



Community rail in the South East



Sponsored by

Rail Delivery Group



Community rail is a unique and growing movement comprising more than 70 community rail partnerships (CRPs) and 1,000 volunteer groups across Britain that help communities get the most from their railways.

It is about engaging local people at grassroots level to promote social inclusion, sustainable and healthy travel, wellbeing, economic development, and tourism. This involves working with train operators, local authorities, and other partners to highlight local needs and opportunities, ensuring communities have a voice in rail and transport development.

Community rail is evidenced to contribute high levels of social, environmental, and economic value to local areas, and countless stations have been transformed into hubs at the heart of the communities they serve. Evidence also shows community rail delivering life-changing benefits for individuals and families, helping people access new opportunities through sustainable travel by rail.

The movement is currently looking to play a key role in the recovery of our communities post-COVID, helping them build back better and greener.

The South East in numbers:

**14
community
rail
partnerships**

Working along railway lines, with industry partners, to engage local communities. Partnerships stretch from Hertfordshire down to Kent, Sussex, and Hampshire on the South Coast.

**230
station
groups**

Voluntary groups bringing stations into the heart of communities. In the South East, around 30% of the network is 'adopted' by local volunteers.

“

Local railways provide vital lifelines that are invaluable, and they are a very sustainable way to travel.”

Tim Barkley, Southeast Communities CRP



“

We are passionate about community rail and putting stations at the heart of the communities they serve, helping to promote sustainable and healthy travel, involve diverse groups, and support social and economic development.”

Andy Harrowell, South Western Railway

Each Year

1,400



Volunteers

Giving

**65,000
Hours**



**Worth
£5.5m**

Community rail partnerships in the South East:

Abbey Line CRP - covers seven stations between Watford Junction and St Albans Abbey. The CRP seeks to use the railway to contribute to the economic and social wellbeing of local communities, help deliver local and sustainable transport solutions, and highlight the environmental benefits of modal shift from road to rail. The CRP runs the 'Abbey Line Days Out' scheme to help boost tourism, support local businesses, and increase leisure travel on the line, including special Christmas events.



Surrey Hills to South Downs CRP -

covers five stations from Haslemere to Farncombe. Priorities include maximising rail's role in social and economic regeneration, supporting local events and cultural activities, encouraging social enterprise, working with young people and marginalised groups, developing station enhancement projects, and promoting sustainable travel. In 2020, the CRP created 'Rail to Ramble' leaflets to highlight walking routes accessible from stations, and ran 'try the train' sessions for local primary schools.



New River Line CRP - this CRP was established in 2019 to bring together local authorities, community groups, and other partners to promote and celebrate the line between Hertford East and Broxbourne. Priorities include engaging communities in station enhancement projects and building relationships with local community groups, businesses, and schools. An early project saw the CRP work with Mudlarks, a local charity involving adults with learning disabilities, to adopt Hertford East Station.



East Hampshire CRP -

covers four stations from Liphook to Rowlands Castle. Priorities include developing stations as access gateways to the South Downs National Park, engaging local businesses, community organisations, and volunteers with stations and services, enhancing station environments, and promoting sustainable tourism by rail. The CRP recently transformed the booking hall at Liss Station, adding a series of brightly-coloured and informative vinyls displaying views of the South Downs countryside and Liss village.



Hounslow and Richmond CRP - this was the first London CRP, covering 15 stations from Barnes to Feltham. The main aims of the partnership are to build on community engagement in the area and encourage greater community involvement in the stations along the line. The CRP facilitated the adoption of Brentford Station by Air Quality Brentford, a volunteer group that seeks to improve the local community through positive environmental action, who worked on a range of biodiversity projects.



Three Rivers CRP - covers 20 stations on lines including Southampton to Winchester and Romsey to Eastleigh. Priorities include promoting stations as gateways to local communities, engaging businesses, local communities, and volunteers in local rail stations and services, and encouraging modal shift from road to rail. The CRP is currently developing a 'Solent Round Robin' multi-modal ticket encompassing local rail, bus, and ferry services, and is also working to establish a new partnership on the line from Reading to Basingstoke.



Darent Valley CRP - covers six stations from Swanley to Sevenoaks. Established in 2019, the CRP aims to use rail to benefit social inclusion, economic development, and community wellbeing, and to encourage sustainable travel by rail, for both residents and visitors, to access local communities, landscapes, and tourist attractions. The CRP used photographs to create 'One Big Picture', a community art project celebrating the line, and is planning posters for stations and murals for railway bridges.



Lymington-Brockenhurst CRP -

covers three stations, Lymington Pier, Lymington Town, and Brockenhurst. The CRP works to create a sustainable local rail network by increasing the use of rail services and wider Solent connections, developing community goodwill and involvement in the railway, improving station facilities and environments, and developing integrated transport links. The CRP supported the creation of the Friends of Brockenhurst Station group, helping with their launch brochure and profile-raising 'Carols under the Canopy' station event.



Kent CRP – youth engagement

Kent partnership empowers young people to lead community activities to improve stations, alongside developing their confidence to travel by train. The partnership works with Sheppey College, which has adopted each station on the Swale Rail Line, with students enhancing station environments and creating a website to promote the line and local area. On the Medway Valley Line, the Five Acre Wood project, which supports students with additional educational needs, has adopted Snodland Station, delivering gardening and art projects, as well as becoming an active member of the line's steering group, offering a youth perspective on plans and activities.

Isle of Wight CRP

- covers stations between Ryde and Shanklin. Priorities include ensuring rail plays a key role in local regeneration projects, working with community organisations to harness their creativity, supporting station development schemes, and promoting sustainable tourism by rail. The CRP set up the Lake Community Kids Project, which saw Lake Station being adopted by the local primary school, who recently created a unique planter to honour the Sandown & Shanklin Independent Lifeboat.



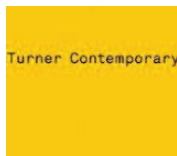
White Cliffs CRP

- covers stations from Westenhanger through to Dover and on to Sandwich. Only established in 2021, the CRP is made up of partners seeking to give a voice to local people, build community cohesion, improve health and wellbeing, boost economic regeneration, and increase the use of sustainable travel. Initial projects include supporting the existing adoption group at Deal Station, and creating poster maps for each station on the line, highlighting local attractions and sustainable transport routes by walking, cycling, and public transport.



Creative Isle CRP

- covers seven stations in Thanet from Birchington-on-Sea to Westgate-on-Sea. This new venture is Britain's first arts-led CRP, and is hosted by the Turner Contemporary art gallery in Margate. The partnership aims to use art and creativity to inspire change, give a voice to local communities, support wellbeing, and deliver social and economic benefits. To engage communities with the railway, the CRP is currently creating sound-based artworks for all its stations, each celebrating Thanet's unique and diverse soundscapes.



Kent CRP

- this CRP covers three lines across the county:

- Medway Valley Line – Strood to Tonbridge
- Swale Rail Line – Sittingbourne to Sheerness-on-Sea
- Kent Downs Line – Ashford to Otford



The CRP brings social, economic, and environmental benefits to the communities served by its lines, improving community links with rail operators and initiating projects to make rail services more attractive to both residents and visitors. Hosted by Sustrans, the CRP is focused on the promotion of active and sustainable travel, including delivering group travel and rail confidence training for colleges and schools, hosting pop-up events at businesses and schools to promote opportunities to link rail with walking and cycling, and organising family bike rides accessible by rail.

Essex and South Suffolk CRP

- This CRP covers six lines across the two counties:



- Flitch Line – Witham to Braintree
- Gainsborough Line – Marks Tey to Sudbury
- Mayflower Line – Manningtree to Harwich Town
- Crouch Valley Line – Wickford to Southminster
- Southend Line – Wickford to Southend Victoria
- Sunshine Coast Line – Colchester to Clacton-on-Sea and Walton-on-the-Naze

The CRP's aim is to encourage and promote the use of the area's six branch lines. The partnership supports projects developed with local community groups and businesses, focusing on enhancing stations, encouraging rail travel through community engagement, stimulating economic development, and promoting sustainable active travel for all. Major projects in 2020 included the CRP working with local partners to install history boards at more stations across the six lines, the production of walking and coastal guides, and the creation of a bee-friendly sculpture at Alresford Station.

Southeast Communities Rail Partnership

- This CRP covers eight lines across Sussex, Kent, Surrey and Berkshire:



- Arun Valley Line – Gatwick Airport to Chichester and Bosham
- Marshlink Line – Hastings to Ashford
- North Downs Line – Gatwick Airport to Guildford and Reading
- Sussex Coast Line – Littlehampton to Hove
- Seaford to Brighton Line
- Tonbridge to Reigate Line
- The 1066 Line - Hastings to Tonbridge
- Uckfield and East Grinstead Lines

The CRP's vision for community rail is that local communities become fully connected with their railway. Key priorities include using rail to support local business and regeneration, promoting sustainable tourism, encouraging volunteering, delivering environmental benefits, advocating for sustainable travel and modal shift, and improving station environments. The CRP is also involved in a range of youth engagement activities, with its Go Learn, Try a Train, and Active Access programmes, which all help introduce young people to rail and develop skills to travel confidently and independently, delivered to thousands of school pupils each year.



Community rail supports the four main aims of The Department for Transport's **Community Rail Development Strategy** via a wide range of projects, such as:

Providing a voice for the community

- Abbey Line CRP works with local primary schools on the 'Adopt a Station' project, encouraging young people to come up with ideas and pictures as to how their local stations could be improved;
- Essex and South Suffolk CRP teamed up with Colchester Sixth Form College to transform a waiting room at Colchester Station into a public art gallery, giving art and design students a chance to showcase their work;
- Hounslow and Richmond CRP worked with Air Quality Brentford on the adoption of Brentford Station, engaging communities in a range of biodiversity projects to benefit the local environment;
- Darent Valley CRP is working with local schools to create a publication, produced by the pupils, of insights and interviews with women working in the rail industry.

Promoting sustainable, healthy, accessible travel

- Many CRPs across the South East produce materials highlighting walking and cycling routes accessible by rail, encouraging active and sustainable travel and promoting health and wellbeing;
- Southeast Communities CRP has held 'bus surgeries' at stations, encouraging the use of public transport and developing relationships between bus and rail partners to work together on integrated timetabling and ticketing;
- Surrey Hills to South Downs CRP is looking to develop a 'cycle back to health from our stations' project, offering cycle confidence activities and bike doctor/bike maintenance classes in and around stations;
- East Hampshire CRP and Three Rivers CRP help to run the 'South Downs Rambler', a specially-commissioned bus service linking Petersfield and Winchester stations, giving visitors the chance to explore the area by bus and rail.

Community Rail Development Strategy

Bringing communities together and supporting diversity and inclusion

- Kent CRP worked with the Five Acre Wood and Grow19 Project, which empowers students with additional educational needs, to adopt Snodland Station, delivering art and gardening activities;
- Lymington to Brockenhurst CRP is developing a short film and children's book to promote inclusive and sustainable travel, aimed at attracting families to rail and encouraging leisure journeys;
- White Cliffs CRP is supporting plans to improve accessibility at Deal Station, enabling passengers with disabilities to travel safely, alongside developing walking and cycling routes to and from the site;
- New River Line CRP worked with Mudlarks, a charity involving adults with learning disabilities, to adopt Hertford East Station, supporting routes into employment via community gardening projects.

Supporting social and economic development

- Three Rivers CRP works with rail partners to lease disused rooms and buildings at stations specifically with a view to creating space for community usage, positioning stations as community hubs;
- Isle of Wight CRP coordinated 'Suit Yourself', a ten-week programme supporting women back into employment, featuring activities on confidence-building and interview skills;
- Creative Isle CRP is creating sound-based artworks for each of Thanet's stations, using the project to celebrate the uniqueness and diversity of the area, generating feelings of pride and community identity;
- Many CRPs across the South East promote their lines via the Scenic Rail Britain website, encouraging people to visit by rail and support local businesses and economies.

Southeast Communities Rail Partnership – education

Southeast Communities Rail Partnership has developed a range of education programmes to promote rail travel. This includes the 'Go Learn' programme, which teaches primary school pupils about rail safety, gives them an experience of rail travel, and includes activities highlighting the importance of sustainable and healthy travel. For older pupils, the partnership also offers an Independent Train Travel training programme, aimed at young people seeking to use rail to access education, training, or employment opportunities. This scheme can also be adapted for students with special educational needs, who may face barriers to travel. The partnership consistently receives positive feedback on the projects, which now benefit more than 8,000 local young people every year.



Haslemere Station

Haslemere has become a true community station in recent years, with its community information hub developing from a modest facility only open in the summer months to a bigger space open all year-round. More than 35 volunteers help to run the hub, which has a community events space and provides a wealth of information to both visitors and residents. Other enhancements have included new flower beds and planters, artwork from local schools, a large 'Totem' displaying maps of the town and its countryside, a defibrillator, and a life-sized Surrey Hills cow decorated with the local 'Rail to Trail' cycle route. The project has not only improved the aesthetics of the station, but also created a welcoming environment that promotes the social and economic vitality of the town.



Station groups:

More than 230 stations across South East England have been 'adopted' by their local communities, with around 1,400 volunteers helping to turn stations and their surroundings into welcoming, thriving, and celebratory gateways and hubs.

Across the region, groups are involved in: community gardening, food growing and biodiversity projects on station land; the creation of heritage boards or community artwork to help people learn about and take pride in their area; projects to enhance stations to create safe and attractive environments for passengers; work with rail industry partners towards improvements, such as better shelters, signage or pedestrian and cyclist access; and running events, workshops or other activities to promote sustainable travel, bring people together, and celebrate the local community.

Petersfield Station

A key priority for the East Hampshire CRP is developing disused rooms and buildings at stations for community use. In what was the old parcels office at Petersfield Station, the partnership has created a regular 'Free Shop' that redistributes food that would otherwise have been wasted, a summer season travel and tourism information hub providing details about rail, bus, cycling and walking routes in the South Downs National Park, a choir and play rehearsal space, a sustainable bag workshop area, and a community meeting room. The space has proved popular with locals and has helped cement the station's place at the heart of the community.



‘Building back better’ post-COVID-19:

Since the pandemic hit, community rail has adapted, supporting local resilience, continuing to engage communities, volunteers, and partners, maintaining togetherness, and looking to the future. Community rail partnerships and groups are now eager to do all they can to support a green and inclusive recovery from the pandemic, helping communities to deal with ongoing challenges, and putting rail at the centre of a sustainable transport future.

In their local areas, individual community rail partnerships and station groups have supported:

- Local understanding, insights, and dialogue, focusing on local people and places and how the railways can best serve their needs;
- Community resilience, wellbeing, and inclusion, bringing people and partners together;
- Building positivity and promoting rail and sustainable travel.

When COVID-19 hit, the Lymington to Brockenhurst CRP, with the support of the Friends of Brockenhurst Railway Station, worked with a local school and a dedicated team of volunteers to distribute food parcels to more than 1,000 vulnerable families. Many of the recipients were on low or no income or living in rented or emergency accommodation. The Isle of Wight CRP, together with staff at Sandown Railway Station’s Gaslight Café, provided 400 ‘Railwayman’s Lunches’ per week, with volunteers delivering the food to vulnerable families and isolated elderly individuals living along the Ryde to Shanklin rail corridor, supporting more than 5,000 people.



Southeast Communities Rail Partnership used its long-established relationships with local schools to establish how to get students back to school by train following the COVID-19 lockdown, promoting active travel, and providing a ‘virtual schoolbag’, an online information service for parents and pupils. The partnership was also proactive with rail partners in guiding their thinking on station ‘pinch points’ and timetable arrangements, ensuring young people could travel safely. At the end of 2020, the partnership promoted ‘I missed a train today’, a musical project celebrating the vital role that rail travel plays in people’s lives.

During the first lockdown, Essex and South Suffolk CRP created a new railway walks booklet to encourage people to get outdoors and use the train to explore areas within reach of their local line once they could travel. The partnership also worked with a primary school to create a bee sculpture at Alresford Station, delivering an outdoor rail safety talk in the school grounds with social distancing measures in place.

All community rail partnerships have been supported by train operators throughout the pandemic, and community rail groups will be working with all rail industry partners to promote rail as a safe, inclusive, and sustainable form of travel, particularly for leisure and tourism, when restrictions allow.



The Old Water Tower,
Huddersfield Railway Station,
St George’s Square,
Huddersfield HD1 1JF

E info@communityrail.org.uk
W communityrail.org.uk