

Great British Railways call for evidence – Whole Industry Strategic Plan Response from Community Rail Network, January 2022

About Community Rail Network

We are a not-for-profit organisation working across Britain to support, champion and represent community rail: a growing, thriving grassroots movement that works to engage communities with their railways, and ensure local people benefit from railways and stations.

This growing movement now includes 74 community rail partnerships (CRPs) and c. 1,200 station friends groups and other local groups, spread across Britain. These are community-based and -led groups and organisations, working closely with the rail industry, to:

- Enhance the railways' contribution to local sustainable development and community wellbeing, including by maximising access to and use of the railways;
- Ensure the community has a voice and plays a part in the development and improvement of our railways, so this meets community needs and aspirations and delivers maximum benefit;
- Communicate the development and importance of our railways to communities, enhancing understanding and pride, and promoting rail as a key part of sustainable, healthy travel.

We work to empower, support and champion community rail, as a growing membership organisation. We share good practice, connect those working in community rail, and help our members to develop, enhance their impact and overcome challenges, drawing on experience from across the movement and insights from the wider voluntary sector, rail industry and beyond. We also raise wider awareness about community rail and share its unique insights with policy and decision-makers. *Find out more about our work, and our members, at communityrail.org.uk.*

Community Rail Network is part-funded by the Department for Transport (DfT), our biggest funder, to support and enhance community rail in England. We also receive funding from the Welsh Government and a range of other authorities, agencies and industry partners. We are the lead delivery partner for the DfT's [Community Rail Development Strategy](#), and we work with government and partners at national and regional level to help community rail to deliver maximum support for a range of public policy goals.

About this response

This submission draws on our extensive experience of supporting and championing community rail over 25 years, and our wide-ranging understanding of activities, opinions, opportunities and challenges within community rail. This enables us to provide a unique viewpoint, based on grassroots, community engagement with our railways taking place across the country. We aim to share a broad sense of the views, challenges and aspirations of community rail partnerships, groups and other community stakeholders engaging with railways, drawing on the queries we get, support we offer, opportunities we identify, what we see and hear from our members, and the brilliant array of case studies we have.

We cannot provide specifics on the views of our members (which are diverse and wide-ranging), only an overview, hence we are also encouraging community rail partnerships and groups to input into the Call for Evidence with their locally/regionally-focused views. **We do provide many links and references to community rail case studies and examples (via links in the text and footnotes).**

We are pleased to be in direct contact with GBR TT, working with Rufus Boyd and Paul Harwood to feed in views and insights from community rail and give our expert advice as plans take shape. We appreciated the chance to work with GBR TT on a joint webinar on 1st February, which was helpful in putting the team in front of those working and volunteering in community rail, reassuring that you are listening, and providing an initial chance for you to hear community rail's thoughts and experiences. We hope this response builds on this discussion. **We will be pleased to feed in and discuss in more detail key issues around empowering community rail and engaging communities to support the WISP's objectives.**

As well as the many links below, please note the three briefing papers attached:

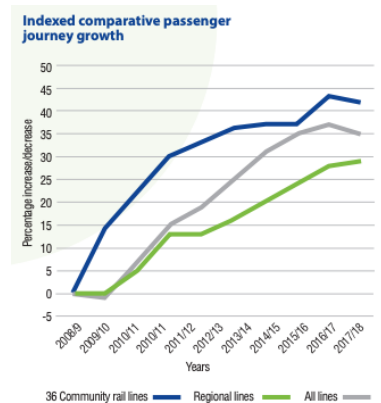
- Behavioural insights on modal shift
- Integrated sustainable transport – insights and opportunities from community-led initiatives
- Engaging community rail in train operator business planning (article developed with DfT)

Question 1

a) How would you apply these objectives to rail in your region or to your area of expertise within the transport sector? Do you have evidence you can share with us of how you have applied similar objectives in relation to rail, and do you consider the objectives to have missed any key areas?

Community rail supports and contributes to all these objectives directly and indirectly, to a greater and lesser degree, in every region across Britain, mostly through locally-focused activities engaging communities, tailored to local needs and contexts, and advising rail partners as a critical friend. Taking the ambitions as currently given under each of the objectives, community rail activities include (see footnotes for evidence and examples of each):

- I.
 - a) Advising rail industry partners on local needs and views, feeding in on timetable consultations and stations development in order to improve rail's convenience for local journey patterns;¹
 - b) Working with active travel groups, local authorities and bus operators to advise on interchange improvements at stations, draw up and deliver station travel plans, or spearhead/manage/secure funding for infrastructure improvements like wayfinding, footpaths, cycle storage or waiting shelters;²
 - b) Widening accessibility by working with groups with mobility needs/barriers to improve confidence and skills and advise rail partners on physical/perceived barriers they can alleviate.³
- II.
 - a) Transforming disused station spaces that may be a drain on the railway into thriving enterprises, and bringing in third party funding for station developments and rail-related community projects;⁴
 - b) Contributing to greater and wider use of local railways through local engagement and promotion: lines with community rail partnerships consistently outperform lines without, on average seeing 42% journey growth 2008-2018 compared to 29% on comparable regional lines;⁵
 - c) Coordinating volunteering (with approaching 10,000 volunteers nationally giving c. 400,000 hours per year) and bringing together wide-ranging community and transport partners to pool resources and align activity.⁶
- III.
 - a) See Ib above. Community rail also makes journeys more productive by developing community facilities, services and shops at stations that suit local needs;⁷
 - b) Working with young people, disadvantaged groups and unemployed people to develop travel confidence and consider job opportunities that can be reached by rail (and careers in rail);⁸
 - c) Developing skills and confidence through volunteering and community engagement projects;⁹ working with local authorities and developers to advise on connecting development with rail and deliver local place-making with rail as a focal point.¹⁰



¹ See example of South East Communities CRP working with local schools to advise rail partners on pupils' travel needs during the pandemic, and support a return to rail travel: <https://communityrail.org.uk/community-rail-south-east/>

² See the many examples in our Connected Stations resource: <https://communityrail.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/ACoRP-STP-toolkit-final-version.pdf>

³ See the examples p4-5 in our Social Inclusion report: <https://communityrail.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/ACoRP-CRSI2018.pdf>

⁴ For example, see our 2017 report on Community Stations: <https://communityrail.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/ACoRP-Community-Stations-Document-web.pdf>

⁵ See more detailed analysis on p11-12 of our 2019 Value of Community Rail Report: <https://communityrail.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/ACoRP-Value-of-Community-Rail-2019-final-for-web-141019.pdf>

⁶ See our Station Adoption Handbook for many examples of volunteering: <https://communityrail.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/Acorp-Station-Adoption-Booklet-050719.pdf>

⁷ For example at Gobowen, Yatton and Lowestoft

⁸ See our youth engagement report for examples of working with young people (and also footnote 3): <https://communityrail.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Youth-engagement-report-final.pdf>

⁹ See the examples linked from footnotes 3 and 6

¹⁰ Work being carried out by Gloucester CRP to engage with local housing development is being used to produce a good practice briefing for our members at the moment.

- IV. a) Spurring and facilitating civic engagement, local pride and wider regeneration, including in areas that have suffered post-industrial decline and deprivation;¹¹
 b) Increasing awareness, confidence and positivity towards rail, among groups lacking familiarity, skills or facing barriers, opening up opportunities, raising aspirations, and transforming futures;¹²
 c) As per our response to Q1e, community rail often advises rail and other transport operators on connectivity both between lines/operators and with other modes like buses, as well spearheading station/infrastructure/wayfinding improvements,¹³ and sometimes combined ticketing.¹⁴
- V. a) Enabling and encouraging modal shift to rail through a variety of communications and local engagement, increasing awareness and positivity towards rail and breaking down common (perceptual and physical barriers) such as through first/last mile connections;¹⁵
 b) Enhancing biodiversity and greening grey spaces at stations through community gardening and wildlife projects, and introducing waste/energy/water reduction practices;¹⁶
 c) Engaging local communities in climate resilience and disaster response, and providing input to rail partners on future-proofing our railways.¹⁷

The examples above are largely to do with either (i) advising the rail industry, feeding in local needs and aspirations, or (ii) delivering local engagement, awareness raising and other community-led projects to break down travel barriers or otherwise create greater use of and value from railway assets. Both spheres of activity are highly complementary of the work of the rail industry, and we suggest community rail is uniquely placed to deliver them given its position rooted within communities, part of the community and voluntary sector, but working closely with the industry. Community rail is evidenced to be low-cost and high-value, for our railways and society. It has been shown to deliver increased passenger growth on lines where it's active, £33.2m annually from volunteer activity alone, plus wide-ranging social, environmental and economic benefits for the individuals involved and their wider localities. Our array of evidence (as of 2019), quantitative and qualitative, is set out in our report the [Value of Community Rail](#), plus we are undertaking ongoing work to support our members to better evidence and demonstrate impact and value.¹⁸

The Department for Transport's [Community Rail Development Strategy](#), which was created in collaboration with ourselves and our members, and is well-embedded across the community rail movement, has four pillars, showing the breadth of community rail activities:

- Providing a voice for the community;
- Promoting sustainable, healthy, accessible travel;
- Bringing communities together and supporting diversity and inclusion;
- Supporting social and economic development.

Our Value of Community Rail sets out qualitative evidence on impacts being delivered against each pillar.

The five proposed WISP objectives align fairly well with the four pillars of community rail, with the exception of financial sustainability, although, as shown above and under Q3, community rail can contribute to this too through the delivery of its own four pillars. A key difference, however, which we recommend the GBR TT considers in developing the WISP, is that community rail does not narrowly focus on existing 'passengers'. **The crucial concept of engaging beyond 'the passenger', and *servicing communities as a whole*, isn't expressly recognised in the proposed WISP objectives. We recommend it should be, for rail to recover from the pandemic in the challenging years ahead, and longer-term for it to play a**

¹¹ See p27-28 of the [Value of Community Rail](#), and examples in [Community Stations](#)

¹² See especially our reports on [Youth Engagement](#) and [Social Inclusion](#), p4-5

¹³ See the examples in our Connected Stations resource: <https://communityrail.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/ACoRP-STP-toolkit-final-version.pdf>

¹⁴ As in the Three Rivers CRP's initiative bringing rail, bus and ferry operators together for the first time to offer a combined three-mode ticket in Southampton, the [Waterside Wanderer](#)

¹⁵ See our report on modal shift: <https://communityrail.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/Modal-shift-summary-FINAL-FOR-WEB.pdf>

¹⁶ Our forthcoming report on community rail and biodiversity will be forwarded to the GBR TT next week

¹⁷ See our report on sustainable development: <https://communityrail.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/Sustainable-development-report-FINAL.pdf>

¹⁸ For example, we provide a dedicated [Impact assessment tool](#) for use in community rail, plus training and support for our members on outcomes and impact. We are also part of RSSB's Social Value Working Group, feeding into rail industry endeavours to better understand and develop social value.

heightened role at the heart of a sustainable transport system, healthy, fair, prosperous communities, and a 'levelled-up' economy.

A crucial theme running through the Williams-Shapps white paper which is not picked up in the objectives and ambitions as they currently stand (although does feature in the CfE questions) is the need for responsiveness to local needs, explicitly mentioned eight times in the white paper. We agree this is vital, and supports all other ambitions. Responsiveness to local needs comes from having the culture, support and mechanisms in place for both working with the established community rail movement and being open to new approaches and opportunities, and able to facilitate new and evolving forms of local engagement with rail. It requires everyone across the industry, at all levels and in all roles, to be people- and community-minded, for communities to be regarded as partners, and for the industry to always have the door open to new ideas and opportunities emerging at regional and local level. We proposed that this step-change should be reflected in the wording throughout, *and that it warrants an ambition in its own right.*

We might also query, looking at the proposed objectives, where are the all-important social elements of rail's ambitions for the coming 30 years? We currently have one objective focused on current users of rail, one on the financial underpinnings of the industry, one on delivering broader economic benefits, and one on delivering broader environmental benefits. There are hints at social impact in a few of the ambitions, most obviously IVb, but the ability of rail to deliver vital social benefits and value is absent from the objectives themselves. Given the recognition in the Williams-Shapps white paper of the social impact that rail can and does deliver, the government's focus on delivering social value through public spending and procurement,¹⁹ and achieving 'levelled-up' communities, we recommend this is addressed. Social benefits could be specified in both objective A (which could refer to 'Meeting customers' and communities' needs' as we argue above) and IV (which might read 'Levelling up, connectivity and social value'). We also propose that IVb is somewhat reductive at present: enhanced social benefits can be delivered in a range of ways, not only through connectivity, but also local engagement and empowerment and generally putting communities and their needs at the forefront of decision-making, considering social, environmental and economic gains. Also relevant to this is the work taking place across the rail industry, on which we are providing expert advice, to better understand and assess rail's social impact and value. We are part of RSSB's Social Sustainability Working Group: its work developing a Rail Social Value Tool, and how this relates to the WISP, is set out in RSSB's input to this CfE on behalf of its sustainable rail working groups.

A further subtle but important issue with the wording of the ambitions as they stand at the moment, which we recommend is addressed, is that the ambition Va presently implies that increasing rail's attractiveness is enough to achieve modal shift, when research suggests this will not be sufficient. For modal shift to be achieved, rail needs to compete with private car use over entire journeys and reach out to non-users to show it's competing. Evidence suggests this isn't simply a matter of marketing and information-provision: the most likely method for instilling more sustainable behaviours, including in transport, is empowering local engagement that works with local identities, responds to local needs, and builds a sense of ownership and pride around the greener alternatives.²⁰ This is because transport mode, like many unsustainable behaviours, is generally not a matter of conscious, autonomous choice: these are deeply embedded and constrained habits.²¹ Most people don't wake up and think 'what mode of transport shall I use today?' and if they do give this any thought, it is likely that their options will be restricted. The evidence therefore points us away from seeing transport mode as a consumer choice; instead we must engage, empower and enable, breaking down barriers and working with local realities and identities. See also our response to Q6a.

b) How is it possible to make progress against a number of the objectives simultaneously? Do any of the objectives have larger barriers associated with them than others, or do any objectives pose possible barriers to others? Where would you make the trade-offs?

It is important to recognise links and interdependencies between and across the objectives and not treat each as a separate silo, including recognising where work towards some objectives can enable and accelerate others. As we explore further throughout this response, a strong community focus, supporting and facilitating local engagement, and treating communities as partners, can be a strong enabler across all

¹⁹ As per the government's Social Value Model with requirements for public spending:

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/940826/Social-Value-Model-Edn-1.1-3-Dec-20.pdf

²⁰ See appended our briefing paper on modal shift and community engagement.

²¹ Ibid.

the objectives and ambitions, yet is currently not expressly recognised: we advise that this is addressed. Building on the findings of the Williams Review and aspirations of the white paper, it seems of great importance for the railways to become more open, collaborative and responsive, and to ensure it's working with local communities and leaders. As we reference above, this isn't just about putting different processes in place, or even just devolution of decision-making, but a cultural shift, towards being more people-centric and socially-minded. Community involvement, and the strong, well-established network for involving communities with rail of course helped to support this. It not only works with rail to deliver community projects, but it provides routes into rail for community voices, ideas and opportunities, connects rail with different and diverse community stakeholders, and constantly reminds the rail industry why it's here and the difference it makes to people's lives. We set out in more detail in Q5b how community rail and an empowering, participatory approach generally, can be further supported and enhanced under the WISP.

We recognise that trade-offs and tensions emerge from the objectives, especially around reducing cost to government while making rail more attractive and affordable, with the very challenging post-pandemic backdrop. Again, strong community relations and engagement can help rail to manage these tensions and make decisions that sit best with local needs, and which are well communicated. As we approach 2022-23, Community Rail Network is working with its members to consider how community rail can play the strongest possible role in rail recovery (not just 'bringing passengers back' but engaging wider groups and new leisure markets especially) within the context of reduced timetables and reduced confidence in public transport. In the short-medium term, for community rail to play this role fully, we are asking our railway partners to engage community rail in the business planning process,²² timetabling consultations, and other decision-making that affects local services and stations, and ensure community rail is fully appraised on what's happening, when and why. The level of engagement we recommend goes beyond (but builds on) how the rail industry has worked with community rail to date; for example, we have seen limited involvement in train operators' business planning in 2021-22, but hope this will develop in 22-23. All of this enables community rail to reinforce key messages locally, highlight how rail is continuing to support local needs and work with communities, and build a sense of positivity for longer-term aspirations. The rail industry working with communities to develop and articulate this long-term, positive vision of the future, with rail at the heart of sustainable, inclusive, happy communities, is also crucial for ensuring a constructive trajectory overall, over the next 30 years. Moving towards GBR, we urge that this principle of involving community rail and other community partners in shared-visioning, planning, decision-making and local engagement and communications – especially important in today's challenging and changeable context – is carried forward to the years and decades ahead.

One particular tension that needs to be managed throughout the WISP's lifetime is that of increasing rail's modal share and widening accessibility, thus bringing increasing passenger numbers, while maintaining and improving standards for existing passengers, and managing costs. Before Covid, we saw this playing out in concerns about overcrowding, and passengers struggling to get a seat while paying ever-increasing fares that many saw as unfairly high. To achieve modal shift from private cars to rail, supporting transport decarbonisation, and for rail to be an inclusive mode of transport, supporting the levelling-up agenda, it needs to be accessible and appealing to all. A critical part of this (reflected in community rail experience) is for it to be affordable (discussed more under Q2a). At present, while there are cheap fares available, in our experience, many do not know how to access these, meaning these fares are, arguably, least accessible to those most likely to need them. Also of great importance to attracting and retaining passengers is people's ability to get a seat, and access a regular and reliable service. The ability of the rail industry to provide these things is naturally strained when passenger numbers increase rapidly. We therefore recommend that modelling is needed, working across the transport field, to assess the scope for our rail network to carry significantly increased passenger numbers over the decades to come, especially bearing in mind the potential (and need, from a decarbonisation perspective²³) for major growth in leisure travel modal share, while managing and developing capacity and affordability that will continually enable and encourage wider use of the railway and maintain standards. We suggest this crucial piece of work is needed at a strategic level, looking nationally, regionally, and at key sub-regional corridors/areas, but also could be constructively delivered for individual lines or clusters of lines in partnership with community rail partnerships.

c) What long-term trends in wider society, the economy, and the environment will affect these five objectives over the next 5, 10, and 30 years? Please give evidence to support your response.

²² See appended our briefing on business planning developed with the DfT and shared with our members in December 2021.

²³ The Decarbon8 network for transport research argues that modal shift in leisure travel is especially important for decarbonisation, due to these journeys tending to be longer and therefore more polluting.

d) What are the key uncertainties you consider that the Strategic Plan must be resilient to in order to be effective over the next 5, 10 and 30 years?

There are of course many wider societal, economic and environmental trends that should be considered, but we focus on a few key areas with relevance to our position in community rail, and comment on uncertainties at the same time:

- **Covid recovery and changing travel habits** – We do not need to state the effects Covid has had on our rail network, on which GBR TT will be well versed. We urge a holistic view is taken, though, considering not only the fall-out for rail, but also the wider transport system and our communities generally, and considering opportunities to not only cope but ‘build back better’ and positively shape the future. Clearly, there is much uncertainty over how transport patterns will take shape over the coming years, but this state of flux and fluidity also presents opportunities to shape the change to come. The WISP should set out how the industry will help to encourage more sustainable leisure travel and support a greater spread of movement through the week afforded by flexible working, rather than movement being concentrated into morning/evening peaks. It should resist the temptation to pigeon-hole journeys into the fairly stable categories of the past, acknowledging that journeys may be increasingly multi-purpose and irregular, and there are advantages to rail and the communities it serves of supporting a further blending of journey purpose. Working with local communities, businesses, service providers and the tourism sector can assist with being nimble and responsive, while also helping to influence change positively in sync with local aspirations.

The implementation of the WISP and creation of GBR also presents a chance for the railways to reimagine and reinvigorate its place and purpose, at the heart of a sustainable transport network and sustainable, inclusive communities. This requires working across mode and acknowledging the broader challenges and trends across the (sustainable/public) transport field. In particular, the bus network has equally been devastated by Covid, and currently faces an extremely difficult period of financial challenges with reduced funding for Bus Service Improvement Plans,²⁴ while traffic levels have bounced back. Given the need to achieve modal shift onto public transport, and aspirations to make rail more accessible and support levelling up, we recommend a joined-up approach with other public transport modes on Covid recovery short-medium term, and longer-term towards dramatic, ambitious modal shift targets, would be highly productive.

We also urge that the effects of the pandemic *on communities as a whole* is acknowledged, including over the years ahead as no doubt new insights will emerge on the multiple ways that Covid has heightened social isolation and mental health issues, while stymieing local (sustainable and fair) economic development. The rail industry’s plan should set out not only how rail can recover and move forward strongly in its own right, but how it can play the maximum role in communities’ recovery and wellbeing (discussed immediately below).

- **Wellbeing, mental health, loneliness and inclusion** – Within community rail, we have a range of evidence underlining how our railways, working with and supporting communities, can impact positively on wellbeing and mental health, help to tackle loneliness, and open up fairer access to opportunity – in many cases having a transformative effect on people’s lives and life chances. This role that rail, and the community rail movement, can play is underscored clearly in the Community Rail Development Strategy, through our report on social inclusion,²⁵ and in the government’s cross-departmental strategy on Tackling Loneliness.²⁶ Given the range of evidence available on the prevalence of mental health issues, loneliness, limited and unequal mobility/access to opportunity, suggestions that these socio-economic concerns have been exacerbated by the pandemic, and the government’s push towards a levelled-up economy, we recommend that these factors are acknowledged in the WISP with ambitions for rail to make a full contribution to alleviating them.
- **Climate emergency and decarbonising transport** – While evidence on the grave and pressing nature of the climate crisis has been available for some decades, there has been a step-change in recent years, especially connected to COP26 and scientists’ increasingly stark warnings, in public

²⁴ At the time of writing, it’s being reported that greatly reduced funding is available for delivery of Bus Service Improvement Plans

²⁵ See <https://communityrail.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/ACoRP-CRSI2018.pdf>

²⁶ See p41 <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/a-connected-society-a-strategy-for-tackling-loneliness>

awareness and the sense of urgency. It is notable too that transport has finally been given the closer attention warranted, as it has become the largest contributor of greenhouse emissions in the UK, and the fastest growing globally. Although there is much attention being placed on EVs, transport academics warnings are clear that simply switching to electric cars is not enough, and neither an inclusive nor realistic pathway.²⁷ Indeed, the government's Transport Decarbonisation Plan has modal shift as its first objective, aspiring to make 'public transport and active travel the natural first choice',²⁸ and there is near-unanimous public support for public transport development as a key way to tackle the climate emergency.²⁹ We are starting to see some local authorities and devolved/regional transport bodies adopting traffic reduction targets,³⁰ responding to the evidence that traffic needs to be reduced by at least 20% this decade, and more thereafter, for climate targets to be met.³¹ All this provides opportunities for the rail industry, to work with communities, local and devolved government, and the wider transport sector, to support this important 'drive' to reduce traffic and shift as many journeys as possible onto sustainable modes.

- **Sustainable development** – Allied with growing evidence and rising concern around the climate emergency and social inequality, much work has been done at a global level to consider what sustainable development looks like,³² and indeed within the UK's rail industry to relate the Sustainable Development Goals to rail's ways of working.³³ Our own report on sustainable development relates community rail experience to this.³⁴ We have been involved in RSSB's working group to consider the rail industry's work to date on sustainability and how this can be developed over the next 30 years, which we understand is being separately fed into the WISP under as a Sustainable Rail Strategy. Given the important role rail can play in supporting more sustainable communities, we think it incredibly important that the WISP aligns with latest thinking on sustainable development, and shows a commitment to continually looking and responding to the field as it continually evolves. Specifically, it should be recognised that engaging with and empowering communities and seeking to maximise social value, as well as striving towards decarbonisation and environmental sustainability, is an inherently crucial part of this.
- **Digital connectivity and community** – While we do not have expertise in digital connectivity, we want to draw attention to the links between digitisation, and communities' wellbeing, sustainability and development. Digitisation clearly presents some great opportunities for the railways, not only to streamline and reduce costs, but also to position rail travel as a way to stay connected and make greater use of journeys, versus being sat in traffic. This can be a key tenet in the railways' push to attract wider passengers, including for leisure, where people want to be able to enjoy their journeys, whether by streaming content, chatting to family and friends, or using an app to learn about the landscapes and places they are travelling through and to.³⁵ It is especially relevant to engaging young people, who are less car-orientated and more focused on connectivity, and supporting and encouraging them to adopt sustainable travel habits.

Digitisation can also help stations to be more useful, welcoming and productive for local communities and support accessibility and sustainable development, whether it's providing free wifi and workspaces for local groups/enterprises,³⁶ or enabling people with disabilities to more easily plan journeys and negotiate stations. These examples help to illustrate how digitisation and new technologies can be combined effectively with local engagement to powerful effect, delivering co-

²⁷ See https://decarbon8.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/sites/59/2020/09/Submission_to_TDP_Consultation_DecarboN8.pdf

²⁸ Transport Decarbonisation Plan, 2021, https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1009448/decarbonising-transport-a-better-greener-britain.pdf

²⁹ See the Climate Assembly's report: <https://www.climateassembly.uk/report/>

³⁰ Such as the Scottish Government and Leeds Council

³¹ Transport for Quality of Life, 2019, <http://www.transportforqualityoflife.com/u/files/211214%20The%20last%20chance%20saloon%20to%20cut%20car%20mileage.pdf>

³² Particularly through the UN's widely-utilised and recognised Sustainable Development Goals

³³ RSSB's Rail Sustainable Development Principles

³⁴ See <https://communityrail.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/Sustainable-development-report-FINAL.pdf>

³⁵ As per our new project working with Window Seater: see <https://communityrail.org.uk/window-seater-innovate-uk/>

³⁶ Such as at [Lowestoft](#) and Kilmarnock

benefits for and with communities. This can help to guard against the disbenefits of digitisation and heavier reliance on technologies, such as excluding certain groups, and heightened risk of isolation.

e) Over the next 5, 10 and 30 years, which steps should the sector take to improve integration of rail with the wider transport system (including walking and cycling) in pursuit of these objectives?

We warmly welcome this question, and we have encouraged our third sector partners working across the sustainable travel arena, brought together under the [Sustainable Transport Alliance](#), to feed in. We are happy to work with the GBR TT as a conduit with the Alliance to further draw on their input, which could be invaluable given the breadth of experience across our organisations in working to advance, integrate and support communities on the sustainable travel mix: walking, cycling, buses, trams/metros, rail, community transport, and shared mobility. We also strongly advise that modal integration should be more explicitly expressly recognised in the WISP's objectives and ambitions: references to 'meeting multi-modal expectations' and 'connectivity' are perhaps open to interpretation. We also advise that the full mix of sustainable modes, in line with the sustainable transport hierarchy, should be referenced and utilised within the WISP, determining the priorities for modal integration and how we want to support and enable people to travel to and from stations.

Broadly speaking, we recommend that not only specific steps, but a step-change in approach is needed within rail to facilitate integration, taking a whole-systems approach across modes, which is crucial to many of the other objectives, including accessibility, modal shift, economic development, inclusion and levelling up. Clearly, it doesn't matter how reliable, appealing, accessible, efficient and sustainable stations and trains are, if people can't get to them via reliable, appealing, accessible, efficient and sustainable means. Yet our experience shows that this has not in the past been the typical way of thinking: rail has often been quite insular in its mindset. Although progress is being made with rising attention to 'end-to-end journeys' and 'the first/last mile' within the industry, this isn't always joined up with thinking about accessibility, inclusion and sustainability, and supported and informed by local engagement. In fact, there has in the past been a push to get people to and from stations by any means, with increased car parking often top of the list in franchise agreements under modal integration, despite the fact that this excludes the one in four households without a car, and adds to the air pollution, traffic, road danger and carbon footprint of the local area. There is also a worry that installing EV charging at stations will be seen as ticking the box of sustainable transport integration, when it is again non-inclusive, comes way down the sustainable transport hierarchy, and reinforces car-centric transport development patterns.

Community rail experience shows that when communities try to spearhead improvements on modal integration, a range of common barriers arise, related to transport industries and wider social, political and economic factors, making progress difficult and patchy. Even fairly small, low-cost and obvious improvements can be drawn out or fall by the wayside (wasting local efforts and enthusiasm). *Our appended briefing paper on integrated sustainable transport highlights opportunities for removing such barriers and making it easier for communities to affect change.* Of course, such community-led improvements have the added benefits of being more likely to align with local need, and being community-owned, thus pre-securing local support and awareness. We recommend the WISP recognises the need for the railway to work with community and strategic partners to remove such barriers and ensure responsibility on the rail industry's part to local ideas, opportunities, and community-led initiatives. See our [Connected Stations resource](#) for advice for community groups and rail partners on making integration improvements, in a way led by local needs, and examples of this working.

In terms of the strategic approach and specific steps needed to facilitate this step-change, we recommend:

- The WISP forms part of and supports a whole-systems approach across the sustainable transport field including high-level engagement and ongoing collaboration with the bus sector, and leaders in the active travel, shared and community transport fields, alongside national and devolved government, seeking to prioritise integration and joined-up development, picking up on aspirations in the Williams-Shapps plan, Bus Back Better Strategy, Walking & Cycling Investment Strategy, Transport Decarbonisation Plan, and related policy areas like levelling up and loneliness;
- As part of this, a joined-up approach to ticketing is needed across public transport modes, to make things easier, and avoid unreasonable/unaffordable costs for those combining sustainable modes;
- A high-level conversation is needed, alongside the bus sector, with housing, planning and development stakeholders, including the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, devolved and sub-regional authorities, and organisations representing town planners, developers

and regeneration specialists, to consider how public transport and the development of housing and urban spaces can be effectively aligned;

- It should be recognised and mandated that, at local level, joined-up working with local authorities and transport partners on modal integration, aligning with and supporting regional and local transport authority strategic development and investment programmes for active travel, buses, community and shared transport, is an *essential* part of rail industry delivery. This should involve ensuring regular dialogue and evidencing progress against shared strategic objectives on integrated, sustainable and inclusive travel;
- Rail industry performance and passenger satisfaction data, monitoring and reporting should relate to whole journeys and incorporate modal interchange and modes used to access stations, supporting progress towards seamless, high-quality and sustainable journeys – the railway should only be judged as high-performing and sustainable if it's working in sync with other sustainable modes in order to serve whole-journey needs;
- Targets are adopted (probably at national, region and station/line level) for increasing the modal share of active/public/shared travel to and from stations and reducing private car use;
- A renewed focus on 'station travel planning' (perhaps under a different guise), but putting communities in the lead of change, taking a participatory, empowering approach (going beyond consultation) that sets out short/medium/long term changes needed to improve modal integration in a way that responds to local needs and aspirations, and which is embedded across wider rail industry (stations) development and area-wide strategies, supporting communities to build the evidence base as needed, secure funding, manage improvements and communicate and evaluate these. Our [Connected Stations guidance](#) on community-led station travel planning could be used as a framework for this programme of work.

We suggest all the steps above should be embarked on in the first few years of GBR, given the pressing nature of the climate emergency and need for rapid decarbonisation, alongside the need to rebuild public transport patronage. Programmes of work to build up efforts, review against objectives and targets, and renew efforts, working with suitable partners, could be undertaken over the duration of the 30-year strategy. This would seize on the opportunity the WISP affords to instigate a step-change with a more holistic, whole-systems approach.

Question 2

a) Passenger: how will rail passenger expectations, including accessibility requirements, evolve over the coming 5, 10 and 30 years, what will be the driving causes of these changing expectations, and how can they be most effectively met by the rail sector?

Building on our comments above on trends, and the railways needing to be responsive to community needs, we have set out below a number key considerations related to expectations. However, we again urge that **the WISP must look beyond existing passengers, and consider the expectations and needs** of individuals and communities as a whole to do with transport, mobility, lifestyle and access to opportunity. The WISP should seek to ensure that rail is set up to continually appraise itself of these shifting, complex and diverse needs and perspectives (something that again local engagement and strong, open local relationships supports), and continually develop the extent to which it meets them, to widen use of the railways as well as increasing passenger satisfaction. We recommend that the language of the WISP and GBR should reflect the importance of considering and meeting needs (i.e. overcoming practical and perceptual barriers that will otherwise prevent or greatly restrict travel) as well as expectations (i.e. responding to wishes, aspirations and values).

As we have discussed, and as many experts attest, for rail to rebuild patronage short term, and play a central role in transport decarbonisation and local economic development in the decades ahead, we need to widen its use among parts of the population that seldom or never use rail at present. It is hard to pin down the expectations and needs of this group since they will be diverse and multi-faceted, and, perhaps, we should acknowledge that many among this group won't have existing expectations as they won't be considering rail at all. However, they will still most likely have a range of perceptual and practical barriers getting in the way of them using rail, which can be broken down. Community rail experience shows that for many people (a majority in many locations) rail is another world: something unfamiliar, that wouldn't enter day-to-day considerations, and which may be a daunting prospect. On this basis, we suggest that the thinking should be broader than this question implies: there is a need to not only meet *passenger expectations*, but continually investigate and seek to understand travel/lifestyle/mobility needs across

communities.

Investigation and consideration of need should be informed by localised engagement, relationship building and dialogue, but broadly speaking the types of needs and expectations likely to arise from such engagement include:

- **Reliability** – People need to be able to rely on services to access work, education and appointments in a timely manner. Even for leisure journeys, which we might think of as lower-pressure time-wise, people need to be able to rely on connections for longer journeys, and arrive on time for dinner appointments and theatre/cinema trips. There is a particular need for reliability in more rural locations (where there are fewer or no alternative options like buses and taxis) and at night, where there can be safety risks, discomfort or major inconvenience/expense if the last train is cancelled for example. This has an acute bearing on the railway's ability to attract and cater to those travelling to green spaces for outdoor leisure, and those going on nights-out. It should be noted that 'reliability' can be approached in a more holistic way than simply thinking about minimising train delays and cancellations, and there is a particular case for this with regards to these types of location/situation where the potential risks/costs/inconvenience are greater. For example, ensuring well-publicised alternatives at stations, good lighting and waiting spaces, and offering to reimburse taxi fares if the last train is cancelled, provides additional reassurance.
- **Affordability** – Community rail experience, and wider experience among our community and voluntary sector partners in sustainable transport, shows that affordability is a key concern and barrier when encouraging people to use public transport, and rail especially. Worries about the price of tickets are compounded by anxiety about the ticket buying process, and perhaps even worse, fears of buying the wrong ticket and being told off or fined (which aggressive messaging on the railway about revenue protection reinforces). This hinders community efforts both to increase mobility and fair access to opportunity, and to support people to shift away from reliance on private cars. With the former, this often involves groups with lower incomes and dealing with disadvantage or vulnerabilities, for whom a pricey rail ticket may be out of reach, or fears of being fined or getting things wrong too much to bear, potentially blocking access to work and training. With regards to modal shift, as the cost of driving is front loaded (buying, taxing and insuring a car), and with ongoing fuel price freezes, the cost of driving a car that's already in the driveway is often lower than taking the train, especially if it needs to be combined with buses, and especially for families.

Community engagement can provide some assistance such as raising awareness about the most affordable tickets, rail cards, or running local resident deals, but concerted efforts are needed across the industry, with government, and other transport partners, *to better understand what affordability means, and ensure that public transport is providing a better deal than driving*. This will not only involve simpler ticketing, but combined ticketing across public transport, deals that respond to real everyday needs (for flexible/part-time working and family leisure use, for example), greater flexibility and allowances for people accidentally buying the wrong ticket, and engaging government on the comparative cost of driving. It's also vital that limited free ticketing continues to be provided via trusted community partners, as in community rail, to run targeted local activities, such as try the train trips and rail confidence schemes for families, young people and groups with different needs, and to assist those interviewing for jobs, which encourage longer term rail use.

- **Integration** – All the needs and expectations we discuss in this list apply to people's entire journeys: people don't tend to have one set of needs for part one of their journey and a different set when they get onto the train. Whole journeys need to be reliable, affordable, accessing, comfortable, flexible and sustainable. If this isn't the case, it poses as much of a barrier to rail use as if these are not met on stations and trains themselves. This requires not only good interchange at stations, but a shift in approach by the rail industry to thinking about entire journeys. See Q1e.
- **Accessibility** – We applaud work taking place to improve accessibility for those with physical and hidden disabilities at stations, which is vital. But it's important to acknowledge the wider spectrum of needs and expectations for accessing the railway, extending beyond railway boundaries and relating to a broad range of (overlapping) personal circumstances. We advise that the WISP recognises accessibility in this broader sense and places suitable priority on enabling all within society to be able to access rail, through national strategies driving progress, but also through supporting localised engagement working with groups with different needs and lived experiences to

understand their needs and ensure they have the support, confidence and sense of ownership and inclusion that is so crucial alongside physical infrastructure. We propose that the WISP should also specifically recognise the accessibility needs of families (with particular attention to families' ability to use rail for leisure and tourism) and elderly people (in light of our ageing population) as well as those with disabilities and specific mobility requirements.

- **Comfort and enjoyability** – For rail to attract a greater modal share with regards to leisure travellers, especially for families and an ageing population, people's comfort needs and expectations are paramount. Our experience in community rail, both promoting leisure and tourism travel, and working with different groups to 'try the train' for the first time (or the first time in a long time) shows that rail has some fantastic selling points compared to driving, to do with the enjoyability and experience of a journey, but there needs to be consistency in delivering on those. For example, children often find rail travel really exciting. Families and groups of friends often value being able to sit together, chat and play games at a table. Walkers and cyclists like to be taken right into the heart of beautiful locations, and then to be able to travel back from a different place they've walked/cycled to. They, and other travellers, need somewhere to put their stuff. Almost without exception, people like to enjoy the view out of the window. And of course, at a basic level, everyone wants to be sure of having a seat, and some shelter from the elements while waiting. The rail industry could not only be working to 'meet' these expectations, but turn them to its advantage, to show how a rail journey can be part of the experience, and not dead-time stuck in traffic. Again, working with communities can help build this sense of positivity, excitement and specialness.
- **Flexible, lifestyle-centric** – Transport academics and commentators have examined how, with the rise of mass car use, people have developed expectations of extremely flexible, life-style centric mobility. This may be exacerbated by increasingly flexible and fluid working patterns that have been emerging. This poses a challenge for rail as an inherently inflexible mode of transport, but our experience in community rail suggests ways to counter this. Rail's awakening to the fact that it is not a stand-alone mode, but part of a wider sustainable transport system, is a crucial part. Ensuring that there are good walking, cycling and bus links at stations, or working with communities (in more rural areas especially) to explore innovations like demand responsive minibuses (as per the [Katch service in Suffolk](#)) or bike share options, helps people to travel as and when they like, as does simple, integrated ticketing across modes with reasonable on-the-day fares. In addition, local engagement, and championing community rail activity, helps to show how the railways are forming an integral and positive part of people's lifestyles and local communities.
- **Sustainability** – Research suggests this is not commonly a determinant of transport behaviours at present,³⁷ aligning with our comments above about transport mode not being a free and conscious choice, but that's not to dismiss this as an expectation, likely of increasing importance. With growing concern about the climate crisis, there's opportunity to position rail as the greenest way to travel long distances, combined with active travel and other public/shared modes, and indeed the industry has been seizing on this, such as through Rail Delivery Group's 'We Mean Green' campaign. In community rail too this was a focus in our 2021 Community Rail Week. Clearly, this type of positioning and cause/value-related marketing raises expectations, and so it will be important for the rail industry to reinforce this across everything it does. For example, if someone does start using trains (more) motivated by their green credentials, they may be frustrated to find on-board catering that refuses to refill refillable cups, and only offers meat/dairy-based and plastic-wrapped food.

All the areas above are well-evidenced in survey data such as that collected by Transport Focus, which we know they will be feeding in and commenting on in detail, and this is reinforced anecdotally through community rail experience. It is notable that speaking to any of our members, they will have a wealth of insights on local needs, perceptions, expectations, and opportunities to better meet these.

b) Passenger: in your experience, how can we most effectively monitor and assess customer satisfaction? What is a stretching yet realistic ambition for this objective and what measures can we most effectively use to consider success over the coming 5, 10 and 30 years? What evidence can you share to support your view?

³⁷ See Transport Focus's 2021 report: <https://www.transportfocus.org.uk/news/on-the-path-to-net-zero-what-do-transport-users-think/>

Reflecting our comments above, we strongly encourage the WISP to look at communities', and not just (existing) customers' perceptions and satisfaction levels. The railways need to understand and monitor the extent to which communities feel the railways are meeting their needs and able to use them. In part, this can be considered by looking at levels and patterns of use, including both retention of existing customers and gaining of new ones. This will need to go beyond existing rail patronage (gate) data and passenger satisfaction surveys. It seems likely that passenger surveys could be improved to better understand levels of repeat/new custom, how this affects perceptions, and motivations of new/repeat users. We would also guess that technological advances, especially the growing use of apps, can enable more sophisticated data on usage. This ties in with our points above about monitoring how people are accessing the railway (i.e. modes used to and from stations), and levels of satisfaction with entire journeys and interchange, not just the section on the railway.

The use of surveys and travel data should be accompanied with local engagement, including qualitative appraisal of local views and barriers to travel, and tracking how these change and how barriers are reduced over time. This is something community rail and other community partners can not only help with but lead, to feed in their own views and facilitate wider local involvement, input and dialogue with a broad a range of people, including those using the railway regularly, occasionally or never. This deeper, meaningful engagement will greatly strengthen the railway's ability to meet the needs of current and future passengers and achieve key objectives around modal shift, increased accessibility and levelling up. In short, the rail industry needs to be talking to and listening to people at a local level, and these kinds of deep-dives within communities can and should as much as possible be led by community partners, albeit with appropriate funding support and involvement from rail industry partners. The rail industry's role should be to facilitate, support, listen, and ensure the mechanisms are in place for responding and acting together.

c) Freight: what evidence can you provide regarding the advantage(s) of transporting goods by rail and what evidence can you share for how that could develop in the next 5, 10 and 30 years? What do you consider to be the most effective role for rail freight in the existing supply chains served and those that it doesn't? How could this change over that period? In answering, please explain and take account of likely developments in technology and in the wider economy.

We focus our answers here on the questions related to passengers rather than freight, due to the nature of most community rail work, but we fully acknowledge the great benefits of rail freight, and increasing its modal share, to communities, in reducing traffic (heavy vehicles especially), pollution, road danger and damage to our climate. There may well be increased opportunities in the future for community rail and the freight sector to work together and we and our members are open to exploring this.

d) What is a stretching yet realistic ambition for this objective and what measures can we most effectively use to consider success over the coming 5, 10 and 30 years? What are the interventions over that period which will be the maximum value for money, and what evidence can you share to support your claim?

We propose three core ambitions for this objective, which tie in with our proposal that this objective ought to read 'Meeting customers' and communities' needs':

- **The vast majority feel able and confident to access and use rail for at least some of their purposes** – to assess success, we suggest that baselines are needed for those living within say 1, 3, 5 and 10 miles of a station. Data collection should not only ask this question but exploring different elements and asking for input on changes that would reduce barriers (which could and should be put to good use at strategic, regional and community level). We should aim for a very large majority of those living closest to agree with this, and towards the end of 30 years perhaps a target of 85% for those living within five miles would be suitably stretching but realistic. Interim targets are hard to comment on without knowing the starting point.
- **Most people use rail regularly, with new passengers coming to rail all the time, and high retention** – as discussed under Q2b, further developing passenger data and satisfaction surveys would enable a clearer picture to emerge. We should be aiming to increase passenger numbers in a way to maximise use of capacity (and anticipate and gradually grow capacity in keeping with this), but also to constantly 'recruit' new passengers to rail, and monitor and develop retention. Again, without knowing the baselines it's hard to suggest specific targets, but it seems reasonable to suggest that regular use of rail among the majority of the popular should be a target over 30 years.

- **Rail is perceived as an inclusive, positive, desirable way to travel** – this should aim to shift towards rail being seen as not only comfortable, but welcoming, enjoyable and an attraction in its own right for leisure journeys. Considering lessons from countries such as Switzerland and Japan, and having seen in community rail the pleasure people can take from rail travel, we feel this is completely achievable, and perhaps necessary to achieve the substantive modal shift needed. In assessing this, we need to go beyond basic satisfaction scores among those using rail already. More nuanced assessments of people’s perceptions, among passengers and across communities, and the extent to which people are using rail for the first time, including modal shift and modal share, will be needed, as discussed under Q2b.

Question 3

Where are the most significant opportunities and barriers to delivering financial sustainability in the rail sector over 5, 10, and 30 years and how do we achieve/overcome them? How can we most effectively monitor and assess this? What is a stretching yet realistic ambition for this objective and what measures can we most effectively use to consider success over the coming 5, 10 and 30 years? What are the interventions over that period which will be the maximum value for money?

The most obvious way to develop financial sustainability is to widen access to rail and maximise its use, especially for leisure and personal use in the post-Covid context, but across the piece. Well-used trains and stations that meet local needs are most cost-effective and simultaneously deliver social and environmental value. A key structural barrier to this is widespread car dependency and car-centric planning, development and investment, as well as the needs and expectations of individuals, as set out above, not being met. As we have stressed already, local engagement and strong community relations helps to address these barriers and maximise use of the railways, by bringing people in, promoting awareness, positivity and confidence, and supporting the rail industry to better understand and respond to local needs. Community rail’s success in these areas is well-evidenced through our huge bank of case studies and other qualitative evidence,³⁸ as well as passenger data on community rail partnership lines,³⁹ and specific examples of stations being transformed into thriving hubs and gateways.⁴⁰ This shows how greater value is created from existing railway assets by communities and railways collaborating effectively.

Better alignment and collaboration with local authorities, communities and other transport providers helps to maximise access to and use of rail travel, but also delivers additional benefits from a financial point of view. Community rail experience shows how local collaboration tends to lead (albeit in multiple guises) to a pooling of resources and funding from various sources, while drawing on local enthusiasm, knowledge and volunteering, tends to ensure developments are better suited to local needs, and therefore more economical, while delivering wider value within communities, and sometimes reducing specific costs to the rail industry such as around security and maintenance. This is especially relevant to stations and their development, where, we have seen an array of examples of community-led projects to restore and put to use disused or dilapidated spaces, as well as smaller-scale projects, that bring in third party funding and combine partners’ expertise and staffing resource, and succeed in making stations more welcoming and inclusive, improving access and connectivity, increasing footfall, reducing anti-social behaviour and delivering wider social and environmental value.⁴¹

We additionally argue that assessments of financial sustainability, and consideration of how to strengthen it, should take into account the wider social, environmental and economic benefits the railway delivers. As noted above, we are involved in RSSB’s Social Sustainability Working Group to help the railway to better assess, understand and develop social value. This has established that the rail industry is lacking in maturity in this area compared to some sectors, and efforts are being made to support the industry to develop its approach, through the roll-out of a ‘Rail Social Value Tool’ this year, and, with our advice, ensuring this is done in a way that’s supportive of community-level and community-led rail-related activity. From our partnership working with RSSB, it also appears that further work is needed to fully understand the value of rail’s contribution to environmental sustainability, and especially the (social, economic and environmental) value of modal shift. While we may be able to place some values on people using rail to

³⁸ Especially through our [Value of Community Rail](#) report, but also see our online [case study library](#)

³⁹ See p9-10 of [Value of Community Rail](#)

⁴⁰ See our [Community Stations](#) report

⁴¹ Ibid

access work, training and healthy leisure opportunities, and we know RDG have recently published an assessment of rail's contribution to the visitor economy, we are not aware of clear data on the difference of making such journeys by rail instead of by private car. We note this recent research showing the high costs of driving and car ownership are underestimated and in significant part born by society,⁴² and also evidence showing the incalculable costs of not adequately responding to the climate crisis.⁴³

We are not commenting in detail on how financial sustainability can be measured and success assessed over the short, medium and long-term, but we generally advise that both local perceptions towards, and local benefits derived from, rail (social, economic and environmental), *and* the bigger picture of how rail contributes as part of a wider (sustainable) transport network and (fairer, levelled up) economy, should all be taken into account. The line at the top of the ambitions suggests that the goal here is ultimately to (a) ensure the model for rail is sustainable financially, (b) make sure that people (i.e. society at large) feel that they are getting good value from rail, (c) ensure that rail is run efficiently. While it's not our field of expertise to comment at length on the first point, we do suggest that rail should be looked at as part of the wider transport mix, for example with consideration given to funding rail alongside other sustainable modes from taxing cars, fuel and road charging. On the second point, we note again the need to understand what people think and feel locally, and how they use rail, and recognise that (especially over a 30 year timeline) this is not an absolute: we can and should track progress over time but there will always be further room for improvement. With regards to efficiency, we again emphasise the efficiencies to be made from local collaboration, and the need to remove common blockers to progress that can cause local projects to be delayed or even abandoned, wasting efforts on both sides. We therefore suggest that part of assessing efficiency should be consideration of local authorities/community partners/transport operators' perspectives, feedback and examples of their ability to work with the rail industry, and how this can be further improved.

However, we also note that the ambitions a-c as set out currently in the table don't quite match up with what the top line says, and there appears to be some contradiction between ambitions 1a and b. Finding an appropriate balance between fares and government funding (and delivering on all the other ambitions) could well mean increasing costs to government, at least in the long term, so long as the wider/longer-term value of (or return on) such investment is deemed worthwhile. We would argue that 'reducing costs to government' may well be a necessity in the short-term, in the years recovering from Covid, but this seems an inappropriately absolute 'ambition' to include in a 30-year strategy, over which time we are otherwise aiming for rail to play a greater role in society and deliver wider economic, social and environmental value. The rail sector would surely, therefore, in this time, be aiming for a situation where the benefits being delivered are so great, and so important, that it is without question warranting increased public investment (as most people would argue about the NHS for example). It also seems likely that over this time – if we are to achieve levelling up aspirations and hit our climate targets – the balance of investment *between transport modes* will have to shift, away from the system we have now which privileges and subsidises the richest and who use the least sustainable modes, to one where the greenest and most inclusive modes are deemed most deserving of the greatest share of public money.

Question 4

We note that the wording of this objective assumes that economic growth is to be pursued over the lifetime of this strategy. This may be a political focus now, especially in a post-pandemic context, but new economic ways of thinking have been emerging that suggest that if we are to forge a more sustainable way forward and tackle the climate emergency and socio-economic inequality, we need to be 'agnostic' about growth, and instead focus on sustainable development.⁴⁴ In many ways, the levelling up agenda chimes with this, proposing a fairer approach to economic development, with people and their places more at the forefront. Our answers below respond to this idea of focusing on *fair and sustainable economic development*, rather than suggesting that growth is an end in itself.

a) As Britain recovers from the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, what evidence do you have for how rail can contribute to wider economic growth over the next 5, 10, and 30 years? What is a stretching yet realistic ambition for this objective and what measures can we most effectively use to consider success over the coming 5, 10 and 30 years? What type of interventions over that

⁴²

⁴³ For example, see <https://www.theccc.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/Advisory-Group-on-Costs-and-Benefits-of-Net-Zero.pdf>

⁴⁴ See Kate Raworth's Doughnut Economics, 2019

period will provide maximum value for money from rail's economic contribution, and what evidence can you share to support your views?

There is a huge range of ways we identify in which the railways contribute to economic development, and specifically inclusive, fair, sustainable forms of development. In community rail, we see these impacts first-hand, across communities, and at a personal level through working with individuals and small groups. Over the years, at community level, we have seen the transformative effect of new lines and stations, increased service provision, and enhanced stations on their local areas. While at household and individual level, we have seen countless people having their lives and life-chances significantly improved by accessing rail. As is recognised in the Williams-Shapps white paper, community rail is working hard, in locations around Britain, with our railway partners, to enhance this impact, from engaging communities to promote service improvements, to helping disadvantaged groups to access work and training opportunities by using rail for the first time. The below summarises (and links to) evidence we have on rail's economic contribution relating to four five areas of development, and how community rail is supporting this:

i. New/reopened railway lines and stations – Amongst the strongest evidence we have for the socio-economic benefits of rail is where new lines and stations have been opened, and where these are not only immediately well used and valued,⁴⁵ but bringing renewed pride and aspiration (linking to mission 9 in the Levelling Up white paper). Community rail has worked with a smattering of such projects (see Devon & Cornwall Rail Partnership's contribution to the [Dartmoor Line reopening](#)) and is lined up to play a role in numerous more being considered under the Restoring your Railway Fund.

ii. Enhanced services and stations – As well as supporting a small number of rail re-openings, we have many examples of community rail helping to build a case for, supporting, spearheading and promoting major rail enhancements, and evidence of the difference these changes make. For example, Community Rail Cumbria worked with Northern over many years to build a social and economic case for a new Sunday service on the Cumbrian Coastline, and then to promote it when it was introduced. This service has provided vital connections for isolated rural communities and boosted tourism (although the effects were still being assessed when Covid hit). The effects of enhanced stations and community rail's contribution to this is discussed below, under 4b.

iii. Enabling and supporting new groups to use rail – As we have emphasised, there are large parts of society that are not using rail at present, and who lack confidence and skills, and face a range of barriers. This includes many young people, groups with disabilities, marginalised and minority groups and those with the lowest incomes. Engaging these groups, as is common in community rail, to break down barriers and help them use rail for the first time, and feel confident about doing so independently, tends to open up a whole world of new opportunity, broadening mobility horizons and connecting people with work and training and social opportunities that would otherwise have been out of reach. Comments from students and teachers at Sheppey College, who work with Kent CRP, help to sum this up especially well: see our [Youth Engagement report](#).

iv. Boosting (sustainable) tourism and leisure: RDG's economic assessment sets out the economic value of rail's support to local visitor economies. We would further substantiate this by highlighting the range of successful endeavours within community rail to not only promote the railway for leisure and tourism, but also link in with wider regional and localised campaigns, and forge lasting and productive relationships with Destination Management Organisations, local authorities, local businesses and others within and supporting local visitor economies. Devon & Cornwall Rail Partnership are an outstanding example and have many testimonies from local partners of the role they have played, as well as passenger data showing how the lines they promote are flourishing. Specific examples of their work include their [Foodie Guides promoting small local businesses](#) and [using Tik Tok to promote their lines to wider audiences](#). Such leisure and tourism promotion in community rail often draws on local stories, histories and identities, again bolstering local pride, as with this [Looe Valley Line campaign](#). We suggest that to build a full picture of the contribution of rail to visitor economies, we should also take into account (a) the added social value of community-led and networked promotions such as these, and (b) the reduction of harm caused to communities and climate by car-based travel and flying. In just about every locality in the UK, the ill-effects of car-based travel are palpable, in terms of noise, congestion, air pollution, road safety, loss of public space, and our communities simply being less pleasant places to be. All of these ill-effects bear economic costs, and are especially acute in well-visited places at popular times. Clearly, rail, combined

⁴⁵ Such as the Borders Railway, Low Moor Station, and Dartmoor Line

with active travel and buses and shared/community transport, provides a way to bring people into these locations, supporting visitor economies, without the environmental, social and economic costs of unsustainable levels of road traffic. It also offers fairer access, helping to open up green and coastal spaces, and heritage locations, to those without a car.⁴⁶

v. **Community confidence and self-efficacy** – As the many examples we have already shared show, engaging communities with their railways and stations delivers economic as well as social and environmental value, and contributes to the levelling up agenda. This is through targeted interventions to widen access to work and training as per paragraph i above, and promotion of tourism as per iii, but also the act of communities leading and developing projects and bringing people together itself bolsters pride, community confidence, local resilience and networks – and this can have a ripple effect for regeneration, local enterprise and sustainable economic development that benefits everyone.

As these examples show, the railways can continue to bolster economic development, and specifically inclusive and sustainable forms of development, through engaging effectively with communities and empowering community rail to deliver work in these areas, of the types we have referenced above, in a way that's community-led and determined by local contexts and aspirations. In terms of measuring success, again local input and feedback is a crucial part, but we also suggest that the rail industry should be aiming to significantly increase its modal share of leisure journeys and improve public perceptions towards rail's suitability for leisure journeys. We propose that specific targets should be set that not only show growth in rail's use, but contribution to road traffic and domestic flight reduction (i.e. how many leisure journeys have been swapped from car and air to rail), and this should be done in light of academic assessments on the reductions needed to hit our net zero targets.

b) In the context of enabling development and regeneration opportunities both in the immediate vicinity of stations and within the surrounding area, how can rail best facilitate improvements to places and local growth, through improved connectivity and unlocking commercial activity, housing, and employment over the next 5, 10 and 30 years?

We have a broad array of examples of communities working with the rail industry to spearhead and manage highly-fruitful projects that breathe new life into stations and their surrounding areas. These include projects to restore and make use of disused rooms, buildings or spaces, in some cases through restoration and repair work (often bringing in multiple funding sources), such as setting up social enterprises, community meeting spaces and cafes.⁴⁷ But also it includes activities to simply help communities get greater use of their stations, bringing people in and bringing people together, such as community gardening in outside spaces, arts projects displaying local works, community events and celebrations, and pop-up stalls.⁴⁸ To give a few, wide-ranging examples:

- Bolton – This large station has undergone a radical transformation led by the community rail partnership working with Northern, but involving a broad range of local partners including the university, arts and inclusion groups. The newly refurbished rooms have already been used for community events, arts exhibitions, poetry readings, a fringe event within the local food and drink festival, and as a focal point for campaigns to celebrate diversity and stamp out hate crime;⁴⁹
- Buxton – Using the outside spaces on and around the station, the Friends of Buxton Station have installed and set up a range of art installations, community maps, a defibrillator, several community gardens created and managed by volunteers, a rail to retail trail, biodiversity initiatives linking to local conservation efforts including bumblebee safaris, and a car share scheme;⁵⁰
- Yatton - The Strawberry Line Café is a community-led social enterprise at Yatton Station, providing skills and employment to people with learning disabilities and a meeting space for local crafts, walking and social groups;

⁴⁶ The Glover Review found that much of our national parks, for example, are hard to access without a car, and recommended that improvements should be made to ensure that everyone can benefit

⁴⁷ See our 2017 report on Community Stations for many great examples: <https://communityrail.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/ACoRP-Community-Stations-Document-web.pdf>

⁴⁸ See our Station Adoption handbook for many examples of smaller scale station projects and station friends groups: <https://communityrail.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/Acorp-Station-Adoption-Booklet-050719.pdf>

⁴⁹ See <https://www.boltoncommunityrail.org.uk/>

⁵⁰ See <https://communityrail.org.uk/friends-of-buxton-station-queens-award/> and <https://communityrail.org.uk/friends-of-buxton-station/>

- Swaythling – Three Rivers CRP has worked with train operator SWR to rejuvenate two previously disused rooms at the station, turning them into a highly successful freeshop, reducing food waste and providing a local source of healthy foods for local families, as well as clothing, books and toys for young children. The project is volunteer led and has created a real buzz around the station, which also hosts community gardening and heritage installations.⁵¹

We have various examples of such initiatives supporting and spurring wider regeneration, development and confidence across a surrounding area. For example, Community Rail Cumbria's work to transform Millom Station into a thriving hub, complete with community-run heritage and education centre, has spurred wider transformation in this part of a town that has experienced post-industrial decline and deprivation.⁵² In all these examples, strong local partnerships, and a participatory, community-led approach has been key, working with local authorities, businesses, community groups and creative people, drawing on local ideas and involvement, and putting the community and its identity centre-stage. Another common aspect of community-led station projects that bring the station into the heart of communities and local economies is accompanying work to improve accessibility and modal integration, and show that the station is an inclusive, welcoming space for all.

As these examples show, while community rail initiatives have historically been at smaller and more rural stations, an increasing array of work is taking place at urban and larger stations, and we are now involved in advising on community rail activity at some major city stations like Sheffield. While every station is to be approached differently, we would like to see the rail industry being open to and encouraging community involvement at stations of all types and sizes, and in fact there is much by way of inspiration that bigger stations can gain from smaller ones. Bringing community rail and its ethos to bigger stations not only delivers wider social value, but embeds the station into its surroundings and connects with local identities, as has been recognised as important to the way people view and use their stations,⁵³ as well as being important to encouraging modal shift.⁵⁴ It also helps to support more sustainable and inclusive economic development, such as by supporting small business, social enterprises and local suppliers, rather than installing big chains that tend to involve capital flight rather than playing a strong role in local economic development. Thinking about leisure promotion, it would also be good to see more of the city stations nurturing relationships with, showcasing and signposting the smaller branch lines and 'hidden gem' stations with active volunteers, lovely gardens, quirks and other attractions that are a short train ride away.

These initiatives show the importance of the rail industry both proactively encouraging and supporting community rail and station adoption activity, and having the scope, flexibility and mindset to be open to new approaches from the community, and enable communities to lead the way on such projects. An empowering approach, resisting the temptation to control or pre-determine results, tends to lead to stronger, more lasting results (see also our answer to Q5b). Part of Community Rail Network's role is working with the rail industry and local communities to support the creation of new community rail partnerships, groups and projects in a way that is well-rooted in and led by local communities, and we hope to continue to be supported by the industry and DfT to do this.

However, many station projects, especially those involving some kind of building development or repurposing, are far from plain sailing. The railway has a fairly clear, consistent approach to station adoption and enabling volunteers to carry out station gardening and other small initiatives (largely based on our [Station Adoption Handbook](#) and our advice provided to train operators and Network Rail), which largely works. However, bigger undertakings, and sometimes even minor requests like groups wanting to install a water butt or art display, can be fraught, falling foul to red tape and sometimes taking inordinate amounts of time to address. We and our members appreciate that sometimes there will be good safety reasons for not being able to do things on the railway estate, but sometimes even reaching the point of getting a 'no', let alone a 'can we approach this a different way' can be unnecessarily slow and complicated. This often can be to do with uncertainty about demarcation and who is responsible for what, or a lack of proportionality,

⁵¹ See <https://communityrail.org.uk/swaythling-station/>

⁵² See <https://communityrail.org.uk/resources-ideas/case-studies/better-side-of-the-tracks-community-rail-cumbria-millom-discovery-centre-and-flimby-primary/>

⁵³ Recent presentation by BMD to RDG's Stations Strategy Group (31 Jan) discussed the importance of this with regards to the redevelopment of Glasgow Queen Street.

⁵⁴ See attached briefing on behavioural insights

leading to groups being passed around, and/or having to go through inappropriate processes and bureaucracy to achieve small, simple changes.

With station buildings projects, where they do get off the ground, they are often far more drawn out and complicated than envisaged. This is partly to do with the multiple parties involved, and often confusion or complexities around who is responsible for what. Related to this, agreeing lease arrangements tends to be complicated, including ensuring that arrangements are not overly burdensome for community groups while enabling them to get things fixed when needed. Even projects that have been completed and started delivering commonly have ongoing issues to do with railway red tape, for example not being able to get basic repairs done (a broken door hinge for example) without going through lots of paperwork and expense. Even where we have been funded by train operators to help find community uses for station spaces, we have experienced various issues, and there are lessons we are keen to talk through with GBR to consider how this could work better.

For all the successful projects we have supported, there will be at least as many again that never got off the ground or fell at the early stages. Sometimes, empty spaces stay empty because a retail lettings agent is hanging on for a commercial let, or projects are otherwise dismissed or deprioritised as non-commercial. In fact, although many community station projects need to be enabled through a peppercorn rent, many will bring commercial benefits such as increased footfall, and some enterprises may be able to pay some rent over time. In many cases, communities have great enthusiasm for making use of a disused station but find it hard engaging with the right people (having to go to property rather than community teams) and getting their enquiry dealt with in a timely and productive manner. Where ideas are being developed by volunteers and community groups, momentum needs to be maintained, and we have seen some great ideas abandoned due to hitting brickwalls. Most of the projects that have succeeded have been characterised by having an extremely determined, confident, tenacious community lead who has refused to give up over many, many years. We propose that this should not be a prerequisite for a community station project to bear fruit. Bearing in mind the ambition to have an efficient railway, removing the common blockers and putting in place a much more conducive approach to such projects would not only enable more to succeed, but also reduce time wasted on both sides.

We are keen to discuss this area of work with the GBR TT in more detail, and have already had some discussions with the DfT's stations and community rail policy team, but in summary, we recommend that:

- The WISP clarifies that community projects at stations bring commercial and other benefits, including contributing social value, and should be proactively encouraged and supported alongside and complementary to traditional commercial lets, depending on local needs and contexts, drawing on local input. Community uses should be especially pursued in spaces that have not been commercially let for some time or which are otherwise unlikely to be, with a clear mandate for identifying these spaces and providing straightforward routes for communities to take them up;
- Property teams (and others as relevant) should be mandated to be responsive and supportive to community stations developments, and other community projects that require their involvement
- There should always be clear routes in to the railway for communities wanting to engage, make enquiries, or for existing community rail groups wanting to deliver new work, plus high standards for responding to these and working collaboratively to make ideas happen (as much as is practicable). Much progress has been made on this with community managers at train operators and Network Rail's community leads (see also Q5b) but building projects are often hard to initiate and progress;
- A new approach is needed to property leasing for community uses, reducing complexity and burdens placed on community tenants/users of spaces – we are happy to advise on this;
- Consider if innovative models might be appropriate in some cases to bring greater community ownership and control of stations, especially where staffing presence is being removed;
- Existing good practice and consistency in the industry's approach to station adoption (as per our [Station Adoption Handbook](#)) is carried forward, but with a few refinements and clarifications, such as ensuring groups are consulted on work at stations, introduced to relevant contractors, and not subject to inappropriate background checks or other disproportionate bureaucracy, and making sure there is clarity and openness between parties over who is responsible for what.

A good starting point, we suggest, is the DfT's Community Rail Development Strategy (see the section on 'Making better use of railway land and stations') and working with us to close the gap between the strategy's ambitions and how things are working at present.

c) What innovative and modernising ideas do you have which would benefit the railway while supporting the strategic objectives? Please give evidence and make reference to how they would maintain or enhance the railway's safety record.

Many of these ideas have already been touched on or specifically discussed in the sections above, but to sum up the more innovative and modernising aspects of our input:

- **An open door to local partnership working** – The railways have often in the past been viewed as difficult to penetrate and engage with, by community groups and local authorities. Setting out a firm commitment to an open door/open ears policy, with standards and mechanisms for local collaboration, closely involving the existing community rail and facilitating its growth, would represent a positive step forward that would support progress towards all five objectives.
- **Community empowerment** – As we have referenced repeatedly, and discuss in 5b below, not only engaging with communities, but taking a participatory and empowering approach, as rail's standard modus operandi, would represent an innovative shift in mindset. This would unlock benefits, value and efficiencies aligning with all the proposed objectives, and will also help the railway's to be agile and future focused over the 30-year timeframe of the WISP. This approach should move the railway up the 'ladder of participation', shifting away from tick-box consultation. Important groundwork for this has been laid with the industry's work with community rail, but further progress is needed to embrace an empowering, community-orientated mindset across different areas of operations, to let communities lead the way at a local level, and to ensure local lessons and barriers are being headed and addressed at a strategic level too. This shift is closely linked with, and perhaps a natural progression from, rail's drive to be more people-focused, and supportive of government strategies including Levelling Up and the Communities Framework.⁵⁵
- **Collaboration across modes** – Joined up thinking and working with other sustainable modes, buses especially, has not been the norm in the past, and when communities try to lead on this it is often fraught.⁵⁶ The WISP could mark a radically different, cross-modal collaborative approach to this, which could be transformative in terms of achieving modal shift, levelled-up mobility, better quality journeys, and achieving greater value from transport assets across the piece.
- **Joining up with planning and housing** – Studies indicate that the majority of new housing developments are not being well joined-up with regards to public transport,⁵⁷ and our members express concerns about a lack of linkages between transport and local planning. The rail industry could play a lead role, working with strategic partners, in turning this around, making new developments better connected, more inclusive, and the railways better used.
- **Stations as integrated parts of their locales** – We argue in various places in this response for stations to be well-integrated with other modes, well-used by local communities, and for the rail industry to generally be responsive to local needs. We suggest that more progressive thinking about stations generally would help to serve efforts in all these areas: seeing stations as part of the fabric of their surroundings, with their relationships and connectedness with the places and people around them as important if not more so than what lies on the station estate.
- **Stations as community hubs and assets** – We discuss above a variety of community uses for station spaces, from entire buildings to tiny patches of ground, transforming these spaces and delivering considerable social good from very little, in tune with local needs. The phrase 'bringing stations into the heart of communities' is one we use a lot in community rail, as it sums up how community-driven activities create an improved relationship with the railway and enable the community to derive greater benefit from rail assets. An approach within the industry, of considering how much can a station do for the community, and how can the station be made more central to community life, supports a range of WISP objectives, and provides a useful underpinning to the specific steps we suggest above. It makes stations places that people are proud of – a key element of the levelling up strategy – and even that people want to visit as a destination in their own right.

⁵⁵ MHCLG, 2019, Communities Framework: By Deeds and Their Results, <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/by-deeds-and-their-results-strengthening-our-communities-and-nation>

⁵⁶ Again, see our attached briefing on integrated sustainable transport.

⁵⁷ See Transport for New Homes: <https://www.transportfornewhomes.org.uk/>

Question 5

a) What evidence can you provide for how the rail sector contributes to the four levelling up outcomes and to improving connectivity in across Great Britain, including through cross-border services? How does this change depending on the type of place where the sector operates (including in cities, towns and rural areas), and what are the most cost-effective ways at the sector's disposal to improve that further during the next 5, 10, and 30 years?

Much of our response to questions 1-4 addresses this question, and we have alluded to the new levelling up strategy throughout. In summary, we see rail contributing to these four outcomes, supported by and involving community rail, as follows:

- **Empowering local leaders and communities** – Everything that has been delivered in community rail over the years is evidence of how the railways are empowering communities and bears insights, explored further under Q5b, on how this can be enhanced. For wide-ranging evidence of impact delivered thus far, see our report on the Value of Community Rail. Also see our [reports on activities in every region of Britain](#). As these reports show, while community rail has historically been concentrated in rural areas, an increasing array of activity is in densely populated urban areas, responding to particular issues and needs in these contexts. We urge that community involvement is not seen as a focus for areas outside the big cities – we see a lot of scope for working with the city regions and devolved authorities for spreading community rail and related, locally-empowering activity across these areas. We already have a good relationship with TfGM supporting station adoption, and evolving relationships with WMRE and TfL, on this front.
- **Boosting living standards** – Clearly, the primary way that rail contributes to living standards and quality of life is as a mode of transport, providing access to work, training, education and leisure opportunities. We have already provided under Q4a evidence of the railway contributing to this, sometimes with profound, life-altering effects for individuals. We emphasise again though that simply the railway being there and providing a good service is not enough for everyone in society, especially the most disadvantaged, to access the mobility it affords. Local engagement and efforts to overcome barriers to travel (practical and perceptual), including through modal integration, are vital to the railways successfully delivering on this and the other levelling up outcomes.

Community rail activities at and around stations, and using the railways to offer different experiences to local groups, supported and facilitated by the rail industry, can also have a marked effect on local environments and people's quality of life. This includes: volunteering of any kind at stations (evidenced to build social connections and reduce ASB, as at [Friends of London Road Station, Brighton](#));⁵⁸ greening grey spaces and providing relaxing spaces people can enjoy (such as the [Bottesford Friendly Garden](#)); self-guided/guided walks (such as [Community Rail Lancashire's Rail Rambles](#)); taking disadvantaged groups on trips to rural locations (as in Gloucestershire CRP's GetAway scheme); helping people to grow their own food (as in [Sevenside CRP and Incredible Edible's secret garden at Avonmouth](#)); and connecting people with nature (as in [Buxton's bumblebee safaris](#)).

- **Spreading opportunity and improving public services** – Again, we suggest that the fundamental way that rail spreads opportunity is as a mode of transport connecting people with work, education, training and leisure, and we again point to evidence in community rail of local engagement helping to open up opportunities to new groups. We would additionally point to work in community rail to offer new opportunities at stations, such as through social enterprises setting up in previously disused station spaces, offering work and skills opportunities (as per at Gobowen Station for example). In addition, a few initiatives within community rail show how forging strong links with local service providers can aid inclusive and sustainable access to these services. For example, Esk Valley CRP has worked closely with James Cook Hospital to promote rail links to the hospital. While South East Communities CRP's links with local schools enabled it to advise train operators on shifting local needs with regards to pupils' travel patterns during the shifting sands of the pandemic.

⁵⁸ Also see statistics on the extent and value of volunteering in community rail (from 2019) pp.9-10 in Value of Community Rail, <https://communityrail.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/ACoRP-Value-of-Community-Rail-2019-final-for-web-141019.pdf>

- **Restoring local pride** – As we discuss further under 5b below, engaging and collaborating effectively with local communities, and enabling communities to inform and direct rail’s development locally, is crucial to bolstering local pride. Local engagement allows the railway to tap into local enthusiasm, knowledge and stories, understand and better meet local needs, and to deliver extensive social co-benefits from all its activities, building positive relationships and perceptions towards rail in the process. All of the community rail examples we share in this response, and through the various reports we have linked to, have in common that people have taken great pride in developing and delivering these initiatives, and have sought to spread that pride and positivity to others within their communities, and to breed pride and positivity towards the railway. It would be difficult to think of any community rail activity that does not do this, as it’s perhaps the essence of the movement: building pride in localities, railways and stations.

We would additionally highlight the academic evidence suggesting that building pride, positivity and hopefulness, working with local identities and empowering local people, is crucial to achieving more sustainable behaviours including modal shift.⁵⁹

In terms of improving connectivity, clearly this is the fundamental way that rail delivers value to society, by providing transport services, so it’s difficult to comment on this separately to any of the other questions in this CfE. See our answers to Q1e and Q6a for further evidence on this related to modal integration and modal shift respectively and how this can be improved. We note that connectivity has been especially allied with levelling up in the objectives, but improving connectivity of course serves all the objectives, helping to deliver environmental value (especially via modal shift) as well as social and economic value (by aiding fair and equal access to opportunity and supporting local economic development).

In terms of the sector improving its contribution to the levelling up objectives further, see our recommendations above under Q4b and 4c on stations and innovation, under Q1e on modal integration connectivity, and our recommendations below under 5c on engaging, responding to and empowering communities. We especially emphasise that joining up community rail activity, and working with local authorities and leaders, is crucial to deliver maximum benefit, as opposed to seeing these as entirely distinct areas of work.

b) How could the rail industry, over the next 5, 10 and 30 years, become more responsive to, and more accountable to, local communities and passengers? Please give evidence and examples in your response.

Our entire response to this call for evidence is heavily focused on this topic of working with and being responsive to communities, and we have already provided a swathe of evidence and examples to show how this is working already and how it can be strengthened. We will therefore use this section to summarise our main recommendations for the WISP and potential improvements to the rail industry’s approach that it could steer:

- **Include a specific ambition in the WISP for engaging, and being responsive and accountable to, communities** – As noted under Q1, this is a key theme in the Williams-Shapps white paper, yet it is not specifically referenced in the proposed objectives and ambitions as they are currently set out. Although this is a cross-cutting theme supporting all the other ambitions (as we have shown), there are many inter-relationships between the ambitions, and to omit this risks this vital point being lost or deprioritised. In our experience, although community involvement with rail has come a long way, it is frequently still seen as a ‘nice to have’, and we remain a long way from buy-in permeating all corners of the industry.
- **Recognise that community engagement and strong local relationships is a vital prerequisite to understanding and responding to local needs** – As much of our response has shown, it is community engagement and local relationships that enable the railways to drill down and have a deep appreciation of local need that would otherwise be impossible (or extremely costly). This is especially the case through periods of great change, as has been the case during Covid, and as discussed above it’s important too for the rail industry to move in sync with wider/longer-term social trends, understanding how these play out locally. This point about local engagement being the key

⁵⁹ See our appended briefing paper on modal shift.

to responsiveness to communities feels obvious to us, but it's not expressly made in the WISP call for evidence or this question. There is a need for this reaching out into communities to be proactively delivered, in partnership with community rail and other local partners, as well as ensuring mechanisms are in place for listening, responding and being open to new opportunities.

- **Recognise the community rail movement's critical role, and cement the industry's support** – We were thrilled to see the enthusiastic recognition in the Williams-Shapps white paper of the range of ways community rail delivers value, and naturally we hope this will be carried forward to the WISP. We are especially keen to see community rail's role in ensuring and developing responsiveness to local needs recognised, in line with the first pillar of the DfT's [Community Rail Development Strategy](#), 'providing communities a voice', and recognition that this aspect of community rail could be further developed by ensuring the empowering, enabling approach we describe below. Part of securing this role moving forward is to ensure that community rail can continue to rely on the essential funding support and collaboration the rail industry provides, and *we are already feeding into the GBR TT on this separately in more detail.*
- **Commit to participatory, empowering approach to community rail and working with communities** – The approach taken to community involvement naturally does vary across the industry, and in many cases we see great examples of empowerment, while in others it's a more top-down approach. In some cases, there can be a view that the community rail movement is a branch of the railway and so to be managed. Our position is that the community rail movement is part of the community and voluntary sector – a unique part working closely with the railways and other community and transport partners. Its independent position within communities is what gives it its strength, and amazing local knowledge and connections, and its ability to act as a critical friend to the industry. We ask that the WISP recognises community rail's independence (as the DfT's community rail strategy does), and value of community rail and other community partners being treated as partners, as well as emphasising the importance of the support the industry provides. We also encourage that the WISP encourages the involvement of community rail and other community partners as relevant in the business planning cycle, which has not happened to date, but we understand the DfT are keen to see from next year.⁶⁰
- **Recognise Community Rail Network's role** – As lead delivery partner of the DT's Community Rail Development Strategy, and playing a vital role bringing the movement together, enabling good practice sharing, and offering up strategic insights, it will be helpful if our role as umbrella body was referenced. This could specifically reference how we are able and keen to work with anyone across the rail industry to advise on, support and facilitate community rail and local engagement with rail generally. While we have specific commitments to support our existing members (CRPs and station adopters/groups/enterprises) our remit includes supporting the growth and development of community rail and we regard any community-based/led group/partnership/enterprise/volunteers working to benefit communities and railways through engaging and connecting the two, as being part of community rail.
- **Emphasise that the railways as a whole should be responsive to communities** – Community rail has been strongly supported in recent years by community managers within train operators, and to a growing extent the community rail leads in Network Rail's regions, and we urge that this continues, ensuring clear routes in for communities. However, it would be helpful if the WISP also underlined that the railways as a whole need to be community-minded and responding to local needs, linking back to our earlier comments (Q1) on cultural shift. We often find that outside of communities teams there can be less awareness, buy-in and commitment to community work, which can hold up and affect the ability of community rail initiatives to succeed (see also Q4b).
- **Improved joint-working with local authorities** – We support the recognition in the William-Shapps white paper of the importance of this, and note that some local authorities have found rail challenging to engage with in the past. We ask for recognition that numerous community rail partnerships are hosted by local authorities, and all work with local government as well as a range of other local partners. Therefore, work with local authorities and work with community rail should not be put in entirely separate boxes – this can be (and already is in many locations) productively

⁶⁰ See our attached briefing on business planning

joined-up, building on existing work and connections.

- **Commit to an open door to community approaches and refined ways of responding to and progressing projects** – We have stressed the need for the railway to be proactive in working with communities and building local relationships. However, it's also crucial for the railway to have its doors and ears open when local groups, authorities, businesses and service providers approach it with ideas, proposals and to involve rail in broader local initiatives. Again, the introduction of community managers in train operators, and community rail leads in each of Network Rail's regions, has been extremely helpful with this, but there is more to be done, including ensuring these managers have the support and engagement of others within their businesses. There is also a need for appropriate mechanisms to feed in (and feed upwards) local ideas, insights and opportunities to other parts of rail operations, and at a more senior level.

All our recommendations above apply to the duration of the WISP, rather than being specific to the short/medium/long term, and we propose that all are applicable/deliverable with immediate effect given the valuable groundwork that has been delivered over the years in working with community rail. See Q5c below for how progress could be assessed over the coming five, 10 and 30 years.

c) What is a stretching yet realistic ambition for this objective and what measures can we most effectively use to consider success over the coming 5, 10 and 30 years? What are the interventions over that period which will be the maximum value for money, and what evidence can you share to support your views?

We refer back to our response to Q2d, as there is significant overlap between these questions: to assess whether the industry is delivering on levelling up and connectivity, it needs to monitor, and assess success against, the extent to which people feel able to access and use rail, the extent to which they are (including new passengers coming on board and retention) and perceptions of rail across communities at large.

Particularly thinking about the importance of engaging with and being responsive to communities and their needs, as set out under Q5a and b above, we recommend that the rail industry sets the stretching yet wholly achievable ambitions:

- (i) **proactive support, facilitation and encouragement of local engagement and input across the network** – working towards this on every line and at/around every station on the network;
- (ii) **a clear approach and high standards for working with and responding to community stakeholders and local authorities** – including aligning with local strategies, responding to local aspirations and opportunities, and maintaining clear and effective 'routes in' and ways to progress partnership working.

In terms of measurables over the coming five, 10 and 30 years to ensure progress against these ambitions, we recommend this includes further facilitating the growth and spread of community rail across the UK, supported by Community Rail Network. We now have 74 community rail partnerships covering c. 95 lines, and approximately 1,200 station adoption groups, so accounting for nearly half of Britain's stations. We propose that incremental targets could be put in place for the five, 10 and 30 year periods to take community involvement towards, ultimately, 100% of lines and stations, and we would be happy to work with GBR TT on the detail of this. We also recommend that feedback, satisfaction and input from community rail partnerships, volunteers and other community partners – including those who have been working with the railways for some time and new partners – should be collected to ensure progress is being made in strengthening local relations and to identify areas for improvement. In addition, data could be collected, which we would be happy to feed into, on station development projects that have succeeded, alongside lessons learnt and any issues experienced. Monitoring how issues are being resolved and barriers removed is crucial.

We also will continue to (a) work with our members to support their understanding and evidencing of the impact they deliver, including encouraging them to share this with their rail/other local partners, and (b) feed into RSSB's Social Sustainability Working Group and other industry partners on social impact and value assessments, helping community rail to play an important part in these developments.

Question 6

a) What is a stretching yet realistic ambition for this objective and what measures can we most effectively use to consider success over the coming 5, 10 and 30 years? What are the interventions over that period which will be the maximum value for money, and what evidence can you share to support your views?

We have already commented a lot on the role of the railway in achieving more sustainable mobility and communities, and given many examples of community rail working with the rail industry towards these goals – work which can and should be continued, extended and enhanced. We want to make the critical point that environmental sustainability on the railway, and achieving modal shift, also delivers great social and economic good. Indeed, the importance of public transport specifically (not just any type of transport) has been recognised in the levelling up white paper, and the Sustainable Transport Alliance of which we are part has a strong focus on green *and inclusive* transport, believing these to go hand-in-hand. In fact, emphasising and celebrating the socio-economic good of public transport (combined with active, shared and community transport) is one of the ways we can further support and encourage modal shift, positioning it as aspirational and part of our communities.⁶¹ We advise that the WISP should draw out and emphasise the many links and interdependencies between the objectives and ambitions, not least showing how environmental improvements and modal shift benefit communities and local economies. We also advise there should be a clear focus on modal shift, and increasing rail's modal share of different journey types, acknowledging that this is the most important contribution rail can make to achieving the UK's Net Zero targets, and achieving sustainable communities.

We reiterate the vital role of community engagement in achieving more sustainable behaviours and modal shift. Academic research is clear that to bring about more sustainable (transport) behaviours, we must take a localised, engaging, empowering, practical approach, which breaks down barriers, works with local identities, normalises more sustainable behaviours and creates a sense of hopefulness and belonging. *This is discussed, with reference to a range of cross-disciplinary evidence, in our appended paper on behavioural insights and modal shift.* Also see our 2021 report on [modal shift and community rail](#), showing the range of activities in community rail that align with academic research and have seen great success locally in bringing more people to rail. As we have argued under Q1, it is not enough to make rail attractive (although this certainly is a part), and we should not think in terms of people making better choices. Transport behaviours are deeply ingrained, embedded in lifestyles, and restrained by local practicalities.

On this basis, and building on our comments under Q1e on modal integration, which we know from community rail experience to be essential for achieving increased rail use, we advise that the main (value for money) interventions over the WISP's lifetime should be:

- i) collaborating and engaging communities to understand barriers to rail use, break these down, and support, enable and encourage more people to use rail – including through community rail and joined up approaches with local and regional sustainable transport strategies;
- ii) taking a whole systems approach and working across modes to achieve joined-up, seamless sustainable transport networks;
- iii) accelerating work towards rail becoming net zero, including exploring collaborations with communities (e.g. community energy schemes), celebrating the progress being made, and making stations not only sustainable in their own right but beacons for sustainability.⁶²

In terms of measures of success, we refer back to our responses to Q2b&d, as these measures of levels of rail use, including numbers of new users, numbers combining rail with other sustainable modes, the extent to which people feel able to use rail, and levels of community engagement are all highly relevant here. We cannot comment on suitable measures and targets for decarbonising traction and the railway estate, but we would state the great enthusiasm within community rail for accelerating and supporting progress, and recommend as above that community rail is kept engaged and informed around this area of work. The greater progress the rail industry makes towards being an even greener, and eventually net zero mode of travel, it further strengthens community rail's cause and message, enabling it to shout louder and prouder about the place of rail in our communities and its role in creating a sustainable shared future.

⁶¹ See attached briefing on behavioural insights and modal shift

⁶² See RDG's Sustainable Stations Guide, to which we fed in heavily, which outlines how stations can be efficient, green, integrated, and engaging, helping to spread sustainability to the wider community:
<https://media.raildeliverygroup.com/resources/rdg-sustainable-stations-guide>

b) What use can the rail sector make of emerging or existing technologies to reduce its impact on the environment and enhance biodiversity over the next 5, 10, and 30 years, and, in a proportionate and cost-effective way, help national and regional authorities to meet their environmental objectives?

We would stress the importance generally, and specifically with regards to environmental sustainability, of not over-relying on technological solutions. Tackling the climate crisis, and delivering on global and local sustainable development goals, is as much, if not more, about people and their behaviour. As we have commented already, the academic evidence is very clear that in transport, electrification and other technological changes are not enough to decarbonise transport: we face a huge social challenge, to shift lifestyles and daily habits, which as discussed above, requires community involvement, bringing people along and shifting power to the grassroots. As we have already set out, rail can play a key role in this through established network of local engagement and its assets and communication channels/profile, and by responding to what people need and want from sustainable transport networks.

We also want to stress that innovation is not only have technologies: innovation emerges from bringing people together and looking at issues from different perspectives. Collaborative working at a local level of course facilitates this, and hence community rail is brimming with new ideas and approaches, and constantly evolving. Local engagement also enhances the value of technological and infrastructure development, such as by raising awareness and promoting use, and helping to ensure that such changes meet local needs and are inclusive.

Turning to the biodiversity part of this question, we agree there is a huge amount of scope to utilise the railway estate to enhance biodiversity, as has been recognised in recent strategy documents from DfT and Network Rail. We would stress that it is crucial, to achieve maximum benefit and efficiency, to link this work with wider, especially local, conservation and environmental efforts, such as to enhance particular local habitats, establish wildlife corridors, or reintroduce or protect particular endangered species. Local engagement and partnership working makes this joined-up approach possible, and delivers accompanying social benefits, around mental health, community cohesion and skills development. It can also help to position the railway as green and community-minded, feeding back into efforts to support modal shift, increased accessibility, improving the attractiveness of rail, and bolstering local pride. We have a wealth of examples of community rail delivering improvements to biodiversity, working with the rail industry, while tying in with wider local programmes and delivering social co-benefits, and advise that community rail can be constructively engaged in the further development of this area of work. *Our examples, and recommendations for developing community involvement with biodiversity, are being collated in an RDG-sponsored report, being published next week: we will forward this to the GBR TT at the earliest opportunity.*

c) How can rail best invest in climate resilience, supported by smarter forecasting, planning and technology, over the next 5, 10, and 30 years and what evidence do you have to support your view?

The technical side of climate resilience is not our area of expertise. However, through the community rail movement, we are aware of the impact that extreme weather events have had on so many communities in recent years, and the ever heightening risks for the future. We have various members who have altered their plans in order to respond to local crises linked to our increasingly warm and unstable climate: playing their part to respond, repair and clean up, care for vulnerable people during and in the aftermath of floods and storms, but also to help rebuild community confidence, solidarity and resilience in longer-term.

Our point is that in both creating a more resilient railway, and engaging local communities, the rail sector can and should also support wider community resilience. After all, there is little point in having a resilient railway if people can't use it or get to it because they and their communities are so badly affected. In addition, working in partnership with communities on climate resilience, especially those that are most vulnerable, can help to create greater impact and pool resources for a more efficient, value-for-money approach, and deliver social co-benefits through local empowerment. For example, many flood-prone communities are looking at ways to 'slow the flow', with initiatives that often engage local people and enhance biodiversity too; as a major landowner (or in other ways), the railways could support and tie in with such efforts. A people and community-orientated approach and mindset across the rail industry, as discussed above, should naturally facilitate this.