

**COMMUNITY RAIL NETWORK  
2020 ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING  
VIA ZOOM  
Wednesday 11 November 2020**

**1. Welcome and apologies for absence**

The Chair (Richard Burningham, Chair, Community Rail Network Board. Devon & Cornwall Rail Partnership) welcomed everyone to the AGM.

Apologies had been received from: Linda Brinklow (Kent Community Rail Partnership Swale section); Hugh Everett (Friends of Handforth Station) and Julie Levy (Bolton Station Community Partnership).

The Chair advised that the AGM was being recorded for the purposes of minute-taking.

**2. Minutes of the AGM held on 6 November 2019**

The Minutes had been available on the website. The Minutes were adopted on the proposal of Ian Dinmore, seconded by Marion Atkinson.

**3. Community Rail Network annual report 2019-20 and discussion on future plans for 2021-22 – Jools Townsend, Chief Executive**

Jools Townsend, Chief Executive, Community Rail Network presented the Annual Report with a slide presentation. The report had been made available with the AGM papers and had been circulated a number of times with the Bulletin.

The CE said she wanted to highlight some of the achievements of 2019-20 together with some more recent updates; give an overview of the main results from the annual members' survey and talk about the focus for priorities and themes going forward next year.

Community Rail Network continued, in 2019-20, to see success in relation to: supporting growth within community rail; providing direct support across the membership; providing events, training and resources; championing the community rail movement and advising on its insights. They also continued to lead on the overarching themes of social inclusion and diversity, sustainable travel, community engagement and empowerment, and community development – aligning with the pillars of the community rail development strategy.

The CE said the facts and figures in the Annual Report gave an indication of how Community Rail Network had continued to grow and develop, and how growth and development had been supported across community rail. The figures were already out of date as growth was ongoing with the team working hard to support that:

- At the end of last year there were 67 community rail partnerships – this was now up to 72
- There had been a large increase in the number of station friend groups
- The team had focused (with the support of industry partners) on areas of the country where there had not previously been much community rail activity in order to help partnerships and groups to set up. This was the case particularly in the West Midlands and Wales with regards to new CRPs, and South Western Railway where there had been a big push for more station adoption.

As well as helping new groups to set up, the teams were concerned to provide quality support right across the membership. The support and development team was dedicated to providing direct help and advice in a tailored way appropriate to the requirements of individual members – normally getting out and about a lot for visits and meetings, and in recent months providing support purely via email, phone

and video call meetings. Last year there were 550 instances of direct support as recorded on our support log, taking a range of forms. The team had also been rolling out the DfT's and Welsh Government's new accreditation scheme for community rail partnerships – working hard to ensure it was implemented successfully and constructive for those going through the process. Many CRPs who had already been through the process had reported that there had been benefits and improvements as a result of reviewing and scrutinising the way they operated.

Community Rail Network had also made good strides in communicating that it was also available to support station friends groups – there was still work to do – but there was already positive feedback from the members' survey and anecdotally from groups who had been supported.

The support and development team worked directly with members, but also rail industry partners, and, increasingly, other partners to help community rail to collaborate and work effectively in partnership with others at a local level, and opening up new opportunities.

Over the last eight months there had been much to do in working through the challenges posed by the pandemic – internally, so that the teams could continue to deliver a service, even if they could not get out and about, but also helping members to deal with the challenges they faced. During this time there was a heightened need to ensure there was mutual understanding between community rail and the rail industry and other partners.

The CE wished to emphasise the extent to which the support and development team fed back in to the rest of the team to inform events, activities and plans: while they were working with members on their priorities and issues, the team was also listening and learning to ensure that Community Rail Network's future plans were in tune with what members wanted.

Working alongside the support and development team was the communications, resources and events team and the training and development coordinators who were providing a growing range of learning and development opportunities; networking opportunities; resources and tools that members could use to develop their own activities. The team facilitated the sharing of good practice and drawing on expertise and the experiences of others not just within community rail but more widely, too.

A few examples of the expanded offering last year were:

- a major revision and improvement of the station adoption handbook;
- a toolkit for community led station travel planning - helping community rail partnerships and station groups think about how rail might be better connected with walking, cycling and buses;
- our biggest ever Community Rail in the City in May 2019, with a huge range of participants from across the membership (36 groups took part) – sadly, this year the event had to be cancelled due to Covid restrictions;
- there had been a fantastic 210 entries for the Awards - which was a celebration of good practice and recognising achievements – this year entries nearly equalled those for 2019-20 despite the difficulties and the CE looked forward to welcoming everyone to the first virtual Awards on 9 December 2020;
- altogether 15 courses and events had been run from very interactive, discussion-based sessions through to the National Community Rail Conference covering a swathe of different topics from community mapping to tackling loneliness and mental health issues and integrated and sustainable travel – reflecting the pillars of the Community Rail Development Strategy. The events programme had had to adapt very quickly to the altered environment and it was pleasing to note that there had been ongoing, great levels of engagement with the webinars.

As well as direct support and providing events, training and resources, Community Rail Network was increasingly doing work to champion community rail and take the insights of community rail to different levels of government, and to partners and decision-makers, in order to raise awareness about the impact

of community rail, and how the lessons from community rail could be made use of at a strategic level. Much was done last year to follow up on the *Value of Community Rail Report* (published in April 2019), using the report to convey how community rail was able to effectively promote rail use; engage volunteers at stations; but also make a significant impact with regard to some of the big issues around social isolation, social inclusion and sustainability – and Community Rail Network would continue to get this message out.

Community Rail Network worked closely with its biggest funder, the DfT, as their lead delivery partner on their Community Rail Development Strategy. Also, increasingly Community Rail Network was advising DfT and others within government on how community rail can play a role in related major policy areas such as tackling loneliness; active travel; and sustainable travel. Since the DfT published its *Decarbonising Transport Report* in March, Community Rail Network had been advising government on how community rail could inform and support the transition that would need to be made to get to a more sustainable and inclusive transport system.

More had been done to engage devolved governments and authorities. There had been a lot of discussion with Transport Scotland over the last year about developing community rail in Scotland. Community Rail Network had also been working with the Welsh Government and Transport for Wales on the expansion of community rail in Wales and the borders. Community Rail Network had also been talking to sub-national authorities such as Transport for the South East to inform and advise on their transport strategy and the part community rail can play.

Further, Community Rail Network continued to advise industry: working with train operators, Network Rail, RDG and RSSB at a national level – advising on how to support and nurture community rail and, through the rail industry's Social Value Working Group, advising how the railways as a whole could deliver greater social value and impact. Community Rail Network would now have a continuing focus on how community rail could play a strong role in the recovery and renewal of communities and railways.

Turning to the annual members' survey (carried out in September 2020), the CE said that the analysis could be seen in full on the website and would also be going out with the bulletin. The members' survey was seen by Community Rail Network as a valuable listening exercise and an additional means of informing their plans and ensuring they matched members' priorities. The members' survey showed a trend of increasingly positive feedback in respect of: the benefit and value derived from membership; communication from Community Rail Network; the close support and positive leadership that had been delivered through the pandemic; and a growing number of members engaging with support, events and resources. At the same time there were plenty of members' ideas and suggestions in the survey that had already been integrated into plans for Community Rail Network to follow up on next year.

Key from the members' survey was learning about members' priorities and concerns. Not unsurprisingly there was a strong emphasis at the moment on the need for continued support to meet the challenges that were thrown up by the pandemic – and helping members play the fullest possible role in the recovery, both in terms of communities and railways. From community rail partnerships in particular, there was a clear steer for the need to promote the railways following the decimation of passenger numbers. There remained a big focus on community engagement: involving local people; inclusive volunteering; and how community rail engaged communities and involved volunteers in a post-Covid world. Members' had also shown their support for some key development areas that Community Rail Network had already been working on: youth engagement and integrated sustainable travel.

Drawing on the feedback from members; discussions within the team, board and partners; and thinking about Community Rail Network's operating environment and long term strategy – they had drawn up a set of priorities which would inform the delivery plan for next year. Broadly the priorities for 21-22 were:

- To continue to be mindful of the challenging environment and support members through changes and recovery associated with the pandemic and changes related to rail reform – helping members to consider how they might deliver maximum impact within this context
- In time it would be necessary to begin promoting rail travel again and to position rail as a sustainable, healthy, community-minded form of travel and to pick up on the work to build confidence and positivity about the railways
- Community Rail Network needed to help members engage effectively with their communities – increasing more digital forms of engagement that might be more appropriate in a post-Covid world and engaging as widely as possible with volunteers and attracting more young people
- Community Rail Network also wanted to help members lead locally on sustainable travel and its integration. There were major opportunities at the moment with a lot of attention on this topic and community rail could play a really important role at the forefront of this change
- The team was also aware that there were areas of its work to be refined: to get ‘smarter’ and more efficient in supporting a growing membership; to ensure effective partnership working to bring wider expertise into community rail; and, to step up PR and communications work to get the message out about community rail to a wider audience.

The CE finished her presentation with a slide from the Annual Report which was a summary of Community Rail Network’s long-term over-arching strategy. This served as a reminder that all Community Rail Network’s activities and plans for next year were all about helping the community rail movement flourish; and helping members to connect communities with railways and to have maximum impact on inclusion, empowerment, sustainability and healthy, well communities.

Malcolm Chainey (Tyne Valley CRP) said that in recent years community rail had enjoyed a ‘veritable bounty of riches’ from the railways, but now the railways were haemorrhaging money. The Community Rail Development Strategy talked about financial independence and in paragraph 3.7 it was suggested that train operators should help by providing community rail with work from which it could earn an income. Tyne Valley CRP was redeveloping buildings so space could be let out – the group was now thinking what it could do for the railway. It might be helpful if Community Rail Network could make some representations on behalf of groups, where relevant.

The CE said she would remind herself of that particular paragraph and would consider whether it might be appropriate to discuss further with the DfT and the national community rail steering group (which included just about all of the train operators and other industry partners). She said Community Rail Network was conscious of the importance of everyone within community rail being aware of the unstable environment in terms of funding. Community rail had enjoyed crucial support from the rail industry, and hopefully that would continue: Community Rail Network was working with the rail reform team at the DfT, as well as with the community rail team, to ensure that community rail’s contribution and role was understood through the changes that were coming. Community Rail Network had been given as much reassurance as was possible that community rail would be safeguarded – but the CE said the level of uncertainty was such that community rail could not afford to be complacent. In any case it was beneficial for community rail to be diversifying sources of income. Community Rail Network had already been doing some work on that front: the training and development team had been running sessions on funding bids and on outcomes so that members could ‘sell themselves’ to different funding partners; Community Rail Network would continue with this sort of work and through the accreditation process and direct advice, it would be signposting possibilities, ideas and methods that might be used to explore and develop new sources of income.

Malcolm Chainey said that the funding from the train operator was looked upon as ‘core funding’ which allowed the group to pay their Officer. The group then bid for grants to do specific projects: if an Officer had to factor in a salary element within the project bids, things would become much harder. The ‘core funding’ gave the group a ‘platform’ from which to operate. The CE said Community Rail Network was

appreciative of the importance of having reliable, ongoing, long-term core funding commitments and what a difference this made. Community Rail Network would continue to ensure this was understood while also supporting members to think about and develop additional income sources where possible.

Roy Chapman (Friends of Heaton Chapel Station) commented on an excellent annual report and said that despite the current background, the growth of CRPs and station friends was very encouraging. He thought this had been replicated across many community groups during the pandemic: that their membership had grown as people turned to them for support. There had been an increase of community engagement in a lot of community projects – was Community Rail Network going to build on this greater community spirit? He also said there was a great deal of debate about devolution and devolving authority to places like Greater Manchester, West Yorkshire, etc to get away from the over-centralised railway industry which had been prevalent over the last twenty years plus. He wondered what Community Rail Network was doing in respect of making overtures to Andy Burnham in Manchester and Steve Rotherham in Liverpool in terms of devolution of railway and transport interests.

The CE said she had already spoken about the challenges that Covid had thrown up, but Community Rail Network did recognise that there were opportunities too: there had been greater involvement with some causes – sustainability being one; and people had come together to support the vulnerable and rise to the challenges brought by the pandemic; and community rail had linked into and shared some of these initiatives and would, going forward continue to think about these opportunities as much as the challenges. Regarding devolution, the CE said it was an area where there was much more to be done – devolution was about taking decision-making closer to communities and there were clearly opportunities for community rail where powers were devolved and this would feature in Community Rail Network’s plans going into next year. However, Community Rail Network did have some strong relationships already with some devolved authorities, and developing relationships too (eg Transport for the South East), and there was an existing relationship with Transport for Greater Manchester. With all of the devolved authorities there was at least a connection on which Community Rail Network could build.

Returning to the issue of funding, Chris Fribbins (Kent CRP) said that when CRPs were tied to the franchise re-letting, and franchises were being extended and converted into direct awards, it made it very difficult for any long term planning with any idea where the funding would come from. Likewise if Community Rail Network’s funding was in doubt – and therefore the level of support to CRPs – CRPs needed to know as soon as possible so that they could assess the situation as it evolved to protect employees and jobs. He said there had been some very ‘eleventh hour’ decisions on funding and this was not appropriate when livelihoods were at stake.

The CE acknowledged the comments and said these points had been fed into the Williams’ Review – and the point would continue to be made through the rail reform process that there was the need for greater certainty and the ability to plan ahead. Community Rail Network was committed to providing ongoing advice to government and rail industry partners and feeding through to members as much information as possible in the interest of transparency.

#### **4. Adoption of Community Rail Network Annual Report and Accounts 2019-20**

Copies of the Annual Report and the Financial Statements for the year ended 31 March 2019 had been made available to members and the Management Accountant was on hand to answer queries.

The Annual Report was adopted on the proposal of Philip Ayers (Individual honorary member), seconded by Marjorie Birch (Clitheroe Line CRP).

The Financial Statements were adopted on the proposal of the Chair, seconded by Mick Stone (Purbeck CRP).

## **5. Election of Board Members**

The Chair of Board said that a third of the Board stood down each year and as there were currently nine Directors, three had stepped down (two had stood for re-election). The maximum number of Directors was twelve and so there were six vacancies on the Board.

No election was necessary as there were six candidates standing (Marion Atkinson, Roy Chapman, Lisa Denison, Ian Dinmore, Julia Singleton-Tasker and Garfield Southall) for the six Board vacancies. However, each addressed the AGM in turn to introduce themselves and to supplement the written personal statements previously circulated.

The AGM appointed the six candidates to the Board on the proposal of the Chair, seconded by Mick Stone (Purbeck CRP).

The Chair wished to thank Heather Cullimore, Melanie Lawton and Kaye Robinson who, for varying reasons, had all stood down from the Board during the course of the year and also James Wilkin who stood down at the AGM for all their hard work. The Chair also wished to thank his colleagues on the Board for the past year too.

The CE welcomed the new Board members and said she was looking forward to working with them. On behalf of the whole team she wished to thank all the Board members present, past and future for the huge amount of work they put in to support and steer the organisation enabling Community Rail Network to develop and move forward, and particular thanks were paid to the Chair of Board for his support.

## **7. Penny Greenwood (Steering Group, Women in Community Rail)**

Penny Greenwood said she was speaking on behalf of WiCR and wanted to mention that WiCR aimed to recruit and support women, people of diverse communities, and younger people to promote inclusion across the industry, which she hoped all would agree was important. These were not 'buzzwords' but important concepts and she felt it was worth highlighting this at the AGM. WiCR also had a training and mentoring scheme: it was not just about getting people to join WiCR in paid or voluntary capacities, but also to offer support when they did. If anyone wished for any more information, Marion Atkinson was WiCR's Chair and would be able to help.

## **8. Chair's vote of thanks**

The Chair closed the AGM, thanking the CE and the team for all their hard work, in particular he thanked Anders Hanson and Hazel Bonner for organising and running the AGM. The Chair thanked attendees for their participation and reminded them that this was their organisation and to make the most of it.

There being no further business the meeting closed at 3.45pm.

In attendance: Jo Andrews (Poacher Line CRP); Philip Ayers (Individual honorary member); Jenny Barnes (Friends of Handforth Station); Brian Barnsley (Community Rail Network); Stephen Bengue (West of Lancashire CRP); Dawn Bigland (Community Rail Network); Marjorie Birch (Clitheroe Line CRP), Mike Bishop (Honorary member & Friends of Handforth Station); Hazel Bonner (Community Rail Network); Richard Burningham (Devon & Cornwall Rail Partnership); Malcolm Chainey (Tyne Valley CRP); Rowena Chantler (Penistone Line Partnership); Roy Chapman (Friends of Heaton Chapel Station) Daisy Chapman-Chamberlain (Community Rail Network Board); Simon Clarke (East Lancashire CRP); Hannah Cottrill (Community Rail Network); Catherine Croney (High Peak and Hope Valley CRP); Vicky Cropper-Clarke (London Northwestern Railway); Heather Cullimore (Sevenside CRP); Sheila Dee (Chester-Shrewsbury Rail Partnership); Lisa Denison (The Heart of

Wales Line Development Company); Stephanie Dermott (Bolton and South Lancashire CRP); Ian Dinmore (Community Rail Network Board); Piers Elias (Esk Valley Railway CRP); John Ellis (Cotswold Line Promotion Group); Anthony Ford (South Fylde Line CRP); Chris Fribbins (Kent CRP); Dennis Gilbbey (Friends of Yetminster Station); Penny Greenwood (Women in Community Rail); Anders Hanson (Community Rail Network); Ro James (Severnside CRP); Lucy Lomax (Surrey Hills to South Downs CRP); Rob Lawson (Community Rail Network); Val Male (New River CRP & Abbey Line CRP); Neil Matthewman (Community Rail Network Board); Emma Morris (Great Western Railway); Joanne Oakey (Settle Carlisle CRP aka Settle Carlisle Railway Development Co Ltd); Alex Peel (Community Rail Network); Peter Roberts (Chair, Poacher Line CRP); Richard Scott (Poppleton Nursery); Julia Singleton-Tasker (Heart of England CRP); Stephen Sleight (Marston Vale CRP); Garfield Southall (North Cheshire CRP); Patrick Southern (Community Rail Network); Tim Sparrow (Southeast CRP); Sally Spaven (Highland Mainline CRP); Mick Stone (Purbeck CRP); Dave Stubbins (Friends of Cark Station); Jools Townsend (CEO, Community Rail Network), Gerald Townson (Leeds-Morecambe CRP and Friends of Bentham Station); Ben Walsh (Hereward CRP); Keith Walton (Severnside CRP); Richard Watts (Community Rail Lancashire); Paul Webster (Community Rail Network); Sarah Wells (Penistone Line Partnership); Jeremy Whitaker (CRN Board); William Whiting (Worcestershire CRP); Claire Williams (Cambrian Railway Partnership); Daniel Wright (Community Rail Network); Martin Yallop (Community Rail Network) and Tim Young (Travelwatch NW).