering young people with their local railways has been shown to deliver wide-ranging benefits for young people and their communities, and help progress towards a more sustainable and inclusive transport network. The findings show how young people, working with community rail and railway partners, can spearhead creative approaches and positive change that can help our railways and communities recover and build back better from Covid-19.

The [research report](#) by Community Rail Network, supported by Rail Delivery Group, draws on input from young people involved and leading on a range of community rail initiatives across Britain (see below). The young volunteers, group leaders and innovators, alongside community rail staff and volunteers and rail industry partners, demonstrate that when young people get involved in rail and young voices are heard in rail development, it serves to:

- Develop skills, confidence and sustainable mobility among young people, sometimes with life-changing effects
- Promote familiarity, positivity, ownership and confidence towards rail travel
- Help our railways and community rail to be more inclusive and future-focused
- Encourage creativity, innovation, and positive changes that benefit current and future rail passengers, wider society and our environment

The report highlights the contribution youth engagement in rail can make towards the government's aim to make 'public transport and active travel the natural first choice for our daily activities' to [decarbonise transport](#), as well as tackling social isolation and promoting inclusion – all important strands of Covid-19 recovery and creating a more inclusive and sustainable transport network.

As well as identifying wide-ranging benefits, the report recommends how youth engagement in rail can be further developed, with suggestions for both for community rail partnerships and station groups, as well as rail industry partners. These include ensuring that youth engagement is embedded, meaningful, and draws on young people's voices and creativity. [Read our one-page summary sheet of key findings.](#)

The report draws on wide-ranging examples of youth engagement and social action within community rail, including:

- Community Rail Lancashire – working with apprentices from the rail industry on community projects, and delivering a range of youth-led schemes, such as promoting STEM careers for women and girls, LGBT+ issues, and employment experiences for marginalised groups;
- 6VT Youth Community Rail Partnership – Britain's only youth-led partnership, connecting young people in and around Edinburgh to promote issues including health and wellbeing, inclusiveness, and rail safety;
- Kent Community Rail Partnership and Sheppey College – working together to adopt and enhance stations on the Swale Rail Line, with students leading on projects to promote the line to local communities;

- Friends of Bescot Station – a newly-formed, youth-led action group, working to develop the station as a community hub and identify ways of involving young people in the development of local rail and transport provision.

The report, published today, has been produced by Community Rail Network, the umbrella body for groups working within community rail, with support from Rail Delivery Group, which exists to enable rail companies to succeed in delivering a successful railway. It will be available to Community Rail Network's growing membership of more than 300, and promoted to other organisations in the youth, community, education, and volunteering sectors via rail industry and third sector partners.

Young people's input into the report includes:

"A big thing for young people at the moment is the environment, so we thought that by getting involved in station adoption, we could help to increase footfall on the station and trains and get cars off the road." (Asad Kalang, Friends of Bescot Station)

"It was just great to get the chance to be involved in a project where we could really express ourselves... It gave me an opportunity to feel like I was useful in some way, and that is really important." (Elena Summers, Community Rail Lancashire)

"We can help implement decisions now that can make things better for everyone. I think that's why we've thrown our all into it." (Roseanna Campbell, 6VT youth CRP)

"It was a way of letting me use the skills I'd learnt in a real-life environment" (Gage Carter-Rowe, Kent CRP)

"I didn't use the trains before, I felt a bit nervous. But with this project, I've found out that there are people that can help you at stations, and there is nothing to be scared about." (Keeley Smith, Kent CRP)

Jools Townsend, chief executive of Community Rail Network, said: "Engaging young people in community rail can empower them to have a greater stake in transport and their local railways, ensuring their voice is heard in decisions that will affect their futures. By being involved with rail, young people develop life skills, increase confidence and self-esteem, and access opportunities that may otherwise be out of reach, through sustainable and healthy means.

"Youth engagement is a key priority area for our growing membership, and embracing the creativity, passion, and enthusiasm that young people can offer is vital for the development of the community rail movement. We strongly believe that community rail can play an integral role in stimulating communities to 'build back better' from Covid-19 and transitioning to a more sustainable and inclusive transport future, and young people can and should be at the forefront of that."

Robert Nisbet, director of Nations and Regions at the Rail Delivery Group, added: "The railway connects communities, supports the economy and opens up opportunities for people. We want to do more for the communities we serve as we emerge from the coronavirus pandemic and engaging young people in community rail provides them with the opportunities to build their skills, gain confidence and set them up for the future."

Community rail is a grassroots movement spanning Britain made up of 72 community rail partnerships, which work along railway lines or across counties, and over 1,000 station friends and other local groups, all aiming to connect communities with their railways. Many are already

actively involved in engaging young people, either as volunteers or via work with schools and colleges, with an increasing number of stations now also being adopted by youth-orientated groups.

While events and activities have been paused due to Covid-19, innovative and inspirational work has carried on behind the scenes to strengthen the place of community rail, and our railways, at the heart of Britain's communities. As groups now look to the future, engaging young people and embracing their ability to create positive change will be increasingly important.

The report builds on Community Rail Network's framework for developing engagement of young people in community rail, which identified working with those aged 11-25 as a key priority and sets out how the organisation will support this. [See the framework.](#)

To access the report, visit communityrail.org.uk

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Note to editors: If you are interested in an additional comment piece from our chief executive on the importance of transport and rail to young people, and the need to include them in its development, then please contact us to discuss this.

Background information:

Community Rail Network – The umbrella body for community partnerships, groups and social enterprises working to connect communities with their railways. Our vision is to create a flourishing community rail movement connecting people and their railways, contributing to inclusive, empowered, sustainable and healthy communities. (Previously called the Association of Community Rail Partnerships, or ACoRP.)

There are 72 community rail partnerships – community-based organisations working to promote and enhance local railway lines – and 1,000 station 'friends' groups across Britain. These numbers are growing each year. There are 8,500 volunteers giving nearly 400,000 hours per year, worth £33.2m annually in health, wellbeing and community benefits. 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, with passenger numbers on lines with community rail partnerships higher than comparable lines. See our report on the '[Value of Community Rail](#)'.

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

See communityrail.org.uk, follow and tweet us at twitter.com/CommunityRail, find us on Facebook, or sign up to Community Rail News at communityrail.org.uk/news/community-rail-news-sign-up/.

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 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 Community Rail Network to further the case for community rail activity and support for it, as well as improving train operators' knowledge of how community rail can help them and the communities they serve through practical examples.

For further details, contact Nik Schofield, communications and marketing manager, on news@communityrail.org.uk or 07376 124964.