



Community rail in the South West



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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 West in numbers:

**Seven
community
rail
partnerships**

Working along railway lines, with industry partners, to engage local communities. Partnerships stretch from Gloucestershire down to Devon and Cornwall.

**70
station
groups**

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

“

It is a testament to all in community rail just how well and quickly so many have adapted to the circumstances of COVID-19 and, in the best positive and innovative traditions of the movement, that great projects have still been conceived and delivered across the country.”

Richard Burningham, Devon and Cornwall Rail Partnership



“

Community rail plays a vital role ensuring people get the most from their railways. It encourages social inclusion, community wellbeing, and empowers economic development.

Emma Morris, Great Western Railway

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Each Year

600



Volunteers

Giving

**27,000
Hours**



**Worth
£2.3m**

Community rail partnerships in the South West:

Gloucestershire CRP - covers

stations on the Golden Valley Line, the Severn Shores Line to Lydney, Ashchurch to Cam & Dursley on the main Birmingham to Bristol line, and Moreton in Marsh on the North Cotswold Line. Key priorities include 'bottom-up' community outreach and engagement, station adoption, community events and activities, input into strategic land use planning decisions, and connectivity of bus and cycle routes to stations. Only established in 2020, one of the CRP's first projects was a public consultation on current transport needs and issues in local communities.



Heart of Wessex CRP -

The partnership is currently going through a restructuring process to become the 'South Wessex' CRP, which will cover all stations south of Westbury to Weymouth. Despite the changes, more than 100 volunteers involved in station groups along the line have carried on their good work, undertaking a range of gardening projects and activities to promote the line for the benefit of its local communities and passengers.



Sevenside CRP -

covers 27 stations on routes radiating from Bristol, bounded by Gloucester, Bath/Bradford on Avon, Weston-super-Mare, Taunton, and the Severn Estuary. The CRP works collaboratively with local communities to encourage rail use, improve access to local stations, enhance stations so they provide a safe and welcoming environment, and deliver a range of events and educational activities to encourage sustainable, healthy travel. The CRP recently supported the creation of 'Track Record', a soundtrack of music and poetry celebrating the Severn Beach Line.



Purbeck CRP -

covers the national rail network between Holton Heath and Moreton, and the heritage Swanage Railway between Wareham and Swanage. Priorities include working in partnership with Swanage Railway, developing rail as part of an integrated local transport network, engaging communities in station partnerships and projects, working with schools and colleges, and promoting rail as a sustainable way to access opportunities in education, recreation, and tourism. Recently, the CRP has supported the development of facilities at volunteer hubs on the Swanage Railway and worked with its young volunteers.



TransWilts CRP - covers the Swindon to Westbury route. The CRP's mission is to carry out activities which encourage and promote increasing community use of local rail stations for the benefit of those living and working in Wiltshire, and to represent the interests of local rail users. Recent projects have included the transformation of a disused storeroom at Westbury Station into a meeting room for both the CRP and local community groups, and progress on the community travel hub and café at Melksham Station.



Devon and Cornwall Rail Partnership -

This CRP covers ten lines across the two counties:

Devon & Cornwall RAIL PARTNERSHIP

- Tarka Line – Exeter to Barnstaple
- Avocet Line – Exeter to Exmouth
- East Devon Line – Exeter to Axminster
- Riveria Line – Exeter to Paignton
- Tamar Valley Line – Plymouth to Gunnislake
- Looe Valley Line – Liskeard to Looe
- Atlantic Coast Line – Par to Newquay
- Maritime Line – Truro to Falmouth
- St Ives Bay Line – St Erth to St Ives
- Dartmoor Line - Exeter to Okehampton

The CRP's priorities are to promote the branch lines, engage and involve communities along the lines, support economic growth, help deliver improvements to services and stations, and to work in partnership with a huge range of organisations, all aiming to promote the lines and the communities they serve. Over the past 30 years, the partnership has helped secure more frequent trains on each of the counties' branch lines, made stations more attractive and welcoming with the help of community volunteers, and more than doubled passenger numbers across the CRP area.

Blackmore Vale Line CRP -

covers six stations on the West of England Line between London Waterloo and Exeter St. Davids. Priorities include engaging communities in their local line to increase rail use, capitalising on the wider economic, environmental and social benefits of rail for the good of the region's residents and visitors, and nurturing and celebrating the efforts of volunteers. The CRP has recently developed an interactive line guide, featuring ideas for great days out plus videos, web links, an art trail, and activities for children.



Blackmore Vale Line
Community Rail Partnership

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

- Gloucestershire CRP facilitated a public consultation as to how recent challenges, e.g. related to COVID-19, had impacted travel behaviour locally, to better understand future wants and needs;
- Severnside CRP supports the Strawberry Line Cafe at Yatton Station, a not-for-profit social enterprise which employs and trains adults with learning disabilities and acts as a community hub;
- Devon and Cornwall Rail Partnership has worked with communities to deliver improved rail services, including running the 'Seize the Sunday' campaign, which brought more Sunday services to the Avocet Line;
- Many CRPs, including Severnside and Purbeck, deliver sessions with local schools on rail safety and travel confidence, engaging young people in rail and the opportunities it can offer.

Promoting sustainable, healthy, accessible travel

- Severnside CRP runs a healthy walks from the train programme, and is engaging young people in North Somerset to create a film promoting sustainable and healthy travel by rail;
- Blackmore Vale CRP has created an interactive line guide, promoting great days out within easy access of the line and sustainable tourism by rail;
- Purbeck CRP has been working with the RSPB to coordinate a shuttle bus connecting train services at Wareham Station with the nature reserve at Arne, allowing people to visit the site via public transport;
- Devon and Cornwall Rail Partnership devised the 'Carbon Reduction Challenge', a competition to encourage local schools to swap car journeys for train journeys to reduce their carbon footprint.

Community Rail Development Strategy

Bringing communities together and supporting diversity and inclusion

- Severnside CRP runs special events on trains, such as 'Chatty Trains' or 'Games on a Train', to introduce communities less familiar with using rail travel to their local services and stations;
- Blackmore Vale CRP runs a 'Community Rail at Christmas' event, a competition to see which station can boast the best festive display and make the station attractive and welcoming to passengers;
- Trans Wilts CRP are leading on the development of the community hub at Melksham Station, offering an attractive, safer, and more welcoming area for passengers, and a base for volunteering activity;
- Devon and Cornwall Rail Partnership helped to host 'CreativiTea Trains', inter-generational tea parties held on the train to evoke memories of the railway and bring people together.

Supporting social and economic development

- Gloucestershire CRP is developing a 'Connecting New Communities to Rail' guide, designed to embed rail as an integral consideration in major residential development schemes;
- Trans Wilts CRP is working with rail industry partners to develop extended and more frequent services on the line and explore aspirations for new stations and infrastructure;
- Purbeck CRP works closely with Swanage Railway to promote the heritage railway as a tourist attraction, and is working with partners to reintroduce a regular passenger service from Swanage to Wareham;
- Devon and Cornwall Rail Partnership directly supports local businesses along its branch lines via initiatives including 'Rail Ale Trails', 'Foodie Guides' and other promotional schemes, all designed to stimulate local economic growth.

Severnside CRP – social inclusion

Severnside CRP works with a host of partners to promote rail as an inclusive and accessible form of travel, introducing communities to their local railways and creating more cohesive neighbourhoods around stations. The partnership holds regular events on trains focusing on social inclusion and mental health, working with organisations such as LinkAge and the Alzheimer's Society, and engaging in national initiatives such as Fun Palaces, a campaign promoting community and culture. During events and activities, including Chatty Trains, Games on a Train, Human Library, and Singing for the Brain, participants are often encouraged to speak to members of the community they may not normally engage with, helping to overcome any feelings of loneliness or isolation, and building confidence to embrace using the train as a sociable activity.



Devon and Cornwall Rail Partnership – marketing and promotions

The Devon and Cornwall Rail Partnership uses a mixture of traditional and digital marketing to promote local branch lines. The partnership runs the Great Scenic Railways website, which encourages tourists and day-trippers to explore Devon and Cornwall by train, and proactively uses social media to showcase events and attractions. The partnership has tapped into popular culture, such as the 'Visit Poldark country by train' campaign, and focused on local history, telling 160 years of hidden stories via the Looe Valley Line Heritage Project. Marketing has had a measurable impact on passenger numbers, with monthly journey figures doubling on certain branch lines.



Station groups:

More than 70 stations across South West England have been 'adopted' by their local communities, with around 600 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.

Avonmouth Station

The 'Secret Garden' at Avonmouth Station came about when a disused platform compound was transformed by volunteers into a food growing and learning scheme. The aim was to empower people to grow some of their own food at home, reducing dependency on charitable support and maximising the health benefits of growing and eating fresh produce. The project is led by Incredible Edible Bristol, supported by Severnside CRP, with fruit and vegetables grown and shared with the local community centre. Since COVID-19, produce has also been included in food parcels distributed to those most in-need. 'Wellbeing Wednesday' sessions allow vulnerable people to drop in on an informal basis, some signposted under social prescribing by GP and NHS services.



Friends of Wool Station

One of the main aims of the Friends of Wool Station group is to enhance the experience of station users by improving information about onward travel in a more welcoming environment. To supplement the materials provided by train and bus operators, they created their own easy-to-follow guides in the form of a Tube-style map of local bus and rail routes, bus timetable summaries, and a helpful village map. To promote multi-modal and active travel, the group also recently erected new signage for cyclists, detailing the four cycle paths within easy reach of the station.

‘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 first hit, Severnside CRP was in the process of developing a programme to encourage young people from the more disadvantaged communities across the region to try new forms of sustainable, active travel. When that was paused, funding was re-allocated directly to three

local youth charities, helping to support home learning and provide arts and sports activity packs. The partnership also produced and distributed 500 ‘Back to School Safely’ packs to students travelling by train when schools returned, providing face masks, hand sanitizer, and safe travel advice.

Despite the pandemic forcing Trans Wilts CRP to cancel its usual Santa Train in 2020, the partnership was keen to maintain a feeling of festive cheer and instead donated Santa goody bags to local primary schools. Purbeck CRP also supported families by providing a host of online resources for children to enjoy during lockdown, including art, storytelling, and activities for junior historians.

In Devon and Cornwall, the rail partnership focused on supporting local businesses during the pandemic by developing trails of book and record shops along its lines, encouraging communities to support them. The partnership also ran campaigns to highlight pasty shops across Cornwall, independent shops on the branch lines for Christmas gifts, and station cafes on the Tarka Line.

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.



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