



ANNUAL REPORT

2020/21



Supporting the community rail movement to flourish

FROM THE CHAIR AND CHIEF EXECUTIVE

Due to the pandemic, we started and ended 20-21 in lockdown. For much of the year, community rail’s regular activities were simply not possible – volunteers were not able to go to stations, and non-essential travel was prohibited.

Despite all this, we at Community Rail Network, the board and team, and the movement across the country, were undeterred. I am always in awe of the inventiveness and resourcefulness of people in community rail. Many great projects were still delivered, despite the restrictions. We all adapted as best we could. I want to salute all of you, and to thank Jools and the team for all their work in such difficult circumstances.

One example of this work was the Community Rail Awards which, because a traditional awards evening was not possible, was held online for the first time. It was an absolute triumph. I’m very much looking forward to this year’s awards which will be a hybrid traditional and online evening on December 9.

May 2021 saw the publication of the Williams-Shapps Review and the government’s plans for transforming the railways. The many positive and supportive references to community rail are a testament to everyone involved in our field; we at Community Rail Network, the community rail partnerships and station friends’ groups far and wide, plus all the people we work with, particularly in national and local government and the rail industry. It is great that the government likes what it sees and plainly wants more of it.

All of us at Community Rail Network, the board and team, will be working to make the very most of the opportunities presented by rail transformation on behalf of you, our members.

Thanks, as always, to all those who make community rail possible by funding and supporting our movement and the activities of local partnerships and groups across Britain. We couldn’t do it without you.

And to my colleagues in community rail, all power to your elbows!



Richard Burningham MBE, chair

Despite the trials and tribulations of 2020/21, community rail has continually risen to the challenges and looked positively to the future.

This shows how adaptable, innovative, and committed those working and volunteering in community rail are, and how the movement will continue to add value, support recovery, and help communities to build back better and greener.

Our members work tirelessly to help communities, railways, and transport, become more sustainable, inclusive, and caring, to bring people together and enrich lives. In 2020/21, this has been more important than ever, and everyone involved should be immensely proud of what they have achieved.

Throughout 2020/21, the Community Rail Network team has also worked with determination to ensure community rail partnerships and groups across Britain felt supported and empowered to deliver positive social, environmental, and economic impact. From our hugely successful online awards, to running government grants and accreditations, to awareness-raising PR campaigns, to hundreds of meetings, calls and emails advising members and partners: our contribution is summed up on the pages that follow.

We were thrilled to see our efforts championing community rail, taking its unique insights to government, partners, and decision-makers, reflected in the Williams-Shapps Plan for Rail, which states that community rail will be empowered to strengthen rail’s social and economic impact. This is testament to the hard work of our members, and the importance of engaging communities with their railways and stations and enabling everyone to benefit from rail travel. Moving into 2021/22, the run-up to the international climate talks is focusing attention on the need for more journeys to be made via greener modes like rail, and we believe community rail has an important part to play in helping to lead this shift.

The community rail movement looks forward to working with Great British Railways and all our partners to ensure rail is at the heart of a sustainable and inclusive transport future everyone can benefit from. We’ll be working hard in 2021/22 and beyond to help communities engage with and feed into this change, ensuring local voices are heard and needs understood.



Jools Townsend, chief executive

COMMUNITY RAIL NETWORK IN NUMBERS

- 74 community rail partnership members, up from 67 
- 258 station group members, up from 235 
- 26 events and training courses, with 1,028 attendees
- 190 entries to our awards, with 18 winners and 508 guests
- 3,894 friends/followers/subscribers @   
- £723,297 annual turnover 
- £490,545 provided in grants
- 18 staff, up from 17 

KEY ACHIEVEMENTS IN PICTURES



The first online Community Rail Awards



A further increase in our membership



Launch of our youth engagement report



Our virtual training and series of webinars



Community rail across Britain PR campaign



Our new Integrated Transport Fund

OUR TEAM



Jools Townsend,
chief executive



Brian Barnsley,
deputy chief executive and head of support and development



Sarah Fatica,
head of people and funding



Sarah Chilton,
head of communications and policy



Dawn Bigland,
administration manager



Paul Webster,
community rail support manager (Midlands and South)



Martin Clarke,
community rail support and sustainability manager



Ian Davis,
community rail support officer (North)



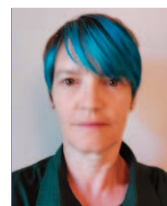
Daniel Wright,
community rail support officer (South West)



Rhiannon-Jane Raftery,
community rail development coordinator (Wales and Borders)



Denise Havard,
community engagement coordinator (Scotland)



Alex Peel, training and development coordinator



Naomi Halloran,
training and development coordinator



Hazel Bonner,
events and fundraising manager



Hannah Cottrill,
events and partnerships officer



Nik Schofield,
communications and marketing manager



Alice Mannion,
tourism and heritage officer



Rob Lawson,
writer and researcher



Patrick Southern,
senior administration officer

Our team reports in to our board, who are elected from our membership.

Find out about our current board members [here](#).

SUPPORTING OUR MEMBERS

Training programme adapts

To deal with COVID-19 restrictions, our training and development coordinators moved our training programme online for 2020/21 and continued to offer a wide range of opportunities. Across all activities, they had a strong focus on interactive and enabling sessions, helping our members to manage and deal with change, plan ahead, and look to the future. They drew on feedback from our members' survey and information fed through our team to develop and tailor courses, consistently receiving excellent feedback.

Workshops covered included:

- Learning from lockdown;
- Applying for small grants, and funding tips;
- Participatory mapping to support community engagement;
- Volunteer recruitment;
- Evaluation, and planning ahead.

The team also ran a host of networking and support sessions to enable members to hear from others around the country and share ideas and experiences. Topics included 'managing change' workshops for rail officers, '**where are we now**' sessions for station adoption groups, and networking for community rail partnership chairs.

The team continued to support members to explore and demonstrate the positive impact they make. More community rail partnerships and station groups are using our tailored **Impact** reporting tool to capture data and evidence, and we produced guidance on how groups can take an **outcomes-based approach** to community projects.



Community rail accreditation

We continued to use our expertise to administer the Department for Transport (DfT) and Welsh Government's accreditation scheme, ensuring it's a robust, constructive process for recognising community rail partnerships operating to a high standard and aligning with the DfT's **Community Rail Development Strategy**.

Our team guided partnerships through 'virtual' accreditations, with eight achieving the standard for the first time. As at the end of 2020/21, more than 40 partnerships have been through the process, with many speaking positively of the improvements it has helped them to put in place.

Continued growth in community rail

With continued support from ourselves, government, and the rail industry, we saw more new community rail partnerships established in 2020/21, with the total rising from 67 to 74. New partnerships included Gloucestershire, South West Wales Connected, White Cliffs, and Creative Isle. Despite being set up in difficult circumstances during COVID-19, the partnerships were able to plan and deliver a range of projects, including launching a ‘community changemakers’ fund, running a youth transport survey, and creating maps and sound-based artworks.

We also saw a 10% increase in station adoption group members, from 235 to 258, with new members supported through the registration process by our administration team. Conservation and environmental groups, community action groups, colleges, sustainable transport groups, and rotary clubs added to the increasingly diverse range of groups now caring for and developing stations.

2020/21 saw us undertake a strategic review of community rail activity in Scotland, liaising with Transport Scotland, ScotRail, Scottish community rail partnerships, and other sustainable transport organisations. This explored how community rail could work with communities, the rail industry, government, and other partners, to make a critical contribution to Scotland’s new National Transport Strategy. We submitted a successful bid to Paths for All, who provided funding for our new community engagement coordinator for Scotland. They are now working with community rail partnerships in Scotland on projects supporting local engagement to promote sustainable travel by rail.

Work to support new and existing community rail partnerships and groups across Wales and the Borders also progressed. We supported the establishment of South West Wales Connected, set up during COVID-19 lockdown, and continue to work proactively with the Welsh Government and

Transport for Wales to expand community rail across the country, including a new partnership for the Valleys area, led by Welcome To Our Woods.

Advising our members and staying in touch

Our support and development team recorded more than 860 instances of direct support to our members during 2020/21, up 56% from 2019/20. As COVID-19 continued to disrupt projects and meetings, the team remained in regular contact with members to ensure they had the support they needed, including on adapting plans and activities, re-engaging partners and volunteers, restarting projects, and returning to rail environments as restrictions were lifted. To see the support members can access, visit our ‘[join us](#)’ web page.

Members’ survey results:

In our 2020 members’ survey:

- 83% said they received value for money for their membership;
- 89% said we communicate well with members.

The most appreciated aspects of our support were:

- our role sharing experiences and good practice, helping members feel part of the wider movement;
- our input on developing new and improved projects;
- members becoming more confident and/or knowledgeable about topics or issues;
- members being supported to create more structured plans;
- members being encouraged and enabled to pursue new funding opportunities.

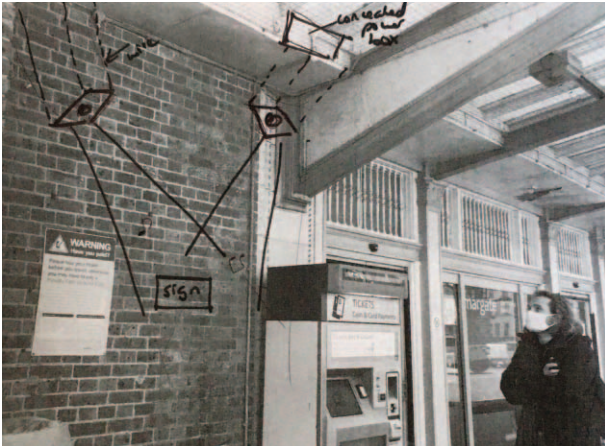
CASE STUDY: New community rail partnership – South West Wales Connected

To combat COVID-19 restrictions, South West Wales Connected, established during the pandemic in mid-2020, held a series of online ‘shared vision’ meetings, bringing interested parties together to co-create shared visions and action plans for local railways and stations and their surrounding communities, businesses, and organisations. The engagement was hugely successful in generating themes and ideas to translate into priorities and action plans, and the partnership’s goal is to support the community in turning those ideas into workable initiatives, led by local people.



CASE STUDY: New community rail partnership – Creative Isle

Creative Isle is Britain’s first arts-led community rail partnership and is hosted by the Turner Contemporary art gallery in Margate. The partnership aims to use art and creativity to inspire change, give a voice to local communities, support wellbeing, and deliver social and economic benefits. To engage communities with the railway, the partnership’s first project, ‘Isle of Sound’, involved a series of online workshops to create sound-based artworks for seven local stations, each celebrating Thanet’s unique soundscapes.



Installation sketch, Isle of Sound by Emily Peasgood, 2021



CASE STUDIES: New station groups – Burton-upon-Trent Rotary Club and Friends of Barrow Station

Joining us in January 2021, Burton-upon-Trent Rotary Club immediately set about transforming their local station, working with partners including East Midlands Railway, East Staffordshire Borough Council, The National Forest, and Burton and South Derbyshire College. The group cleared what was described as a “jungle” at the western end of the station and planted flowers along the length of the platform. There are plans to install a sculpture, designed by the students, on the cleared area, alongside longer-term aims to improve waiting areas and the station front.

At Barrow-in-Furness Station, the Friends of Barrow Station, members since August 2020, have been busy developing a joint project with a local community interest company (CIC), Marsh Street Arches & Gardens. The CIC is responsible for ‘Greenheart Den’, a community garden and grow-your-own scheme that acts as a hub for a range of community activities in the town. The friends group plan to use the garden as a nursery for floral displays at the station, with the plants cared for by local schools and community groups.

Both projects, which helped to bring communities together and instil pride in local stations, received support from our Small Grants Fund, and advice from our support and development team.

CELEBRATING SUCCESS AND SHARING GOOD PRACTICE

Awards and events

Our 2020 Community Rail Awards were held as an online gala evening for the first time. Coordinated by our events team, more than 500 guests logged into the showpiece virtual occasion, including community rail officers and volunteers, and industry and government colleagues.



A wide range of speakers underlined the value of engaging communities with local railways and stations, and the importance of rail to our communities, recovery, and sustainability. They included: Rail Minister Chris Heaton-Harris MP; Ken Skates MS, Minister for Economy, Transport and North Wales; Bill Reeve, director of rail at Transport Scotland; Sir Peter Hendy and Andrew Haines, chair and chief executive of Network Rail; Jaqueline Starr, chief operating officer of Rail Delivery Group; and Malcolm Brown, chief executive of headline sponsor Angel Trains.

An array of inspiring projects were celebrated from 190 entries, see the winners' booklet [here](#).

Our events programme again included organising the DfT's annual Community Rail Conference, also held online for the first time, with 450 delegates attending four sessions in March 2021. The event saw 20 speakers deliver 12 hours of live content, sharing good practice and expertise on engaging communities, supporting social and economic recovery, promoting social inclusion, and promoting rail as safe, accessible, and sustainable.

We held a further 25 events and courses with nearly 600 attendees in 2020-21, including our training and development programme, and a series of webinars to replace our traditional workshops and seminars.

The team focused on topics that members could use during the pandemic, including writing good awards entries and using social media, and key issues for the future, such as community rail's role in recovery, transport decarbonisation, and sustainable tourism.



CASE STUDY: Track Record Arts – The Soundtrack to the Severn Beach

Track Record came about due to the fondness that local Bristol poets and musicians Eyebrow and The Spoke had for the Severn Beach Line. They wanted to fuse music with the written word to create a soundtrack for the line that passengers could download and enjoy while making their journey.

Supported by Severnside Community Rail Partnership, the artists used stops on the line to layer together 11 ambient jazz tracks and 18 poems. The poetry was informed by creative writing workshops held in communities along the line, identified as areas of restricted cultural opportunity. Participants shared their memories of the line and described how the stations and the journey had evolved.

The launch of the project saw two sold-out trips with 120 passengers enjoying a 'silent disco', listening to the soundtrack through headphones, and a well-received performance of the full soundtrack to an audience of around 500 people at the Severn Vale Festival. A book of the poems was released, and the soundtrack made available as a free [download](#) from Track Record Arts.

Resources and case studies

Our research project for 2020/21 was ‘**Looking to the future**’, our report into youth engagement in community rail and rail. The resource explores how young people are involved currently, the benefits this provides, and how such projects can be developed further. The report featured various examples of successful initiatives, including by 6VT, Britain’s only youth-led community rail partnership, and was picked up by the Chartered Institute of Logistics and Transport in its ‘Focus’ magazine aimed at young professionals.

We also produced online **case studies** and guidance resources, including **National landscapes and community rail**, a guide on working with National Parks, Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, and other outdoor spaces, providing advice on working together to encourage sustainable, car-free journeys.



CASE STUDY: Kent Community Rail Partnership and Sheppey College – **A Chance to Shine**

Kent Community Rail Partnership works with different student cohorts – IT, business, construction, landscaping, travel and tourism – at Sheppey College to offer real-life work experiences. To introduce them to the projects, groups of students – some of whom have never travelled by rail before or even left the Isle of Sheppey – are taken on the train to stations on the SwaleRail Line. Alongside information on travelling safely and independently, they are tasked with looking at issues at the stations and identifying improvements that could encourage greater use, by other young people and their wider communities.

Students have created a website and promotional videos to promote the line, brightened up stations with artwork and awareness-raising posters on issues such as equality, mental health, addiction, and train etiquette, and enhanced sites with landscaping, planters, benches, bird boxes and floral displays. The college has now adopted all five stations on the line, and linking their work to community rail allows the students to put the skills they have learnt in the classroom into practice while also having a positive, tangible impact on the communities they live in.

Leisure travel and Scenic Rail Britain

Community Rail in the City is normally a flagship annual event for our members, coordinated nationally by us, to promote sustainable leisure travel by rail.

2020 was our tenth anniversary, and although the pandemic meant that we were unable to hold the event in its usual format with colourful displays at stations, we celebrated instead by sharing memories from previous years online, with social media activity reaching 11,000 users.

Our communications and policy team continued to provide tourism support to members, focusing on relaunching activity and supporting local economies post pandemic, alongside promoting our **Scenic Rail Britain** initiative.

We also introduced a new tourism network for community rail partnerships. Meeting every few months online, it provides an opportunity to discuss challenges and share best practice around tourism promotions, which is already proving valuable as leisure travel recovers.

Our Scenic Rail Britain website also proved popular, with a focus on future travel ideas and inspiring photography promoting more than 80 lines showcasing Britain’s most picturesque and interesting rail journeys. As 2020/21 ended, plans were underway for a national tourism PR campaign, **#DaysOutByRail**, to uncover and promote Britain’s hidden gems by rail.



CASE STUDY – ‘Wales on Rails’

‘Wales on Rails’ promotes tourism via rail and other forms of public transport throughout Wales, encouraging safe, sustainable, scenic adventures. It involves all the Welsh community rail partnerships, and Great Little Trains Limited, representing many of Wales’ heritage and narrow-gauge railways. A **website** offers images and storytelling to attract travellers to each line/route, with information on awesome adventures, fantastic food, gorgeous gardens, heroic heritage, and obtainable outdoors.

CASE STUDY – Three Rivers Community Rail Partnership - The ‘Waterside Wanderer’

To encourage people back to rail and support local leisure travel via public transport, the Three Rivers Community Rail Partnership joined forces with bus and ferry partners to create the ‘Waterside Wanderer’, a multi-modal day ticket allowing passengers to explore the coastal areas around Southampton and Hythe. Due to its excellent relationship with all the stakeholders involved, the partnership was able to coordinate the project and ensure a positive, collaborative approach. While other multi-modal tickets have been available previously, this is the first to incorporate rail, bus, and ferry services, with operators receiving an agreed allocation of ticket revenue. As well as all modes benefitting from new business and passengers, the project encourages greener leisure travel while supporting local businesses.



RAISING THE PROFILE AND AWARENESS OF COMMUNITY RAIL

Community Rail across Britain PR campaign

In March 2021 we delivered a PR campaign designed to raise the profile of community rail and the positive work taking place, particularly its relevance to recovery from the pandemic. Building on our 2019 ‘Value of Community Rail’ report, we highlighted the social impact of community rail activities, and emphasised how the rail industry is working with and supporting communities.

To support the campaign, we produced six briefings highlighting community rail activity in regions and nations across Britain. Alongside coverage in rail media, the campaign was featured by more than 20 regional media outlets.

Supporting member communications

Our communications and policy team also supported various members to help them improve their online presence. Numerous community rail partnerships used the period during lockdown to redesign their websites, ensuring they were ready to promote their lines once restrictions allowed. Examples include High Peak and Hope Valley, Darent Valley, and the Poacher Line.

We also continued with our significantly increased member communications through the pandemic, including changing our ‘Community Rail News’ bulletin initially from monthly to weekly, and then to fortnightly. We also increased our activity on social media, resulting in a 12% increase in users and followers.



A new approach to sharing community rail’s insights

In 2021/22, we will be undertaking a review of our communications, policy, and research functions, aiming for a more structured and strategic programme of proactive and reactive external affairs. This will consider how we can reach wider audiences across the media, influencers, and government at national, devolved, and regional level, using community rail’s unique insights to develop stories and influence debate.



LEADING THE WAY ON SUSTAINABLE, INCLUSIVE, HEALTHY TRAVEL

Transport decarbonisation

In Summer 2021, the DfT published its Transport Decarbonisation Plan, setting out commitments to decarbonise transport, including accelerating modal shift and making public transport combined with active travel the natural way to get around. Alongside this, it also published its Rail Environment Policy Statement, with a range of steps towards an even greener railway, and specifically recognising the role of community rail in modal shift and modal integration. These documents followed us and our members feeding into consultations and providing expert advice, including our chief executive sitting on the DfT's Net Zero Transport Board.

We will continue to advise DfT and other partners on the insights that emerge from community rail on this crucial area of work.

Our Integrated Sustainable Transport Fund

In 2020/21, we established a new £40k grant fund, with assistance from the DfT, to support initiatives by community rail partnerships and station groups that aimed to improve and develop integrated sustainable transport solutions. The applications were reviewed by our support and development team and colleagues from our Sustainable Travel Alliance partners CoMoUK and Living Streets, with grants awarded to **seven projects** across the year, including schemes to enhance rail and bus connections, and initiatives linking rail with cycling and walking. The fund is being repeated for 2021/22, as sustainable travel continues to be a key priority for our members.

Families take the 'bucket and spade' train with Essex & South Suffolk CRP



Building up to COP26

We are committed to sharing ideas and advice on sustainability, empowering members to work with partners locally to achieve impactful change. As 2020/21 ended, we were gearing up for webinars on rail's green credentials and enabling modal shift, and developing a series of sustainability-themed reports, sponsored by Rail Delivery Group, exploring evidence and good practice on promoting modal shift, sustainable development, and biodiversity.

We also started planning our first **Community Rail Week** for October 2021, as part of the run up to COP26, the UN Climate Change Conference in Glasgow. With the tagline 'Go Green by Train', the week will include a national awareness and community engagement campaign built around children, young people, and families, showcasing the role community rail plays in stimulating and enabling sustainable travel.

Community rail will also be represented at COP26 itself, via an event led by the Sustainable Transport Alliance, which is chaired by our chief executive. The interactive panel session will champion the importance of communities in creating a cleaner, greener transport future. It will showcase examples and insights, including some drawn from community rail, on local initiatives engaging and empowering people to achieve climate-safe, inclusive, healthy transport systems and behaviours.

The **alliance** was established due to us stepping up our partnership working with a host of sustainable travel partners to ensure we were sharing insights and working collaboratively. All the organisations involved are committed to putting communities, health and wellbeing, and our environment, at the forefront of future transport and travel.

Young people involved in Community Rail Lancashire's 'Ticket to Pride' project



CASE STUDY – South East Lancashire Community Rail Partnership – Bolton to Rivington Bus Link

Despite being one of the most popular parks in the North, Rivington Country Park had no public transport access. The nearest bus stop is about two miles away, and the nearest railway station is about four miles. To combat this, South East Lancashire Community Rail Partnership worked with partners to provide a Sunday and Bank Holiday service for Summer 2021. The route was an extension of an existing commercial service, the 575 Bolton – Horwich, operated by Diamond Bus North West, which started at Bolton Interchange.

The partnership drew on its local knowledge and engagement with communities and local businesses about inconsiderate parking in the area and potential passenger demand. Although in its infancy, there are signs that passenger numbers have the potential to grow, and the partnership has built strong foundations to continue the project longer-term.



CASE STUDY – Friends of Wool Station – Cycle Signage

The Friends of Wool Station aim to enhance their station by improving information about onward travel and create a more welcoming environment. They created easy-to-follow Tube-style maps of local bus and rail routes, bus timetable summaries, and a village map. To promote multi-modal and active travel, the group also erected signage for cyclists, detailing the four cycle paths within easy reach. With support from our Integrated Sustainable Transport Fund, the group worked with Dorset Council to deliver the project during lockdown, ready for when visitors could return.



COMMUNITY RAIL'S ROLE IN COVID-19 RECOVERY AND RAIL REFORM

Building back better

When COVID-19 hit in Spring 2020, we were on-hand to support members in adapting to change, alongside promoting the importance of community rail during the pandemic and beyond.

We produced a **briefing** and ran a webinar exploring how the movement could play a key role in a sustainable, inclusive recovery, sharing this with industry and government partners. This highlighted how community rail was supporting local understanding, insights, and dialogue, acting as a link between our railways, communities, service providers, employers, and authorities, and bolstering community resilience and wellbeing.

We continue to meet and discuss regularly with the DfT, Welsh Government, Transport Scotland, and industry partners Network Rail, RSSB and Rail Delivery Group, on the role of community rail in rebuilding trust and positivity about rail.



CASE STUDIES – Community rail supporting communities during COVID-19

Through the pandemic, community rail has adapted, supported local resilience, continued to engage with communities, volunteers, and partners, and maintained togetherness. Examples include:

- The Heart of Wales Development Company set up a 'community resilience' **small grants fund** for community groups near their line, supporting projects on social inclusion and wellbeing. A similar fund was established on the Cambrian Line, and South West Wales Connected launched a '**Community Changemakers**' fund to support post-COVID regeneration schemes;
- Several partnerships and groups supported projects organising and distributing food and supplies for vulnerable people, including the Lymington to Brockenhurst and Isle of Wight partnerships who coordinated food parcels via the '**Food on the Move**' scheme. Borders Community Rail Partnership supported older people, young families, and isolated individuals. East Midlands Railway, along with the Derwent Valley Line, North Staffordshire, and Poacher Line partnerships, and the Friends of Beeston Station, donated funds to **local food banks**;
- Partnerships including Severnside and Southeast Communities Rail Partnership developed resources to help pupils **return to school** and travel safely by rail;

Continued>

- On the South Fylde Line in Lancashire, volunteers made much-needed **scrubs** and bags for their local hospital, medical centres and care homes;
- Worcestershire CRP created the '**Stitch Train**', a project that brought over 200 people together remotely to produce 18 tapestry trains, one for each of the stations in the county;
- As volunteers began returning to stations, partnerships including Heart of England and Essex and South Suffolk produced '**Welcome Back**' packs for station adopters, thanking them for their patience and perseverance during lockdowns;
- Various partnerships and station groups continued to engage their communities online with activities including quizzes, book clubs, and art competitions;
- On the West Highland Line, where a limited timetable was in operation, the community rail partnership worked with ScotRail to advise on a **special bi-weekly service train** from Rannoch to Fort William, giving people in isolated communities the ability to travel to the town for shopping and medical appointments.



Community rail and rail transformation

In May 2021, the DfT published the findings of the Williams Rail Review, resulting in **Great British Railways -The Williams-Shapps Plan for Rail**. This signals the beginning of significant reforms for the rail industry, with our railways set to become more inclusive, accessible, sustainable, and responsive to local needs and opportunities. A new public body, Great British Railways, will run and plan the rail network, bringing the system under single, national leadership.

To help inform the review, we provided a comprehensive response on behalf of the community rail movement and regularly engaged with government partners. We also encouraged and supported our members to add their voices to the call for evidence, providing updates and opportunities for discussion at major events including the Community Rail Conference. We were thrilled to see community rail referenced explicitly within the plan on numerous occasions, with specific commitments to make the railways more responsive to communities, and to “empower” the community rail movement to “strengthen rail’s social and economic impact.”

The document also recognised the 9,000 volunteers across Britain who deliver community activity at stations and connected with local railways, and emphasised how community rail partnerships and groups play an important role in building local awareness and promoting sustainable travel by rail, improving rail’s social impact, and engaging schools and businesses.

Following the publication of the plan, we created a **briefing** for members, and a summary of the new **National Rail Contracts**. To secure community rail’s position and opportunities to make an enhanced contribution in the future, we will continue to liaise with the DfT, as well as contacts in the Welsh and Scottish governments.. We have also produced a **community rail and rail transformation FAQs** document, so we can put key community rail questions to the DfT and keep our members informed and engaged.

“ We are excited to see the government commit so strongly to community rail, and recognise its importance, in its plans for reforming and reinvigorating our railways. Community rail partnerships and station groups will be empowered to further step up their work strengthening rail’s social and economic impact at a grassroots level. This is all about helping local people and places get maximum benefit from their railways, ensuring that local needs and opportunities are at the forefront of rail’s development. ”

Jools Townsend, chief executive,
Community Rail Network



OUR PARTNERS AND SUPPORTERS

Throughout 2020/21, we worked closely with our biggest funder, the DfT, coordinating with the stations and community rail team, and its National Community Rail Steering Group of rail partners, to continue to support members in delivering on all aspects of the **Community Rail Development Strategy**. We also worked with other government departments to take forward opportunities for community rail to align with other major policy areas such as sustainability, tackling loneliness and social isolation, and COVID-19 recovery.

We further developed our relationships with the Welsh Government and Transport for Wales, supporting the growth of community rail there, and with Transport Scotland, highlighting how community rail can contribute to their National Transport Strategy.

As a not-for-profit organisation, Community Rail Network is dependent on sponsors and supporters. We are hugely grateful to our growing list of main partners, including train operators that provide valuable funding for us to provide enhanced support on their parts of the network, and national rail organisations such as Rail Delivery Group, RSSB, and Network Rail.

Find out more about partnership opportunities via our website or by emailing sarahf@communityrail.org.uk

A tea party at Reedham Station



OUR GOVERNMENT AND NOT-FOR-PROFIT FUNDERS:



OUR CORPORATE PARTNERS:



MANAGING GRANTS

We continue to work on behalf of government and industry partners to manage and promote grant schemes, ensuring a robust approach to awarding **funding**. These schemes included in 2020/21:

- Community rail development fund (England and Wales), on behalf of the DfT, plus our Small Grants Fund and a new Integrated Sustainable Transport Fund;
- South Western Railway Small Grants Fund;
- Transport for Greater Manchester Small Grants Fund.



In total, £490,545 was awarded to community rail projects and developments in 2020/21.

OUR VISION

A flourishing community rail movement connecting people and their railways, contributing to inclusive, empowered, sustainable and healthy communities.

* Community rail is made up of community-based partnerships, groups, enterprises, and volunteers seeking to benefit their community and railway, through connecting people with, and engaging them in, the railway.

Our mission

Community Rail Network's mission is to **empower, support and champion** the community rail movement, helping community rail partnerships and groups to:

Enhance the railways' contribution to social inclusion, sustainable development and health and 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 social value

Communicate the development and importance of railways to local communities, enhancing understanding and pride, and promoting rail as a key part of sustainable, healthy travel

This Community Rail Network Annual Report 2020/21 is a draft, subject to agreement by our members at our November 2021 AGM.

Find out more about community rail and our work supporting community rail partnerships and groups at communityrail.org.uk, where you can also meet the team.

Find out more about becoming a member or partner at communityrail.org.uk/join-us.



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