



# ANNUAL REPORT

2019/20



## Community Rail Network

(formerly the Association of Community Rail Partnerships – ACoRP)

Supporting the community rail movement to flourish

## FROM THE CHAIR AND CHIEF EXECUTIVE

**2019/20 was another year of solid progress and success for community rail and our organisation. Of course, there was a sting in the tail as right at the end, Britain went into lockdown due to Covid-19. It is a testament to the team and all in community rail just how well and quickly so many adapted to the new circumstances and, in the best positive and innovative traditions of community rail, that great projects have still been conceived and delivered across the country.**

I have been the manager of the Devon & Cornwall Rail Partnership since 1998. Community rail was very small then – not even yet called community rail – had no government backing, and what is now the Community Rail Network was a loose grouping of the few partnerships that existed, brought together by the indefatigable energy and enthusiasm of Paul Salveson.

It is so great to see how it has blossomed and continues to blossom since those early days. I am particularly pleased to see more community rail partnerships being set up, a further six in 2019/20.

The huge increase in the number of station adoption groups joining us is very welcome too. This has been particularly helped by some very proactive policies from train operating companies.

On behalf of myself and the board, I would like to thank Jools and the team for their hard work over this year, thank the Department for Transport and our funding partners for their steadfast support, and salute everyone who works in community rail, staff or volunteers, for all you do.



**Richard Burningham MBE**, chair

**Despite finding ourselves in extraordinary circumstances at the end of 2019/20, community rail has continued to grow and develop, and everyone involved has much to be proud of. Community rail's work – connecting people with their railways, building a sense of community, and helping everyone to access sustainable travel – couldn't be more important now, and as we look to build back better from Covid-19.**

Community rail has adapted and responded, supporting community resilience and wellbeing, and working with rail partners to create local understanding and positivity. It will continue to play a crucial part in helping communities and railways manage the challenges ahead, and starting to rebuild patronage, showing rail is a green, aspirational mode of the future. This is vital to decarbonising transport – of prime importance to us in tackling the climate emergency – while creating more inclusive, vibrant communities.

Throughout 2019/20, Community Rail Network (or ACoRP, as we were) has strived to support and empower our members. Our team has worked with determination, enthusiasm, and integrity prior to and through the pandemic to serve, understand, and promote community rail's interests. From a major toolkit on integrated transport, to running government grants and accreditation schemes, to a hugely successful awards, to hundreds of meetings, calls and emails advising members and partners: our contribution is summed up on the pages that follow. Of note too are our stepped-up efforts championing community rail, taking its unique insights to decision-makers, advising on what community rail shows us about how we can work with and empower communities towards more sustainable, inclusive travel and ways of living.

We look forward to continuing to work with partners in transport, the third sector, government at different levels, and of course our members, to help community rail deliver maximum impact for our communities and railways, our environment, and society at large.



**Jools Townsend**, chief executive

## COMMUNITY RAIL NETWORK IN NUMBERS

- 67 community rail partnership members, up from 61 
- 235 station group members, up from 164 
- 15 events and training courses, with 412 attendees
- 210 entries to our awards, with 18 winners and 446 guests
- 3,468 friends/followers/subscribers @   
- £804,325 annual turnover 
- £350,225 provided in grants
- 17 staff, up from 15 

## KEY ACHIEVEMENTS IN PICTURES



Our 2019 Community Rail Awards winners



Our biggest-ever Community Rail in the City



Our support and development programme



An increase in community rail partnerships



Launch of the 'Connected Stations' toolkit



Groups adapt to the challenges of Covid-19

## OUR TEAM



**Jools Townsend**,  
chief executive



**Brian Barnsley**,  
deputy chief executive and  
head of support  
and development



**Anders Hanson**,  
head of  
communications,  
resources  
and events



**Dawn Bigland**,  
administration  
manager



**Paul Webster**,  
community rail  
support manager  
(Midlands and South)



**Martin Yallop**,  
community stations  
development  
manager



**Ian Davis**,  
community rail  
support officer  
(North)



**Daniel Wright**,  
community rail  
support officer  
(South West)



**Rhiannon-Jane Raftery**, community  
rail development  
coordinator  
(Wales and Borders)



**Alex Peel**, training  
and development  
coordinator



**Naomi Halloran**,  
training and  
development  
coordinator



**Hazel Bonner**,  
events and  
fundraising  
manager



**Nik Schofield**,  
communications  
and marketing  
manager



**Alice Mannion**,  
tourism and  
heritage officer



**Rob Lowson**,  
writer and  
researcher



**Hannah Cottrill**,  
events and  
partnerships  
officer



**Patrick Southern**,  
senior administration  
officer



Our team reports in to our board, who are elected from our membership. Find out about our current board members [here](#).

## SUPPORTING OUR MEMBERS TO FLOURISH

### Training programme develops

Our training and development coordinators Alex and Naomi continued to refine and expand the opportunities available across our membership, while also delivering bespoke sessions to meet the specific needs of community rail partnerships and station groups. Across all their activities, they had a strong focus on interactive and enabling training, boosting confidence and helping delegates develop practical solutions. They drew on our annual members' survey and information fed through our team to identify common needs and tailor courses, consistently receiving excellent feedback.

Workshops covered:

- project management and outcomes;
- introduction to fundraising;
- making good funding applications;
- involving and supporting volunteers;
- skills swap and networking for station adopters;
- induction for new community rail partnership officers.

The team also facilitated in-house sessions for specific community rail partnerships on outcomes, supporting members to explore and demonstrate the positive difference they make. This built on our wider work understanding social value in community rail, including through our 2019 'Value of Community Rail' report, and new 'Impact' reporting tool (see page 12).

To support members during the pandemic, Alex and Naomi devised an online session on 'Learning from lockdown', helping groups and individuals reflect on and deal with ongoing challenges, and produced a well-received resource on '[managing change](#)'.



### Community rail accreditation

In 2018/19, we used our expertise to assist with the creation of the Department for Transport (DfT) and Welsh Government's accreditation scheme, ensuring it was a robust and constructive process to recognise community rail partnerships operating to a high standard and engaging their communities in line with government objectives.

Members of our support and development team subsequently spent a significant amount of time advising community rail partnerships on plans and procedures they needed to have in place, supporting them to meet the standards. In June 2019, Cambrian Rail Partnership became the first to receive accreditation, and as the programme was rolled out in 2019/20, **a further 24 partnerships, covering 33 lines**, received the recognition. Many have fed back positively on the support they received and improvements they put in place as a result.

As face-to-face contact was curtailed due to Covid-19, our team adapted and moved their support online to guide partnerships through 'virtual' accreditations, including some going through the process for the first time, and others being re-accredited after a successful 12 months. This support remains ongoing, with the team continuing to work with partnerships at different stages of the accreditation journey.

## Continued growth in community rail

With continued government and industry support, **we saw a significant growth in the number of new community rail partnerships during 2019/20, with the total rising from 61 to 67.** The new partnerships were Bedford to St Albans City, Worcestershire, Surrey Hills to South Downs, Bolton and South Lancashire, Darent Valley, and New River Line. Despite the Covid-19 lockdown, our support and development team continued to advise groups looking to establish new partnerships, and by Summer 2020, the total had topped 70, providing value and support to local communities.

**We also saw a striking 43% increase in station group members in 2019/20, rising from 164 to 235 over the year,** processed by our senior administration assistant Patrick. More than 40 of the new groups are linked to stations on the South Western Railway network, where nurturing station adoption has been a priority for our community rail support officer Dan, supported by the train operator. We also saw notable increases across the Northern, West Midlands, and Great Western areas, with stations being cared for by an increasingly diverse range of partners, including schools, youth groups, and charities, alongside more traditional 'Friends of' groups of volunteers.

2019/20 saw Community Rail Network work proactively with the Welsh Government and Transport for Wales Rail Services (TfWR) to develop and expand community rail across Wales and the Borders. All parties acknowledged that Community Rail Network having a dedicated team member to work with Wales & Borders members and cultivate new partnerships and opportunities was required, resulting in the appointment of our Wales & Borders coordinator, Rhiannon. She is now working with and advising new and existing partnerships, linking community rail to other community activities, and developing Wales-specific opportunities and initiatives.

### CASE STUDY: Surrey Hills to South Downs Community Rail Partnership

The Surrey Hills to South Downs Community Rail Partnership grew out of a community station project at Haslemere. Having successfully created an information hub there, the team behind it wanted to spread the positivity of community rail to other nearby communities.

Community Rail Network supported the partnership in reaching out to local councils and community organisations along the line, explaining what community rail was all about, what it could deliver, and how they could get involved. Following an enthusiastic local response, Community Rail Network helped put in place policies and procedures to ensure that the partnership could launch and hit the ground running in June 2019.

The group has already delivered a number of activities linking communities with their railway, including 'Try the Train' trips for primary school children and 'Rail to Ramble' leaflets promoting walking routes from stations along the line.



## Advising our members and staying in touch

Our support and development team recorded more than 550 instances of direct support to Community Rail Network members during 2019/20, and our members' survey indicated that almost every community rail partnership benefitted from this over the year, helping them to structure and refine their plans and activities. For examples of the type of support we offer to members, visit the 'join us' page on our website.

As Covid-19 brought projects and meetings to a halt, we were more determined than ever to stay in touch with members, to discuss initiatives they had paused, or to simply check in to see whether groups were adapting to lockdown or needed support in any way. The team ensured that contact was frequent, via online meetings and chats, phone calls, and emails. They fed in practical ideas, for example virtual or home-based projects that members could join in with or replicate, as well as tips on using online communications, supporting local resilience efforts, and looking after staff or volunteers' wellbeing. The team also maintained relationships with key rail partners such as train operating companies and Network Rail, and coordinated by our head of communications, resources, and events Anders, we advised on liaison with community rail and provided regular updates to members regarding appropriate messaging around safe and responsible rail travel.

### Members' survey results:

In our 2019 members' survey:

- 76% said they received value for money for their membership, including 83% of community rail partnerships;
- 86% said we communicate well with members.

The most appreciated aspects of our support were:

- our role facilitating the sharing of experiences and good practice, helping groups feel part of the wider community rail movement;
- our input on developing new and improved projects and accessing funding;
- members becoming more confident and/or knowledgeable about topics or issues;
- members being supported to create more structured plans;
- the expertise of our team in helping to overcome any problems or barriers.

A 'Try the Train' trip with East Hampshire Community Rail Partnership



## CASE STUDY: Community Rail Norfolk – Lowestoft Central Project

When the Lowestoft Central Project working group was formed in 2017, their aims for the station were to improve facilities, reduce antisocial behaviour, find new uses for redundant buildings, and increase community involvement.

The group's main initiative was to redevelop the station's old parcels office, which had been unused and derelict for more than 30 years. With the community rail partnerships project-managing the build, the group revamped the 170-year-old industrial building into a modern and spacious venue for public

use, and the building was officially opened as Lowestoft's new community exhibition space last summer.

Thanks to more than 1,000 hours of volunteer time, the partnership has successfully re-connected the station to the town centre and created a popular events space at the heart of the community. Community Rail Network supported via the Community Rail Development Fund we run for the DfT, and Brian, our head of support and development, said the project was testament to what community rail can achieve.

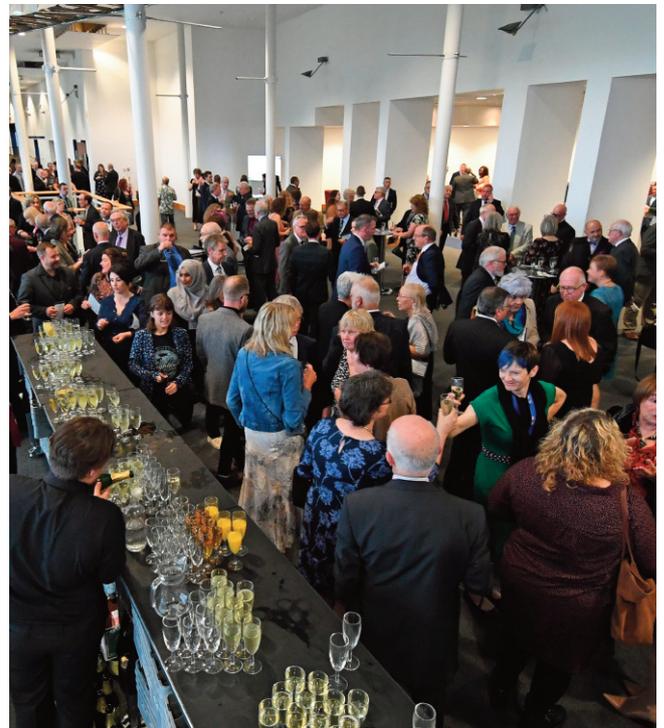


## RAISING THE PROFILE OF COMMUNITY RAIL AND CELEBRATING SUCCESS

### Becoming Community Rail Network!

Right at the end of 2019/20, we embraced major change by rebranding from ACoRP (The Association of Community Rail Partnerships) to the Community Rail Network. Our team and board worked closely with experienced brand agency David Carroll & Co to consider a new identity to put us in the best position to champion community rail. We believe the change makes us more inclusive, open, dynamic, and forward-looking, better placed to raise awareness of the movement by putting community rail front and centre. **It says clearly and succinctly who we are and what we do, and that we are privileged to represent and support a rich and diverse ‘community of communities’.**

Feedback regarding the rebrand has been extremely positive, with members and partners appreciating the clarity the new name brings, the greater ease with which they can promote the community rail movement and get people enthused, and the pride with which members can state that they are part of the Community Rail Network. Since April, we have used the new brand to empower and position community rail as a vital part of the community sector, primed to play an even stronger role as our communities and railways rebuild from Covid-19.



The 2019 Community Rail Awards in Telford

### Awards and events

Our 2019 Community Rail Awards were held in Telford, supported by West Midlands Trains. Coordinated by our events manager Hazel and new events and partnerships officer Hannah, the showpiece occasion was attended by nearly **450 guests**, including community rail officers and volunteers, and industry and government colleagues. We celebrated a diverse array of inspiring projects from a fantastic **210 entries**, with the winners celebrated [here](#).

**We held a further 15 events and courses with 412 attendees in 2019-20**, including station buildings and community stations workshops with our community stations development manager Martin. Our annual programme again included organising the DfT’s annual Community Rail Conference, bringing more than 120 attendees to Bristol in March. The event was focused on sharing good practice and expertise on sustainable travel, biodiversity, and community engagement.



Fundraising at the awards

The Friends of Beeston Station



Just after the conference, our traditional series of workshops and seminars was interrupted by the Covid-19 lockdown, forcing the team to take a different approach to retain an events offer for members. Hazel and Hannah, alongside other team members, adapted swiftly to put together a series of webinars, using new (to us!) technologies. They focused on topics that groups could put into practice during the pandemic, including writing good awards entries, engaging with local media and social media, and supporting recovery and renewal, a discussion on how community rail can help communities and transport ‘build back better’ from Covid-19.

**The feedback from webinar attendees has been excellent, with sessions described as “exemplary”, “very professional” and “a great way of staying in touch.”** Embracing the technology for online events has also allowed us to start planning for the 2020 Community Rail Awards, set to be delivered online for the first time in December.

### Resources and case studies

**Our major resource for 2019/20 was a toolkit on station travel planning and sustainable travel** (see page 15). Our writer and researcher Rob also produced a revamped **station adoption handbook**, packed with ideas for developing station activities, and advice on operating safely and engaging communities, which was well received by members, particularly those setting up new adoption groups.

We also produced numerous online **case studies** and new guidance resources, including guides for community rail groups on **insurance** and engaging with their **local media**.

## CASE STUDIES: The Friends of Beeston Station and the Friends of Berkhamsted Station

After joining as new members in 2018/19, both of these groups have been extremely active in their first full year, supported by our community rail support manager Paul and Community Rail Network’s Small Grants Fund.

The Friends of Beeston Station improved the look and feel of the station by transforming an “ugly” wall on one of the platforms into a vibrant photographic display, using images and accompanying storyboards from local photographers on the theme of sustainable transport. Group members also helped to raise awareness of station adoption during National Volunteers Week, talking about how the social benefits of being involved had “enriched” their lives. Sarah, the group’s secretary, also spoke about the group and how community rail plays a role in tackling loneliness at our 2020 Community Rail Conference.

The Friends of Berkhamsted Station transformed a neglected piece of land at the station entrance into a new garden, vastly improving the site’s welcome to passengers and how it is being used by the community. They are now developing their gardening by installing planters on the station platforms, made by a local charity, Sunnyside Rural Trust, which provides training and work experience for people with learning difficulties.



Gardening at Flitwick Station

## Community Rail in the City

This annual event, coordinated by our tourism and heritage officer Alice, provides a valued opportunity for community rail groups to showcase their lines and attractions at busy city stations.

The 2019 event was by far our biggest yet, with **36 community rail partnerships – up 50% from 24 in 2018 – running activities at 20 stations, speaking to an estimated 75,000 people.** Highlights included:

- a ‘Highland Fling’ at King’s Cross, courtesy of the Highland Mainline Community Rail Partnership;
- a countryside scene celebrating the 70th anniversary of National Parks at Waterloo, organised by a group of community rail partnerships from the South West;
- an 18-foot replica of the Mayflower on display at London Liverpool Street, with Essex and South Suffolk Community Rail Partnership;
- a giant paint-by-numbers mural at Birmingham New Street, coordinated by Severnside Community Rail Partnership.

The event continues to highlight destinations accessible via Britain’s expanding community rail network, promoting sustainable tourism by rail.

Our tourism and heritage officer Alice meets Atholl Highlander Graham Jack and All the Station’s Geoff Marshall and Vicki Pipe at King’s Cross

## Community rail online

Our communications and marketing manager Nik, working closely with our administration manager Dawn, was instrumental in coordinating our rebrand to Community Rail Network, and has since revamped **our website** to reflect our new image and identity. Nik has also continued to support various community rail partnerships to help them improve their online presence, offering advice on best practice for websites and social media.

**We increased our own presence and activity on social media in 2019/20, resulting in a significant 29% increase in users and followers.** **Twitter** use continued to grow, and we became more active on **Facebook**, creating themed groups on topics such as arts/gardening projects, tourism, and funding, to facilitate conversations between members.

In response to Covid-19, we significantly increased our member communications, involving more of the team in social media monitoring and posting, and changing our ‘**Community Rail News**’ bulletin from monthly to weekly. We ensured a clear focus on staying positive, looking to the future, and making productive use of this time, sharing examples of how members were responding. We also had a push on promotions to ensure that as many members and partners as possible were subscribed to and using our online and email communication channels.



## CASE STUDY: Highland Mainline Community Rail Partnership – Highland Fling

A primary aim of the Highland Mainline Community Rail Partnership is to highlight the heritage and history of the line, encouraging people to visit the area by rail. To reach a wider audience, the group created an exhibition for the 2019 ‘Community Rail in the City’ event at London King’s Cross, the starting point for a direct, daily service to Inverness, ‘The Highland Chieftain’.

After creating a logo and title, ‘The Highland Fling’, the group developed ideas with partners including the Atholl Highlanders and the Creative Team at Pitlochry Festival Theatre. A huge team of volunteers helped to coordinate the event, with 53 people working on the stand throughout the day, supported by ScotRail and advice from our team. Highlights included a ‘flash mob’ of 30 young people performing songs from the musical ‘Summer Holiday’, and performances from pipers and dancers from the Atholl Highlanders.

The partnership engaged with more than 6,000 people on the day, with 80% of people spoken to saying they would be encouraged to travel by train. Volunteers also gave out 2,500 goody bags and signed 300 people up to the partnership newsletter.



Our stand at the Excursions Group Travel Show

## Scenic Rail Britain and leisure promotion

We continued to promote our Scenic Rail Britain campaign and [website](#) in 2019/20, alongside project partners Devon and Cornwall Rail Partnership. **New content has been regularly added to the site and social media to promote Britain’s most picturesque and interesting rail journeys, with 76 lines now featured.**

Our leisure and tourism promotion work this year also included attending, alongside four community rail partnerships, the Excursions Group Travel Show to highlight rail travel to group organisers, resulting in a new page on our website on [group travel](#). We also added a range of inspiring [blogs](#), including on rail ale trails, dog friendly holidays in Essex, and a family, car-free adventure in Cornwall.

Our tourism officer Alice continued to work with partners to increase awareness of Scenic Rail Britain, with a focus on sustainable travel. New relationships have been developed with FlightFree, promoting greener ways to travel, City to Sea, encouraging plastic-free travel, and Campaign for National Parks, promoting car-free journeys to those areas.

We provided content to partners for inclusion on their websites, opening up Scenic Rail Britain to a host of new audiences, which was reflected by a significant increase in users and page views.



## PROMOTING SOCIAL INCLUSION AND WELLBEING

### Assessing social impact

A continued focus during 2019/20 was supporting our members to better assess, evidence, and communicate the impact and value of their activities within communities. Building on the findings of our 2019 ‘Value of Community Rail’ report, and our involvement in RSSB’s Social Value Working Group, **we worked with a social enterprise called Impact Reporting to develop a tool specifically for use in community rail.**

**Impact** is an easy-to-use online platform that enables community rail groups to track and record activities and associated indicators of change, supporting them to demonstrate their outcomes. It can be useful for:

- showing how much you do and the difference you have made;
- capturing data and feedback in real-time, whilst out and about;
- collating evidence for funding bids and communications;
- reporting to funders and partners;
- prioritising activities to maximise impact.

Heading up the Impact project, our training and development coordinator Alex worked throughout 2019/20 to develop and test the system to ensure that it was user-friendly and suitable for both small groups who want to build a picture of the work they do, and larger partnerships running multiple projects and strands of work.

Alex gave a presentation on Impact at the 2020 Community Rail Conference, and all Community Rail Network members received details on how to get started in April, with usage now on the increase. The platform hosts more than 50 activity logs for groups to report on and track progress against, offering opportunities to understand, demonstrate, and evidence positive outcomes of their work.



Fun on Kent Community Rail Partnership’s ‘Santa Train’

### Championing social inclusion

Promoting social inclusion and wellbeing continues to be a theme central to our work, and we have supported a number of projects highlighting the breadth of social value that can be delivered via community rail, creating more inclusive, cohesive, and connected communities.

As part of a wider drive to help everyone in community rail deliver as much benefit as possible to local communities, by embracing inclusion and diversity, we produced guidance for community rail partnerships and station groups on promoting **positive and inclusive conduct**. This offers advice to help community rail groups reflect the communities they operate in, have a culture of transparency and openness, create supportive and welcoming environments, and champion equality and diversity.

We also championed social inclusion via our events programme, with the Community Rail Conference hosting sessions on community rail’s role in tackling loneliness, youth engagement, and community engagement. Via our seminars, we also gave members the chance to benefit from expertise from our growing roster of third sector partners, with joint sessions delivered with the Prince’s Trust on youth engagement, with the Plunkett Foundation on social enterprise, and an inspiring workshop with Mapping for Change on community engagement, where groups saw the positive effects that participatory mapping can have on grassroots community development.

## CASE STUDY: Penistone Line Community Rail Partnership – Dwell Time

‘Dwell Time’ seeks to raise awareness of mental wellbeing and provide a platform for people experiencing mental health issues to share their stories through art and writing. It has developed into a free publication distributed on the railway, an online blog, and a series of films, so its content is seen by as wide an audience as possible.

The project is curated by artists and writers who have ongoing mental health problems themselves, and is developed in conjunction with the Penistone Line Partnership. Organisers hold open calls for contributions towards the project, with each one published on the blog and shared via social media. The group has presented at arts and mental health events, delivered poetry performances on trains, and launched the Dwell Time Art Trail at stations on the Penistone Line.

Due to the “overwhelmingly positive” public reaction to their work, the group has been awarded a microgrant by the Yorkshire Visual Arts Network to produce an exhibition for Huddersfield Station. Community Rail Network continues to support and share the project across its members as an example of good practice.



## CASE STUDY: Leeds-Morecambe Community Rail Partnership – The Dementia Friendly Railway

With more than 850,000 people in Britain living with dementia, including tens of thousands near the Bentham Line, the Leeds-Morecambe Community Rail Partnership set out to create Britain’s first-ever dementia-friendly railway. They wanted to raise awareness of dementia with staff, volunteers, and passengers; to support the journeys of those living with dementia; and create dementia-friendly station environments and activities.

Partnership staff and volunteers became Dementia Friends Champions via the Alzheimer’s Society, and have delivered more than 30 workshops to 260 people, including groups across community rail and the wider rail industry. The partnership, which is supported by our community rail support officer Ian, also carried out audits of the line’s stations looking for ways of making them dementia-friendly, such as simplifying display information, buying tickets, and finding the right platform and train.

To complement train journeys along the line, dementia-friendly walks have been created at Morecambe, Bentham, Forest of Bowland and Saltaire to help recall memories of the seaside, countryside, and industrial heritage. The partnership also assisted in the founding of Dementia Friendly Bentham, and has received enquiries from a host of train operating companies and community rail partnerships interested in replicating the project, which was part-funded by Community Rail Network, in their own areas.



## LEADING ON SUSTAINABILITY

### Decarbonising transport

Community rail has a critical part to play in promoting rail as part of everyday sustainable and healthy travel, and in helping railways play a major role in bringing about a more sustainable society. The movement is already contributing to sustainable development, but there is scope for it to make a greater contribution, especially to support the drive to decarbonise transport and help avert the climate emergency.

In March, the DfT published ‘**Decarbonising Transport: Setting the Challenge**’, asking for input in the development of its Transport Decarbonisation Plan. The plan will set out what government, business and society will need to do to deliver the significant emissions reduction needed across the transport field, creating a pathway to achieving net zero emissions by 2050.

Given the unique insights community rail can offer on the role that community engagement and community-led change can play in creating the shift we need from private car use to active travel and the use of public transport, we submitted a **comprehensive written response**.



Launching new trains on the Marston Vale Line

School children take the train in Cumbria



We outlined four key recommendations:

- ensuring a sharp focus and positive messaging on ‘making active travel and public transport the natural first choice’, as the key to decarbonisation and extensive co-benefits;
- recognising and prioritising the role of communities and community-led change in achieving a more sustainable and inclusive transport future;
- setting out how public transport and active travel will be integrated and developed as a coherent, aspirational, affordable transport system;
- committing to going ‘further, faster’, to support a green and fair recovery from Covid-19, and show global leadership on climate transition.

To inform our members and encourage them to feed into the government’s decarbonisation plan, we worked with the DfT to deliver a well-attended ‘Decarbonising Transport’ online consultation event, allowing community rail groups to discuss its contents and explore the role that localised community engagement can play in promoting more sustainable travel habits.

Jools, our chief executive, also fed in to a number of DfT workshops on different aspects of the transport decarbonisation challenge, highlighting the importance of integrating sustainable transport modes and ensuring they work well together at a local level. She also emphasised the huge value of engaging and empowering communities on sustainable transport, and how this can help to shift culture and behaviours as well as driving practical, effective and inclusive infrastructure and service improvements. Jools now sits on the DfT’s Net Zero Advisory Board, championing the role of community rail in creating vibrant sustainable transport networks that work for communities.

## Supporting sustainable transport networks

One of our ongoing aims is to share ideas and advice on sustainability, empowering members to work with partners locally to achieve impactful change. A key issue that many community rail groups are involved in is better connecting and integrating rail with other sustainable and healthy modes of travel, such as walking, cycling, and public and shared transport.

To support this, we researched and created ‘**Connected Stations**’, a new guide to community-led station travel planning and linking rail with sustainable transport, created in partnership with West Midlands Trains. The toolkit features guidance on planning and community engagement, travel data collection and analysis, developing action plans, and ideas for projects, alongside case studies and best practice from a host of partners including Sustrans, Living Streets, and Transport Focus. The toolkit was well-received by members, who appreciated the range of accompanying practical resources to help deliver change, such as station audit forms, example travel surveys, action plan templates, and example station travel plans used by community rail partnerships and groups.

As well as empowering our members to champion sustainability locally, we also drew on the experiences of 30 groups by conducting a survey on integrated sustainable transport activity. We used the results to produce a policy briefing on integrated transport, designed to advise central and devolved governments and other transport partners on common barriers faced by communities in creating more coherent and convenient sustainable transport networks, and opportunities for us to empower members and communities better to achieve effective local progress in this vital area of work.



## CASE STUDY: Tyne Valley Community Rail Partnership – Volunteer Station Ambassadors

Thanks to funding from Community Rail Network, Tyne Valley Community Rail Partnership commissioned a physical activity and wellbeing consultant to train volunteer station ambassadors at the 14 stations along the Tyne Valley line, which runs from Newcastle to Carlisle.

A training workshop was held to assist volunteers in undertaking walking and cycling audits to and from stations. The environments surrounding each station were examined to establish whether the current conditions supported or inhibited active and sustainable travel. Ambassadors assessed opportunities to improve provision at each station, then met as a group to exchange ideas to make recommendations.

The findings will be used to create maps, to display at the stations and online, to inform prospective passengers of what is available to support active eco-friendly travel and inform and complement a station survey update along the length of the line.



## CASE STUDY: Community Rail Cumbria – Walking and cycling projects

Community Rail Cumbria are using their strong relationship with Cumbria County Council and other partners to make great strides linking walking and cycling with rail.

They are working in partnership with the county council to help them complete Local Cycle & Walking Infrastructure Plans (LCWIPs) for the six major towns across the county, advising on requirements for cycling and walking routes to/from railway stations. They are also working with the authority's active travel team to support healthy lifestyles, exploring the potential to use station volunteers as local walking guides.

Other projects include working with local bus companies to strengthen connectivity between rail and bus services, with the potential for some services to be re-routed to serve stations, working with Northern to explore increasing cycle capacity on trains, and improving signage and information for walkers and cyclists in and around stations.

The partnership also produces leaflets and a calendar promoting walks accessible from Cumbrian lines, with nearly 50,000 distributed over the past three years. This in part led to the creation of 'The Ramblers', a group that prior to Covid-19, met monthly for social interaction to boost members' health and wellbeing and raise funds for local charities.



# COMMUNITY RAIL'S ROLE IN RECOVERY AND RENEWAL

## 'Building back better' from Covid-19

Since the pandemic hit, our focus has been on supporting our members in continuing their activities and adapting to change, alongside promoting the importance of community rail in rebuilding communities and their connections with rail during the pandemic and beyond. **We feel the movement is more important now than ever, to aid the recovery of our communities and their vital railways and sustainable transport links.**

As well as advising members on how they can play a strong part in managing challenges and Covid recovery, we are continually working to raise awareness of community rail's important role on a wider basis. For example, we have featured regularly in rail and transport media this year with reference to community rail building for the future post Covid-19, our sustainable and inclusive travel alliance (see next page), and our rebrand.

## Rebuilding confidence in rail

Throughout the pandemic, we kept our members up-to-date with the latest government advice from England, Scotland, and Wales, identifying and communicating good practice and safe working and volunteering procedures for community rail.

As lockdown restrictions have been eased and people have started to move around again, we have supported community rail to encourage confidence and positivity about rail and sustainable travel, whilst also conveying messages about following safe travel guidance.

**We know that community rail has an important part to play in rebuilding trust and positivity in rail, and are working with governments, rail partners, and our members to aid this.**

We continue to meet and discuss regularly (online!) with DfT, Welsh Government, Transport Scotland, and industry partners Network Rail, RSSB and Rail Delivery Group, on the role of community rail in positioning rail travel positively, while being attentive to local needs, nuances, and changing restrictions/travel advice.



To illustrate how community rail can support Covid-19 recovery and building back better, we produced a briefing outlining how the movement can play (and is already playing) a fundamental role in a sustainable, inclusive recovery. This was shaped by discussions with members and feedback from our 'Recovery and Renewal' webinar, attended by more than 70 members and partners.

The briefing highlights how community rail is:

- supporting local understanding, insights, and dialogue, acting as a link between our railways, local communities, service providers, employers, and authorities;
- bringing people together to bolster community resilience, wellbeing, and inclusion;
- building positivity and promoting rail and sustainable travel.

The document has been widely shared via our communications, and with senior government and partner contacts.



Travelling safely on the Bishop Line

## Sustainable and inclusive travel alliance

We have stepped up our partnership working with a host of sustainable travel partners to ensure we are able to share insights and work collaboratively, including to deal with the challenges and opportunities presented by Covid-19. **This has resulted in a new alliance of national charities and organisations including Bus Users, Campaign for Better Transport, Community Rail Network, Community Transport Association, CoMoUK, Greener Journeys, Living Streets, and Sustrans.**

Together with these organisations we have underlined that we are at a critical juncture with transport and travel, with a chance to reset priorities, putting people's communities, health and wellbeing, and our environment, at the forefront. With efforts underway across Britain to develop space and facilities for walking and cycling, the group has **highlighted** the importance of linking these improvements with public, community and shared transport, to lock-in long term benefits for all.

We know that rail, and sustainable transport, can play a fundamental role in a green and just recovery and safeguarding our shared future, and we will continue to work with governments and authorities, partners and communities, to ensure this is the path we take from here.

## CASE STUDY: Heart of Wales Development Company – Covid-19 Community Resilience Fund

The Heart of Wales Development Company came up with the idea of a resilience fund after realising that due to the pandemic, they wouldn't be able to deliver their usual programme of marketing and community projects. Instead, they decided to create a fund to help community groups along the line to remain active.

The group worked with local voluntary associations to set up a small grants fund of £10k for groups within 10km of stations on their line, drawing on support from Transport for Wales. This recognised that small amounts could make a big difference to enabling these groups – whose activities are crucial to inclusion and wellbeing – to 'weather the storm' of Covid-19.

As well as providing a funding lifeline, the community rail partnership was also able to develop and strengthen its local community links. Community Rail Network supported media and communications around the project.

Passengers on the Heart of Wales Line



## OUR PARTNERS AND SUPPORTERS

Throughout 2019/20, we worked closely with our biggest funder, the DfT, coordinating with the stations and community rail team, and its National Community Rail Steering Group of rail partners, to continue to support members in delivering on all aspects of the DfT's **Community Rail Development Strategy**.

We also worked with other DfT teams to take forward opportunities for community rail to align with other major policy areas such as sustainability and tackling loneliness and social isolation. We further developed our relationship with the Welsh Government, supporting the growth of community rail there, and also advised Transport Scotland on how community rail can contribute to all strands of Scotland's new National Transport Strategy.

We also continued to develop our partnerships with the third sector, passing on knowledge and expertise to help connect community rail to other community activities. Alongside the links we have made through the sustainable and inclusive travel alliance, we furthered relationships with the Prince's Trust,

Groundwork, the Plunkett Foundation and Locality, with those organisations contributing to our events or resources as expert consultees.

**As a not-for-profit organisation, Community Rail Network is dependent on sponsors and supporters.**

We are hugely grateful to our growing list of main partners (see next page), including train operators that provide valuable funding for us to provide enhanced support on their parts of the network, and national rail organisations such as Rail Delivery Group, RSSB, and Network Rail.

In 2019/20 we welcomed new corporate partners, Eversholt Rail and Siemens Mobility, whose infrastructure teams are now in contact with a number of community rail partnerships and station adoption groups to explore ways they can potentially work together.

Find out about **partnership opportunities** via our website or by emailing [hazel@communityrail.org.uk](mailto:hazel@communityrail.org.uk).

Bike meets train on the Highland Mainline



## OUR GOVERNMENT AND NOT-FOR-PROFIT FUNDERS:



## OUR CORPORATE PARTNERS:



## MANAGING GRANTS

We continue to work on behalf of government and industry partners to manage and promote grant schemes, ensuring a robust approach to awarding **funding**, which is increasingly outcomes-orientated. These schemes included in 2019/20:

- Community rail development fund (England and Wales), on behalf of the DfT, plus our Small Grants Fund and a new Integrated Sustainable Transport Fund;
- South Western Railway Small Grants Fund;
- Transport for Greater Manchester Small Grants Fund.

**In total, £350,225 was awarded to community rail projects and developments in 2019/20.**



Work at Dronfield Station continues despite Covid-19

## OUR VISION

A flourishing community rail movement connecting people and their railways, contributing to inclusive, empowered, sustainable and healthy communities.

\* Community rail is made up of community-based partnerships, groups, enterprises, and volunteers seeking to benefit their community and railway, through connecting people with, and engaging them in, the railway.

Our mission

Community Rail Network's mission is to **empower, support and champion** the community rail movement, helping community rail partnerships and groups to:

Enhance the railways' contribution to social inclusion, sustainable development and health and 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, so this meets community needs and aspirations and delivers maximum social value

Communicate the development and importance of railways to local communities, enhancing understanding and pride, and promoting rail as a key part of sustainable, healthy travel

This Community Rail Network Annual Report 2019/20 is a draft, subject to agreement by our members at our November 2020 AGM.

Find out more about community rail and our work supporting community rail partnerships and groups at [communityrail.org.uk](https://communityrail.org.uk), where you can also meet the team.

Find out more about becoming a member or partner at [communityrail.org.uk/join-us](https://communityrail.org.uk/join-us).



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