

**COMMUNITY RAIL NETWORK  
2021 ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING  
VIA ZOOM  
Tuesday 2 November 2021**

**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: Andy Buckley (Beds & Herts CRP Line Officer); Mhairi McKenna (South West Scotland CRP); Stephen Sleight (Marston Vale CRP Officer); and Karen Williams (Conwy Valley Railway Partnership).

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

**2. Minutes of the AGM held on 11 November 2020**

The Minutes had been made available when joining the AGM via Eventbrite and had also been emailed to registered delegates.

The Minutes were adopted on the proposal of Mick Stone (Purbeck CRP and North Downs Line CRP), seconded by Ian Dinmore (Community Rail Network Board).

**3. Community Rail Network annual report 2020-21 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 with the Bulletin.

The CE said she wanted to highlight some of the achievements of 2020-21 together with some more recent updates, and talk about the focus for priorities and themes going forward next year, which had drawn on the input from members.

2020-21 had been another challenging year with everyone facing uncertainty and change. However, community rail had continued to adapt and respond with great gusto (many examples were included in the Annual Report) and groups had continued to support their local communities. Community Rail Network had been working hard to publicise what community rail had been doing during the various period of lockdown and as restrictions were lifted. During this period Community Rail Network had paid particular attention to how it communicated with members; ensuring information went out in a timely manner; being as clear as possible and attentive to external events and had tried to maintain a sense of positivity within the movement. Community Rail Network had kept listening to members and providing opportunities for input into Community Rail Network activities.

During the year steps had been taken to strengthen the Community Rail Network team. A member of the senior management team, Anders Hanson, had left in January 2021 and Community Rail Network took the opportunity to slightly restructure the team, bringing in two new senior managers at the end of the financial year. This was to enable Community Rail Network to be as organised and effective as it could be in championing community rail. Joining the CEO and Brian Barnsley (Deputy Chief Executive and the Head of Support & Development) were Sarah Fatica (Head of People & Funding) and Sarah Chilton (Head of Communications & Policy). Denise Havard (Community Engagement Coordinator – Scotland) and Martin Clarke (Community Rail Support & Sustainability Manager) also joined the team more recently. All members of the team and the Board had a profile on the 'About Us' page of the website.

As the country came through the worst of the pandemic, Community Rail Network had been keen to champion community rail and ensure that community rail was ready to lead from the front on a number of key issues, such as the recovery and sustainability.

The CEO said the facts and figures in the Annual Report gave an indication of how Community Rail Network continued to grow and develop over the course of the last financial year, despite the challenges.

- Community rail partnership (CRP) members had increased from 67 to 74 (up 28% on four years ago)
- Station group members had increased from 235 to 258 (150% growth over four years)
- There had also been an increase in the number of events and training courses – partly because of the change in format to online delivery. This also had an impact on the number of people who were able to attend. There had been 26 events with 1,028 attendees. Feedback was that these online events were popular and there was demand to retain them alongside face-to-face events
- Followers on social media had increased by 50% over the last four years – Community Rail Network anticipated further growth as it continued to strengthen its communications
- Turnover dipped slightly, largely due to the pandemic
- The changed format to the awards meant income dropped, but there had also been reduced costs
- There was a gradual increase in the amount of funding that Community Rail Network was providing to members, including a new grant scheme for integrated, sustainable travel (linking different modes of transport) introduced last year
- Slight increase in staff numbers – 18 at the end of the financial year

Through the year the top priority continued to be providing support to the growing membership, with a focus on change and adaptation to the circumstances. Not simply in terms of the pandemic, but also longer-term change that lay ahead with rail transformation and changes already coming into effect. The Support & Development Team had been working hard to be responsive to members, to answer queries, to provide help where there was uncertainty and things were in flux.

There was a continued focus, through the direct support provided, and events and training activities, on outcomes, social value and local engagement. In order to help CRPs and groups to:

- have as much clarity as possible about their aims and the best approach to achieve these
- think about social value and how this was delivered and evidenced – members were encouraged to use Community Rail Network's free Impact tool to help
- access advice, ideas and inspiration (as well as training) on different local engagement techniques – and be as inclusive as possible.

The Support & Development Team invested a considerable amount of time helping new CRPs set up. There was a broader range of groups getting involved in station adoption which was very welcome. Community Rail Network had secured new funding for dedicated support for CRPs in Scotland, focusing on promoting rail as a form of sustainable travel.

Community Rail Network continued to support members to plan ahead, to seize new opportunities, to increase their impact, alongside administering the DfT's accreditation scheme and supporting CRPs through that process and to benefit as a result. More than forty CRPs had now been accredited.

Across all the support Community Rail Network provided, the aim was to help groups learn and develop and to collaborate and learn from each other, as well as to bring in expertise from beyond the community rail movement. This has been a growing focus on this over the past few years – developing partnerships that allowed community rail to work collaboratively at a local level.

As well as direct support, provided by the Support & Development Team in particular, Community Rail Network continued to share ideas and good practice in a broad range of ways to suit different needs. The Events Team ran a superb online Awards for the first time last year, with over 500 guests logging in

and at which 18 winners were recognised. The Awards were not just about celebrating the good work, but also helping decision-makers recognise the impact that this delivered. The Awards therefore continued to be very important to Community Rail Network and to the movement as a whole.

There was another first: Community Rail Network's first online Conference for CRPs in March 2021. There were 20 speakers, many of them third sector partners bringing different expertise and perspectives. A wide range of topics were covered by the webinars run by the Events Team and also the online, interactive training and networking courses run by the Training & Development Coordinators. Topics included: community rail and recovery; social media; tourism promotion; applying for grants; planning and evaluation; community and volunteer engagement.

The Communications & Policy Team continued to expand Community Rail Network's range of resources, all available on the website. Many resources focused on communications, promotion and tourism. A fantastic report had been produced by Community Rail Network's writer & researcher '*Looking to the future – an exploration of youth engagement in rail*' looking at the ways young people had been engaged in community rail and recommendations on how this might be further developed. The resources were partly about providing guidance and tips to those working in community rail but also demonstrating the ways community rail is delivering impact. And therefore the resources, especially the reports, were used when explaining to industry partners, government at different levels and other third sector organisations what community rail was about and evidence of its value.

The briefing '*How can community rail support Covid-19 recover and building back better*' was well used to show how community rail was contributing through the pandemic and set to play a bigger role.

Community Rail Network's role was not just about supporting members but also championing community rail: getting community rail's messages and ethos out to a wider audience, which included the general public, policy-makers and decision-makers. Community Rail Network worked with members to raise the profile of community rail locally and digitally. It was pleasing that the movement continued to be more digitally aware and active – progress, in part, driven by the pandemic. Some members had taken the opportunity to revamp their websites with the advice of the Comms & Policy Team: they were always happy to help with these sorts of enhancements. Community Rail Network shared members' stories on social media, as well as helping members with their own social media.

Community Rail Network had delivered a successful region by region PR campaign in March highlighting: how widespread community rail was across the regions of Britain; and, how community rail had kept working throughout the pandemic and was ready to support the recovery of communities and railways. Following this, Community Rail Network started to prepare proactively for the time when rail travel could again be promoted – and a number of major campaigns had been rolled out in the last few months. So, (although not included in this report as it was in the current year), there had recently been a stepping up of campaigns working with and supporting members to deliver profile-raising and engagement locally, but also to disseminate information at a wider level, too.

The CEO said she was very proud of the progress that had been made in taking insights, expertise and experience within community rail and sharing these at a strategic level. Over the last year Community Rail Network had demonstrated, to a greater degree than ever before, what community rail was able to contribute to big strategic and policy issues in areas such as social inclusion, health and well-being, levelling-up, and addressing environmental and sustainability challenges. Community rail was recognised and mentioned prominently in the Williams Review White Paper as helping the railways deliver social value and to be responsive to local needs. Community Rail Network had fed into the Decarbonising Transport Policy Development, including having a seat on the Secretary of State's Net Zero Transport Board – getting across what community rail and local engagement could do to make public transport and active travel the natural choice. Comprehensive advice had been fed into the Welsh Transport Strategy, published towards the end of the financial year – which, again, included some fantastic recognition regarding the role of the community and voluntary sectors in achieving

more sustainable and inclusive transport.

Having given an overview of the Annual Report, the CEO highlighted some of the headlines from the recent 2021 Members' Survey – (to be circulated as usual via communications channels):

- There had been ongoing improvement with the satisfaction levels amongst CRPs for the value received from membership (91% thought it was good value)
- Satisfaction amongst station groups remained lower (66%) and had dropped in the last year – this appears to be to an extent due to the circumstances of the pandemic and the team not being able to get out as much as would have been liked. This was disappointing because prior to this station group satisfaction had been growing. Community Rail Network exploring this further and underlining to these groups that it was there for them as well as CRPs, and making sure there was a balance between digital and face-to-face support and engagement
- Members were pleased with how Community Rail Network communicated with them (88% said communication was good)
- Community Rail Network continued to have very high (and increasing) levels of engagement with events/training (8 in 10 had participated in at least one).

The survey was used not only to provide feedback on Community Rail Network performance but also to understand priorities and focus amongst members. The results would be scrutinised in detail and feed through into plans for the next year – together with the input that Community Rail Network had received less formally throughout the year. On the whole CRPs had a strong focus on community/local engagement alongside promoting rail with communications, marketing, tourism etc. and, for station groups – local engagement, volunteering, arts projects and, gardening and biodiversity projects.

Some of the development areas for Community Rail Network to take forward were: schools/youth engagement; funding sources; active/integrated travel and station friends.

Community Rail Network was at the beginning of its annual planning process in which the next year's priorities were set out – this was taking place a bit later than normal because of the commitment to Community Rail Week. However, initial conversations had taken place, drawing on the Members' Survey, and would continue with the team, Board, funders and partners:

- Community Rail Network was clear that Rail Transformation offered some important opportunities over the coming years and so there was a need to be talking to the right people in DfT, Network Rail etc and be attentive to what members were saying
- Community Rail Network was keen to work with members to anticipate and manage change – looking at social value and how to evidence impact; funding diversification; etc
- Community Rail Network is committed to continuing to step up its PR and policy work
- This would include working with community rail to position the movement as part of the sustainability, levelling up and social inclusion agendas. Some of the work in the build up to COP26 and in relation to Community Rail Week had a heavy focus on sustainability and green travel messages. It was often not about doing something entirely new, but making links and positioning oneself as part of the agenda and demonstrating that community rail was part of the solution to the challenges for the climate and within communities, too
- There would be an ongoing focus on inclusive engagement, families and young people – and looking at opportunities to share good practice and the possibility of linking up with others such as The Education Network to support further expansion of work with children and young people
- Community Rail Network would also be working behind the scenes to further strengthen the organisation – a new contact management system would be introduced to ensure it is 'joined up' and efficient in the way it supports members and engages partners

Community Rail Network had been ramping up its PR and communications activities to get community

rail out to wider audiences: the Days Out By Rail campaign that had run over the summer; and the Community Rail Week in which so many members had participated. Next year there would be longer lead in times for these campaigns. The model that the Comms & Policy Team had used was to provide tools and resources for members to utilise in the ways which worked for them at a local level. This had been well-received and Community Rail Network would build on this model.

The CEO had already spoken about Community Rail Network's delight at the profile community rail had been given in the Williams Rail Review published earlier in 2021. She ended her report to the AGM by sharing some of the statements in the Review that recognised the work already done by community rail and the opportunities that lay ahead; and to say how keen Community Rail Network was to work with members to maximise those opportunities. She thought there were positive times ahead for community rail.

The Chair thanked the CEO for her report. He also thanked her, and the team, for all their work and remarked on how wonderful it was to see community rail's development over the years and particularly over the last five years since the 'great enlargement' [the team's expansion in 2016].

Michael Wilmott (North Staffordshire CRP and Helmsdale Station CIC) thanked the CEO for her report. He said that she had mentioned decarbonising transport and wondered if there was more to be said about integrated transport provision and the role that community rail partnerships might play in that. He gave two examples: (i) the government recently introduced its bus strategy 'Bus Back Better' with the hope that there would be a lot more local bus services across the country. He was concerned not enough thought was being given to their integration with rail services – and in some instances it looked as if the bus services might even be in competition with rail which he said would be a great shame, and (ii) with a full gamut of sustainable transport options available, was there more work to be done with the train operating companies encouraging them to take e-bikes on board perhaps by removing some seats if, on some routes, passenger numbers had dropped post-Covid.

The CEO said Community Rail Network was very conscious of the importance of modal integration: hence a new grant fund was introduced last year, which would open again in the new financial year. This was aimed specifically to support projects within community rail working to link rail up better with buses, walking, cycling, community transport, car and bike share schemes and the like. This had been successful and was oversubscribed. Some work had also been undertaken in the last financial year phone-surveying 30 CRPs on issues, challenges and opportunities they faced on integrated, sustainable transport. The results had been very helpful with the work feeding into the government at different levels ie informing policy work. She agreed with Michael Wilmott, there was a whole array of government strategies, all talking about modal integration but it now had to be made to happen.

The CEO referenced that as well as talking to government and supporting members on these issues, Community Rail Network was working in partnership with other third sector organisations involved in sustainable transport: Campaign for Better Transport, Community Transport Association, CoMo UK, Bus Users UK, Living Streets, Sustrans and London Cycling Campaign as part of the Sustainable Transport Alliance. The Alliance was all about working together to support a shift towards greener transport and integrating different modes. The CEO thought that the Alliance would lead to increased opportunities for local collaboration benefitting members on the ground. The CEO said that it would be helpful to the team to know what members were doing with regard to modal integration and any challenges that they were facing.

Ben Walsh (Fenland District Council) commented that there would be more emphasis on train and bus travel because of COP26.

Graham North (North Yorkshire County Council) asked if Community Rail Network could provide help on governance and succession planning. The CEO said the Support & Development Team provided quite a bit of support relating to governance issues but this tended to be 'reactive', ie when

partnerships or groups asked for specific help often when going through change or setting up in the first place. There was, within the team, considerable expertise on third sector governance and there had been facilitated bespoke sessions for individual CRPs on different aspects of governance. There were also sessions for CRP Chairs covering topics such as managing change and the role of Chairs in ensuring financial sustainability etc.

Malcolm Chainey said Tyne Valley CRP was trying to do what the DfT's community rail strategy advocated – to diversify income and earn money. The Haltwhistle project was supposed to have taken 5 months and was still ongoing 13 months later so had not in fact produced any income to date. However, Tyne Valley was still keen to continue exploring ways of earning extra income. Given that the railways were restructuring this was a good time to be thinking about how CRPs could provide extra services. The CEO said there were a number of things the team had done over the past few years to help members think about different sources of funding (either by being more enterprising or by bringing in more grants) and they would continue to do this. She encouraged members to speak to their usual contacts within the Support & Development team with any specific needs.

Referring to a comment about independence, the CEO agreed that all the work that Community Rail Network was doing (on rail transformation and community rail's role going forward) was based on the premise that community rail was an independent grassroots movement that, whilst it needed the support and collaboration of the rail industry, should not be seen as an adjunct to it. There were opportunities in rail transformation to look at funding arrangements/agreements to ensure they were in line with best practice regarding working with and supporting the community and voluntary sector.

#### **4. Adoption of Community Rail Network Annual Report and Accounts 2020-21**

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 Malcolm Chainey (Tyne Valley CRP), seconded by Garfield Southall (Community Rail Network Board).

The Financial Statements were adopted on the proposal of the Chair, seconded by Jeremy Whitaker (Community Rail Network Board).

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

*This item was Chaired by Marion Atkinson (Vice-Chair, Community Rail Network Board) as Richard Burningham was standing for re-election*

At the close of nominations there were five nominations for six places on the Board (3 vacancies and 3 re-elections). Therefore no election would be necessary. The nominees were: Karen Bennett, Richard Burningham, Jeremy Whitaker, Tim Sparrow and Mick Stone.

Each candidate addressed the AGM in turn to introduce themselves and to supplement the written personal statements previously circulated.

The AGM appointed the five candidates to the Board on the proposal of Peter Roberts (Individual Honorary Member), and seconded by Ben Walsh (Fenland District Council).

The Chair welcomed the new Board members.

Resuming the Chair, Richard Burningham also welcomed onto Board the returning and new Directors. The Chair said he was looking forward to exploring some of the points raised in the introductory speeches. He thanked the two Vice-Chairs (Marion Atkinson and Jeremy Whitaker) and all Board members for their sterling support and work over the last year. Three Directors (Lisa Denison, Neville

Jephcote and Neil Matthewman) had stood down during the course of the year and the Chair also wished to thank them for the contributions they had made to Board.

A third of the Board's membership was up for election each year, and the Chair encouraged anyone interested in joining the Board not to wait for the advertisement to be circulated but to get in touch with him or the team. They would be happy to answer any questions and explain what was involved – there was also the possibility of joining a Board meeting as an observer.

The Chair also wished to thank the Head of People & Funding and the Events & Partnerships Officer for their help and support with the technical and administrative side of the AGM and elections.

The CEO then thanked the Board, on behalf of the team, for all the effort Directors put in and said this was hugely appreciated – she reiterated the Chair's thanks to those Board members who had retired mid-term and also gave a warm welcome to the new Board members.

## **7. Salisbury rail crash, 31 October 2021**

Tim Sparrow (Southeast CRP CIC) wished to record concern for all those directly involved in the Salisbury crash and to wish them a speedy recovery. He also wished to record support for Community Rail Network's rail partners in the difficult and long process of ascertaining what happened and getting things back to normal for the local communities. The Chair apologized for not having mentioned this at the start of the meeting and thanked Tim Sparrow for his apt words now.

## **8. Local Authority membership of CRN**

Graham North (North Yorkshire County Council) said it was his long-standing comment that there did not seem to be a category of membership that allowed local authorities to be full members of Community Rail Network. The Chair said that Community Rail Network was originally set up for community rail partnerships and then full membership was expanded, a few years ago, to include friends of stations groups and community station groups. Community Rail Network was a membership body for community rail organisations – although these were often hosted by and/or working closely with local authorities. Even though local authorities might be funders, it was the community rail partnership that would be the member and the local authority would be linked through them.

It was noted that North Yorkshire County Council funded four partnerships. The CEO said that obviously Community Rail Network was very happy to work with the Council and support the Council in its community rail related endeavours – but confirmed that the way Community Rail Network was set up meant that the four community rail partnerships would be the members.

## **9. Focus – newsletter of the Chartered Institute of Logistics & Transport**

John Ellis (Cotswold Line Promotion Group) firstly wanted to congratulate Community Rail Network on the excellent work that continued to be done. He wanted to draw attention to an article in *Focus* about community rail partnerships in Gloucestershire '*Creating real-life connectivity in Gloucestershire*'. The article had been written by Jon Harris who had been instrumental in forming the new Gloucestershire CRP. He thought it might be useful to develop on-going links with CILT and perhaps provide material for further features. The CEO said she would look out for the article and follow up on the point about CILT.

Referring to Graham North's point, John Ellis said he understood the policy but wondered whether the Board might consider some form of associate or corporate partnership for local authorities. There was (gratifyingly) huge support from LAs all around the country and it might strengthen these relationships further if there was some means to formally recognise them. The CEO said Community Rail Network was an umbrella organisation and did not want to get in between the very important relationship between

LAs and community rail partnerships at a local level. However, Community Rail Network would give further thought to how it might be possible to recognise that support at a broader level.

There being no further business the meeting closed at 3.25pm.

In attendance: Jo Andrews (Poacher Line CRP); Philip Ayers (Southeast Communities Rail Partnership); Marion Atkinson (Community Rail Network); Brian Barnsley (Community Rail Network); Karen Bennett (CRL); Dawn Bigland (Community Rail Network); Stephen Birchall (Friends of Disley Station); Linda Brinklow (Sheerness Town Council); Richard Burningham (Community Rail Network); Malcolm Chainey (Tyne Valley CRP); Rowena Chantler (Penistone Line Partnership); Roy Chapman (Community Rail Network); Daisy Chapman-Chamberlain (Knowledge Transfer Network); Martin Clarke (Community Rail Network); Barry Coward (North Notts & Lincs CRP CIC); Ian Dinmore (Community Rail Network; Wherry Lines CRP); John Ellis (Cotswold Line Promotion Group); Beryl Ezzard (Purbeck CRP); Sarah Fatica (Community Rail Network); Chris Fribbins (Kent CRP); Dennis Gilbey (Friends of Yetminster Station); Sarah Grove (Meldreth, Shepreth & Foxton CRP); John Harrison (Friends of Narborough Station); Denise Havard (Community Rail Network); Lucy Lomax (Surrey Hills to South Downs CRP); Felicity Machnicki (Bishop Line CRP); Alice Mannion (Community Rail Network); Colin Moore (Tyne Valley CRP); Emma Morris (Great Western Railway); Kate Myers (NNL CRP); Graham North (North Yorkshire County Council); Gary Outram (Sustrans); Peter Roberts (Individual Honorary Member); Craig Sidebotham (Goostrey FOGS); Julia Singleton-Tasker (Heart of England CRP); Garfield Southall (Community Rail Network); Tim Sparrow (Southeast CRP CIC); Mick Stone (Purbeck CRP and North Downs Line CRP ); Dave Stubbins (Friends of Cark Station); Christine Sykes (Mirfield in Bloom); Melanie Taylor (Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council); Jools Townsend (CEO, Community Rail Network); Gerald Townson (Leeds-Morecambe CRP); Ben Walsh (Fenland District Council); Keith Walton (Sevenside CRP); Richard Watts (Community Rail Lancashire Ltd); Jeremy Whitaker (Community Rail Network); Michael Wilmott (North Staffordshire CRP and Helmsdale Station CIC ); Antony Woodward (Worcestershire CRP) and Daniel Wright (Community Rail Network).