



‘Looking to the future’

An exploration of youth engagement in rail

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Sponsored by

Rail Delivery Group



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report is by the Community Rail Network, the national umbrella body for community rail partnerships and groups, with sponsorship by the Rail Delivery Group, which exists to enable rail companies to succeed in delivering a successful railway.

We worked with our community rail members and rail industry partners to advance understanding about engaging young people aged 11 to 25, which we identified as a development area. We wanted to establish what is happening within community rail, the benefits this provides, and how engagement could be developed further.

The report finds that community rail provides an ideal environment for young people to learn new skills and develop existing talents in real-life settings, aiding personal and professional development. They become more confident, ambitious, and socially mobile, proud of the difference they are making and keen to share this with others. Gaining self-efficacy and having their voices heard – key underpinning principles of the government’s proposed new Youth Charter – gives young people a chance to connect with their communities and become active citizens, and to influence issues they care deeply about, such as social inclusion and climate change.

By drawing on youth voices, community rail groups in turn become more inclusive and better equipped to serve their communities, helping young people have a stake in the railway and decisions that affect their futures. Youth engagement adds creativity, passion, and new ideas and approaches, helping community rail and the rail industry move towards a more sustainable future, and stimulating progression. By listening to young people and promoting not only social action,



but career pathways, the rail sector can harness young people’s energy and enthusiasm to help create a rail industry fit for future generations, as prioritised by the Rail Delivery Group.

Society also greatly benefits from youth engagement in rail, as it helps young people to play meaningful roles in improving sustainability, social mobility and inclusion, community cohesion, health and wellbeing, and in tackling loneliness and isolation, all key elements of the government’s Communities Framework. Our findings show they can help to deliver, and lead on, projects that can have major impacts on communities, and encouraging young people to take the lead yields particularly significant results. Participating in social action or volunteering is also evidenced to add social and economic value to young volunteers and their communities; with figures suggesting that if each community rail group (community rail partnerships and station-based groups) across Britain had just one regular young volunteer, it would equate to social value of more than £3million a year.

Youth engagement also seems especially important for supporting the change we need to decarbonise transport and protect our climate: engaging people at a time in their lives where travel habits are forming and locking-in long-term benefits, by building early confidence and positivity about sustainable forms of travel.

The report finds that to maximise the benefits of youth engagement, projects need to be genuinely youth-led, empowering young people through ownership. They should be shaped by young people’s skills and interests, and allow their creativity to come to the fore. To promote engagement, community rail groups need to reach out to young people on their terms, offering opportunities that are flexible, appealing, and fun, in a welcoming environment where their contributions are recognised. By valuing young people, they can empower them to enthuse their peers by sharing their experiences, hopefully leading to more young people getting involved and creating a sense of the railways caring about and listening to young people’s views.

Groups should consider ways in which they can embed youth engagement across all of their work, rather than it being seen as standalone activity. This could be aided by long-term relationships with dedicated youth engagement partners, and looking at how young people’s views and contributions can be incorporated into groups’ planning, decision-making and governance.

The report suggests a need for a coordinated approach to promote youth engagement in community rail, something that Community Rail Network will continue to take forward. We will support our members to share ideas and good practice, and work with rail partners, so youth engagement can continue to grow as a priority area. We will especially seek to get across how this can help us move towards a sustainable and inclusive transport future, serving communities and providing maximum social value, and helping our communities and railways recover from the current Covid-19 crisis. **Over the challenging years to come, engaging young people and unleashing their ability to bring about positive change will be more important than ever for community rail and transport as a whole, and for our shared future.**



INTRODUCTION

Community rail is a grassroots movement spanning Britain that continues to grow in its spread and influence.

As of July 2020, it is made up of 71 community rail partnerships, working along railway lines or across regions, and at least 1,000 station friends/adoption groups and other local organisations, all aiming to connect communities with their railways.

Community Rail Network is the umbrella body for community rail, empowering, supporting, and championing those working locally.

As community rail has grown, so has appreciation of the value of engaging communities in their local railways and stations. There is now widespread acknowledgement – among the community rail movement, rail industry, government, and local authorities – that community rail activities do more than simply promote railways: they deliver major social, economic, and environmental benefits.

When the first community rail partnerships were established in the mid-1990s, their initial focus was to protect and promote local lines by increasing interest and passenger numbers. This quickly diversified into broader activities, including youth engagement with schools and other youth organisations. Now, issues such as rail safety and travel knowledge, and youth-based station projects, e.g. art displays, are important areas of work for many, with some employing education officers to lead on an increasing array of schemes, delivered with rail and community partners.

In 2018, Community Rail Network (then ACoRP) published a framework for developing engagement of young people in community rail <https://communityrail.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/YouthEngagementFramework-2019-22.pdf>. While this highlighted successful youth projects in community rail and rail, it also acknowledged that engagement of the 11-25 age group remained an area for development, with wide-ranging benefits to be gained.

This report aims to build on this by speaking to groups involved in youth engagement in community rail – including young people – to find out the rationale behind current ways of working and why certain programmes have been successful.

We wanted to establish:

- **What is happening now in terms of youth engagement in rail, and what benefits are projects providing?**
- **How can youth engagement be developed further, and what principles could be used to maximise impact?**

While most of the research for this report was completed prior to the Covid-19 pandemic, it is evident that youth engagement is going to become even more important as railways and communities establish a ‘new normal’ and rebuild for a prosperous future. By understanding how youth engagement can be integrated into rail, we hope to help young people play a critical role in helping transport, rail, and society ‘build back better’, creating more resilient, sustainable, inclusive communities.

WHERE ARE WE NOW?

“

Youth engagement can and does change lives. It recognises young people’s right to participate in decisions that impact them and acknowledges the great skills and strengths they bring to the table. It injects young people as valued stakeholders into creating effective and inclusive policies, programmes, and environments.

Youth engagement makes programmes more effective, policies more relevant, and adults and young people more capable and confident, resulting in stronger relationships and communities.¹”

I. Youth engagement in rail

The Community Rail Network’s youth engagement framework ² was based on interest and enthusiasm across the community rail movement, and among partners and funders, for getting more young people involved, tying in with wider social trends and public policy goals. These factors included:

- In 2018, 83% of Community Rail Network members said they wanted more support on youth engagement, and to develop skills, capacity, and confidence to do this;
- Growing appreciation among our members and their funders of the importance of engaging widely, to represent communities, and promote social inclusion;
- Recognition that young people, at the age when they are starting to travel independently, form travel habits and mobility horizons that affect their entire lives and wider communities;

- Acknowledgement that young people are enthusiastic about making a difference to the world around them but can face barriers to engaging in social action;
- Increasing evidence that young people are becoming more dependent on public transport, and recognise it as a sustainable, sociable form of travel;
- Recognition that society is changing rapidly, with a need to work with young people to ready transport for the future.

There is also a recognition among our partners that the rail industry lacks diversity and youth, with the industry and government keen to rectify this and ready rail for the future. The rail sector employs around 240,000 people and is worth £10.4bn per year to the UK economy.³ In 2019, less than one-fifth of the workforce were 30 or under, and almost one-third (30%) over 51.⁴ This has led to initiatives to achieve a step change towards embracing young talent, such as the cross-industry ‘Routes into Rail’ by The National Skills Academy for Rail.⁵ It is acknowledged that inspiring young people and harnessing their passion, creativity, and enthusiasm can help bridge any potential skills gap within the rail sector and deliver wide-ranging benefits.⁶

There is also evidence that the average age of those involved in community rail is relatively high, provoking a need to consider ‘succession’ among staff and volunteers. In 2017 and 2018, 65% of respondents to our members’ survey were aged 55 to 74, with less than 2% aged 18 to 24. This supports the notion that volunteering, for example as a station adopter, is often most appealing and accessible to older and retired people, who are looking for social connections, regular routines,⁷ and ways to continue making a contribution to society.⁸

Our ‘Value of Community Rail’ report communityrail.org.uk/wpcontent/uploads/2019/10/A-CoRP-Value-of-Community-Rail-2019-final-for-web-141019.pdf found that community rail adds social value by creating opportunities around a shared area of interest, and this has the potential to promote inter-generational engagement. This seems vital for the movement if it is to gain from fresh thinking and skills brought by younger recruits, allowing groups to not only be sustainable, but to grow and flourish, able to respond flexibly and effectively to current issues.

The importance of youth engagement was also underlined in the Department for Transport’s Community Rail Development Strategy www.gov.uk/government/publications/community-rail-development-strategy/connecting-communities-with-the-railways-the-community-rail-development-strategy which sets out how community rail can be developed and supported to deliver impact related to four themes:

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



“Community rail partnerships have the potential to play a significant role in educating and creating the rail passengers of the future. By increasing the confidence with which young people can travel by rail, they can improve their access to employment, education, training, and recreation opportunities. This has the potential to build long-term healthy and sustainable mobility with significant implications for individuals’ and communities’ prosperity, health and wellbeing.”

” Department for Transport.



This strategy highlights the need for community rail groups and the rail industry to work together to ‘support, engage and listen’ to young people, who make up the next generation of passengers, volunteers, community rail officers and railway staff.

Reference is made to the potential for community rail to encompass secondary and tertiary education, highlighting the opportunities for: awareness-raising, interactive projects and visits, volunteering, work experience, and careers advice. **While there is undoubtedly scope to do more, our latest members’ survey shows that three-quarters (76%) of community rail partnerships are already working with 11-25 year olds to some extent, indicating a strong base from which to build.**

II. Wider trends and opportunities

Transport is of great importance to the lives of teenagers and young adults. It has the ability to stimulate or inhibit their personal and collective development across a range of areas affecting their future prospects and physical and mental health and wellbeing. A need to engage young people in transport is highlighted in many policy areas.

The government's loneliness strategy, 'A connected society. A strategy for tackling loneliness',⁹ emphasises the value of community engagement in transport, and engagement of young people specifically, in addressing social isolation and creating more inclusive, cohesive communities. A case study highlights work by Community Rail Lancashire to help young people, including those with special needs and disabilities, become confident in rail travel. The strategy also emphasises how accessible transport is needed to maintain key social connections and combat loneliness, which is particularly vital for 18-24-year olds, who experience the highest levels of loneliness of any age group.¹⁰

Poor access to transport has been found to deepen inequalities across the youth population, resulting in different tiers of access to services and opportunities. Young people can suffer from difficulties in maintaining relationships and accessing social networks and youth services, potentially leading to increased feelings of isolation.¹¹ This is particularly important at a time where young people are driving less now than in the past and depend more on public transport. Increasingly, rail and buses may be their dominant travel option,¹² despite often having to travel further than before for work, education, and training.¹³

Alongside increased dependency on public transport, there is a growing acknowledgement of the role it can play in combatting the climate emergency. Our climate is the issue that young people across the world feel is the most important

in terms of their future,¹⁴ resulting in unprecedented global social action.¹⁵ Increasingly, young people are campaigning for change to safeguard their futures and the future of the planet.¹⁶

Transport is now the biggest source of carbon emissions, mostly from car use.¹⁷ The railway has a critical role to play in sustainable travel, with rail already producing some of the lowest greenhouse emissions by transport type,¹⁸ and the lowest emission rate per passenger per kilometre, excepting walking and cycling.¹⁹ The UK government has pledged to make public transport and active travel the "natural first choice" for daily activities,²⁰ and young people can and should be effectively engaged with how this change is brought about, ensuring it is an inclusive transition that works for everyone. **If rail is to be part of the solution to averting the climate emergency, young people need to be enthused by and included in its development.**

There is also wider recognition of the importance of young people having their voices heard, in terms of transport, and all issues affecting them as part of societal change. This has been underlined by the UK government through commitments such as a proposed new Youth Charter,²¹ which reaffirms a determination to give young people a say on issues that they care about, such as transport, mental and physical health, and the environment.

Young people are keen to become involved in social action and influence future policy, with three-quarters believing they can make a positive difference and contribution to society.²² The need to recognise and empower young people as active citizens has been highlighted by initiatives such as the #iwill campaign,²³ which is now supported by more than 1,000 organisations across the UK, including Community Rail Network.²⁴ The campaign wants taking part in social action to become the norm for 10-20 year olds, with increasing access to high-quality volunteering opportunities.

All of the above arguments are magnified by the impact on young people of Covid-19, which research suggests will potentially have “intense and long-lasting” effects, with particular concerns raised over mental health and wellbeing, increased feelings of loneliness and isolation, and loss of jobs and income.²⁵ Young people appear particularly vulnerable to the disruptions the pandemic has caused, with some at risk of being left behind in education, economic opportunities, and health and wellbeing at a time crucial to their long-term development.²⁶

At the same time, however, many young people are responding positively to the crisis through their innovation and voluntary efforts, suggesting that they will be key to the recovery process.²⁷ Research also suggests that, more immediately, car use will increase post Covid-19, with less people using trains and buses,²⁸ despite rises in walking and cycling and longer-term aspirations to achieve a more sustainable transport network as part of a green recovery. Much work is likely to be needed to restore confidence in public transport, and ensure that opportunities are accessible and affordable to all. This is vital if the government is to achieve its aim of decarbonising transport,²⁹ and harnessing young people’s support, creativity, and voices in the promotion of active and sustainable travel will be more crucial than ever.



Youth social action & volunteering: the current picture – adapted from NCVO,³⁰ DCMS,³¹ #iwill³²

Young people (aged 10-20) are keen to make a positive contribution to society; 82% care about making the world a better place, and 74% believe they can make a difference via meaningful social action

Young people appear to be gaining their first experience of volunteering at a relatively early age, with 70% of 18-24 year-olds reporting volunteering at some point in their lives

More than a third of 16-24 year olds (37%) take part in formal volunteering (giving unpaid help through a group, club, or organisation) at least once a year, with around a fifth (21%) involved at least once per month

Among 18-24 year olds, the main motivations for volunteering and becoming involved in social action include gaining new skills (37%), wanting to improve things and help people (36%), and the social aspect of volunteering (25%)

The vast majority of 18-24 year olds are 'satisfied' with their volunteering experiences, with 75% saying are given flexibility within their roles

The majority of 18-24 year olds say volunteering helps them to gain new skills and experience (85%), gives them confidence (84%), and boosts their employability and career prospects (69%)

Young people (aged 18-24) are the age group most likely (77%) to say that volunteering helps them to feel less isolated. Nearly one in ten (9%) of 18-24 year olds say they feel lonely 'often or always', the highest figure for any age group

Around one in five (22%) 18-24 year olds expect the process of getting involved in volunteering to be quicker, and 18% say it is neither easy nor straightforward

A quarter (25%) of 18-24 year olds have felt excluded at some points of their volunteering, with only six out of ten (62%) making a 'likely' commitment to continuing on a long-term basis

III. Methodology and case studies

To inform this report, we have considered case studies and best practice from community rail groups across the UK. We have also spoken to members of the National Community Rail Steering Group, rail industry partners, including a number of train operators, and organisations specialising in youth engagement in non-rail settings such as the Prince’s Trust and Groundwork UK.

In-depth discussions were held with a small number of groups involved in delivering youth projects within community rail, the details of which can be found in the following case studies. Semi-structured

interviews and focus group discussions, involving some of the young people who had taken part in the projects, explored themes linked to the benefits of successful youth engagement, its importance to community rail and rail, and ways to encourage and develop progress in this area.

The groups were chosen due to their willingness to engage with the project, differences in terms of geography and stages of development, and the range of youth-related activities they were involved in. The findings, including the impacts and benefits of the projects, and the reasons behind their success, are detailed in the remainder of this report.

CASE STUDY: Kent Community Rail Partnership and Sheppey College – www.kentcrp.org :

Kent Community Rail Partnership and Sheppey College provide opportunities for the college students to get involved in a range of community projects. The partnership works with different student cohorts – IT, business, construction, landscaping, travel and tourism – to develop schemes offering real-life work experience and the chance for students to showcase their skills.

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 how to travel safely and independently, they are tasked with looking at issues at the stations and identifying improvements they feel could promote and encourage further use, by young people and all sections of local communities.

To complement their own ideas, the students design surveys to collect data from passengers and local residents on what they would like to see at the stations, with the results informing projects as well as being fed back to the community rail partnership and the train operator, Southeastern.

In the two years the projects have been running, students have created promotional videos to promote the line and a website listing things to do and places to visit in the local area swalerail.wixsite.com/swalerailtourism/project. Stations have been brightened up with artwork, adorned with awareness-raising posters on issues such as equality, mental health, addiction, and train etiquette, and enhanced by new landscaping, planters, benches, bird boxes and floral displays.

The college has now officially adopted all five stations on the line, and linking their work to the community rail projects 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.



CASE STUDY: 6VT Youth Community Rail Partnership - www.6vt.info/crp

6VT, based in Edinburgh, is the only youth-led community rail partnership in the UK. It was established via the 6VT Youth Café, which provides a space for young people to come together to access a range of services and personal development opportunities to improve their lives and help them reach their potential. Working mainly with 14-21 year olds, the café has helped more than 160,000 young people since the late 1990s.

The café had an existing relationship with Network Rail, working on rail safety projects, and it was suggested that this could be developed into a community rail partnership. The idea was agreed with ScotRail, who are now influential in driving the group forward.

The partnership itself has a core of around 15 young members, many of whom also sit on the café’s youth board, with projects and meetings facilitated by café staff.

The group’s main aims are to connect young people along a range of railway lines serving Edinburgh and its surrounds, promoting health and wellbeing, inclusiveness, and rail

safety. They tend to work on two projects per quarter, which in recent years, have been decided via votes following ‘Dragon’s Den’ style pitches from members. This year, the group have been developing a safety campaign linked to taking pets on trains, and a football tournament involving teams from different catchment areas within the partnership.

The group have also been involved with high-profile events such as a talent showcase at Edinburgh Waverley Station to celebrate the ‘Year of Young People’ in Scotland in 2018, the launch of the ‘Fearless’ hate crime reporting number, and the introduction of ScotRail’s new Hitachi trains.

The partnership has young adults acting as chair and secretary, and every project the group works on is youth-led, tackling issues that members feel are important. All group members are also enrolled on the Scottish Government’s Saltire Awards programme, which celebrates, recognises, and rewards the contribution and achievements of young volunteers.



CASE STUDY: Friends of Bescot Station - twitter.com/friendsofbescot

The adoption group for Bescot Stadium Station in the West Midlands was officially founded last year as an offshoot from Youth of Walsall, the town’s youth cabinet group for young people aged 11-18 and members of the UK Youth Parliament.

The idea to adopt the station came about after one of the founding members noticed the community rail banner while searching for a ticket on the West Midlands Trains website.

The station was already central to local life as it serves Bescot Stadium, the home ground of Walsall FC, but the group felt there was further potential to develop the site as a community hub. They worked with West Midlands Trains to formally adopt the station and add the project to other activities including work around tackling knife crime and environmental issues.

The group has around 20 regular attendees who are young people, plus approximately 10 others from a partner group, Walsall Action, a social action group working on local environment and regeneration issues.

Initial projects have included a community litter pick and a charity bake sale at the station to support Macmillan Cancer Support. They have also surveyed people locally to see what they would like to see done better at the station to increase footfall and passenger satisfaction.

As one of the first youth-led station adoption groups, representatives have attended stakeholder events in the West Midlands on improving rail and transport networks, and are exploring ways they can get more young people involved in influencing decision-making on local transport, including working with West Midlands Trains to establish a West Midlands Youth Rail Forum.



CASE STUDY: Community Rail Lancashire - www.communityraillancashire.co.uk/

Community Rail Lancashire (CRL) consists of five community rail partnerships covering seven lines across the county. It has been a pioneer in terms of railway-based education projects for many years, with education programmes forming an integral part of its daily work.

To date, the partnership has engaged more than 5,000 children from around 100 schools, including primary, secondary, and special schools. Qualified teachers and experienced development officers have used the National Curriculum to generate flexible, meaningful sessions that develop an in-depth knowledge of the railway’s purpose and history, alongside promoting a love of the railways.

Alongside many schemes catering for primary age children, the partnership also delivers a diverse range of projects for those aged 11 and above, many of which are linked to, and delivered in conjunction with, the rail industry. The projects often promote potential careers in rail, helping to increase opportunities for marginalised and under-represented groups.



All are included on the partnership’s ‘Down the Line’ website,³³ which offers a toolkit outlining links to be made between rail and education. They include;

- ‘Women Who Wander’, which used writing, photography, and artwork to promote STEM careers within rail to women and girls;
- ‘Ticket to Pride’, which used artwork and posters to address LGBT + hate crime and hate incidents and enable LGBT+ people to feel safe using public transport;
- ‘On Track to Train’, which gave young people with additional needs and disabilities, young women, and those from BAME and other minority backgrounds the chance to receive a comprehensive employment experience in rail and community rail.

CRL also works with train operator Northern to introduce its apprentices to the world of community rail. The young apprentices join community rail partnerships over a 12-month period to plan, manage and deliver their own projects. All schemes are driven and led by the apprentices, focusing on work with schools and issues such as rail safety, travel confidence, sustainability, and the environment.

BENEFITS OF YOUTH ENGAGEMENT – WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

Initial consultation we conducted to develop our youth engagement framework³⁴ suggested that a range of positive outcomes can be achieved through this type of work, potentially with profound implications for young people’s lives, and benefitting community rail, our railways, and society as a whole. These are set out in the boxes below. Through this report, we explore some of these benefits further with people within community rail and try to uncover what they feel the most important issues are.

Potential outcomes of youth engagement in community rail and rail:

Community rail can:

- draw on young people’s ideas, perspectives, help, dynamism and future-focus
- engage more volunteers, greater support and involvement, aiding succession
- better represent and understand the community
- deliver and demonstrate greater social value

The railways and rail industry can:

- draw on young people’s ideas, perspectives, help, dynamism and future-focus
- influence travel habits and encourage rail use
- better understand current and future passengers’ needs
- develop its workforce and diversity
- achieve reduced anti-social behaviour at stations

Young people can:

- integrate, interact, participate and make a difference in their community, beyond mainstream channels
- broaden their (mobility) horizons, and realise they can reach further afield and access more
- improve their confidence and capability to travel
- access and get into wider employment/training/education/ social opportunities

Society and communities benefit from:

- interaction across generations and difference, building cohesion and resilience
- less pollution, improved local environment, reduced climate impact
- increased education and employment
- improved health and wellbeing
- ‘early intervention’ on social problems
- active citizenship
- social inclusion, social justice, social equity

BENEFITS TO YOUNG PEOPLE

I. Learning and applying skills

Young people cite having the opportunity to learn new skills as one of the biggest factors for becoming involved in social action and/or volunteering.³⁵ They recognise that improving abilities in teamwork, communication, leadership, planning and problem-solving can aid personal development and enhance employment prospects, with volunteering adding depth to CVs. Young people involved in social action often also report increases in self-confidence and self-esteem, which can lead to improved wellbeing and mental and physical health.³⁶

Community rail and railway staff facilitating all the projects examined within this report said they had seen noticeable increases in the self-confidence, communication, teamwork, and decision-making of the young people taking part. All of these are crucial to young people’s personal and professional development, as Fiona Horne, operations manager at the 6VT Youth Café, observed. She said: “They’re learning these skills that while they might not realise how valuable they are now, they will later in life.

A few who are going for jobs are saying that employers are more interested in their volunteering background than their academic results. People are fascinated by the community rail partnership work, so that’s invaluable for them.

A lot of young people we work with aren’t particularly academic, so this sort of stuff builds up a good CV for them, it shows they can work as a team and can manage projects and deadlines.”

Community rail volunteering can provide young people with an environment where they can take the lead and engage in competency-based social action, giving them a practical means of developing skills that are difficult to learn without doing.³⁷ It also gives them the chance to take skills and lessons from education or training and apply them in ‘real-world’ settings.



Co-ordinators at Sheppey College said one of the main benefits of its partnership with Kent Community Rail Partnership was that **students were taken “out of their comfort zone” and exposed to real-life scenarios**; experiences that potential employers are looking for. Andy Place, engagement officer for Kent Community Rail Partnership, explained: “The SwaleRail projects give them a real-life situation to use their skills. It’s not artificial, it’s for a real purpose. The initial body language can be, ‘why are we doing this?’, but once they take ownership of it, there is a real change in their enthusiasm. It gives them real-life experiences they just aren’t going to get in a college environment.”

Students involved in the projects said they appreciated the chance to gain “hands-on experience”, giving them a chance to test their skills and focus on being able to improve. Carpentry student Gage Carter-Rowe, 19, describing the benches he helped to build and install at stations, said: “It was a way of letting me use the skills I’d learnt in a real-life environment, that gave me the motivation to get involved. In a classroom we can build something, but it’ll probably just get binned when it’s been assessed. This was something that is for the public that is being used daily, and it’ll be there for a while. **That also gives you a sense of pride, knowing that people will be using them and that it makes the area a nicer place to be.**”

The opportunity to acquire and apply professional skills is also seen as a crucial component of work experience schemes within rail, where young people generally spend a limited time within the industry to learn directly about work by watching, learning, and doing. As part of the Northern apprenticeship scheme, participants spend time with a community rail partnership to experience community rail and the activities and value it delivers. They also get the opportunity to plan, manage, and deliver a community project linked to issues such as rail safety or the environment, working with schools and community partners.

This is seen as vital by the train operator in allowing placement students to experience a different side to the railway, widening their career options. As Chris Leggett, responsible for talent management, people, and organisational development at Northern, explained: “The project offers that added value element. It adds real breadth and colour to the programme. Without it, I don’t think it would be something we could stand proudly behind as what a placement should be. For our students, they have something positive to put on their CV, and alongside the work experience, they can reference engaging in a community project. It adds an extra dimension.”

Community rail can often offer experience in an unusually wide range of community engagement and transport-related activities, as well as linking in with mix of public, private and third sector partners. Richard Isaac, Northern’s regional community and sustainability manager, said this gave young people chances to encounter and work with individuals or groups who might be new to them, forcing them to sharpen communication and networking skills. He said: “Getting them involved in the community element is vital because you meet so many characters. **Community rail has such a breadth of people, so learning the communication skills to deal with all those people, age groups and backgrounds is vital.** It’s really important to their individual development, especially in a public-facing industry where you need skills to be able to deal with everyone.”

“Once they take ownership, there is a real change in their enthusiasm.”



The benefits of including hands-on experience for young people is now recognised across community rail and rail, becoming a vital aspect of many schemes. For example, it is the main element of 'On Track to Train', Community Rail Lancashire's employment programme for underrepresented youth groups in rail, with young people given the chance to directly experience a diverse range of different roles and types of career.

Various community rail partnerships and groups are also ensuring that young people get the chance to see projects through to completion, and appreciate the fruits of their labour being used productively. This can be especially meaningful in young people developing their confidence and having a means to sell themselves and their talents. Examples include projects completed as part of formal student placements, such as those offered by the Penistone Line,³⁸ or resources produced by local college or university students that they can reference, including Devon & Cornwall Rail Partnership working with Plymouth University students to create an award-winning children's book,³⁹ and North Staffordshire Community Rail Partnership working with BTEC graphics students to produce their new line guide.⁴⁰

The notion of involvement in community rail aiding personal growth was highlighted by members of 6VT, who spoke about benefits and transferable skills they had gained from networking and project work. Some of the group's comments echoed research findings stating that if young people are engaged early and effectively in ways that allow them to gain appropriate knowledge and experience, they become more inclined to see themselves as future leaders.⁴¹

On becoming the first youth community rail partnership, 6VT chair Roseanna Campbell, 20, said: "It was an opportunity we didn't want to miss. It was really exciting, but at the same time, it was like 'wow, we're the first one'. It was a bit scary, but we thought, why isn't there a youth community rail

partnership? **We can help implement decisions now that can make things better for everyone. I think that's why we've thrown our all into it.** It's opened so many doors and allowed us to see different ways of life that otherwise we just wouldn't see."

II. Enabling sustainable mobility

Being able to access rail travel can increase opportunities for young people in many ways, broadening horizons in terms of education, employment, and recreation. This can lead to higher levels of social mobility and wellbeing, as discussed in our report on community rail and social inclusion <https://communityrail.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/ACoRP-CRSI2018.pdf>. Becoming comfortable using rail also encourages young people to adopt long-lasting sustainable and healthy travel habits.

Some community rail partnerships, and an increasing number of station groups and other rail partners, now work with young people to increase confidence in using the railways. For example, Community Rail Lancashire have engaged with thousands of children from more than 100 local schools via their 'Railway Confidence' and 'Passport to Safe Travel' schemes. This often focuses on primary school-age children, engaging them on the practicalities of how to travel safely, but different projects are being developed to appeal to older children and young adults, such as secondary school programmes linked to STEM subjects.

Train operators recognise the benefits of this and are keen for this message to be delivered as early as possible in schools, stating that railway confidence can support young people's ability to access opportunities, sustainably, for the rest of their lives, as well as positively influencing others. Carolyn Watson, community and sustainability director at Northern, explained: "The earlier you can engage young people with the idea of what the railway is and what it can offer from a travel and transport

perspective, or indeed as employment, you can also drive behaviour change among parents and wider families as well. **The earlier we can engage and demonstrate the benefits of rail, the better.**"

Research shows that it is hard to 'persuade' people to opt out of unsustainable behaviours, such as car use, when they are thoroughly embedded in our lifestyles and identities.⁴² However, if young people are engaged with rail at this formative stage, and identify it as a positive, sustainable, and accessible form of travel, its use can become habitual. As a growing number of young people are priced out of driving, or become less car-orientated in their thinking,⁴³ having the confidence and skills to access public transport is becoming more important in preventing them from being excluded from everything except what is in their immediate neighbourhood. The urgent nature of the climate emergency adds to this, with a growing recognition that ongoing widespread private car use "does not appear to be compatible" with the dramatic decarbonisation now needed.⁴⁴ Activities like those delivered through community rail can help young people develop familiarity and positivity about sustainable transport, and a sense that this form of travel is the 'norm' and part of their identity, which research suggests may be key to encouraging sustainable transport behaviours.⁴⁵

“ I now feel safe to go and get on a train by myself. ”

One of the main benefits of Sheppey College's alliance with Kent Community Rail Partnership was that it actively encouraged students to use the railway. Simply being in a rail environment appears to have had the effect of allaying fears or misgivings about rail as an accessible and inclusive form of travel. Business student Keeley Smith, 17, said: **"I didn't use the trains before, I felt a bit nervous. But with this project, I've found out that there are people that can help you at stations, and there is nothing to be scared about.** You can go on that train and you will be safe. Making the awareness posters like we did, it highlighted safety points that maybe I didn't know were there before, so that really helped me, as I now feel safe to go and get on a train by myself."

Breaking down the initial barrier to rail travel was viewed as vital for the students, particularly in an isolated island community, as it allowed them to broaden ambitions for their futures, widening professional and personal life choices and reducing feelings of isolation. Nicole Fitzpatrick, head of building services at Sheppey College, explained: "Some students have never been off the island, and I don't think people realise that. If you're not from here, you probably can't imagine it. Some of our students are quite shy and timid, but this partnership promotes wider ambition, allowing them to venture a bit further. **They can say, I haven't got to be restricted to this area, there's a big world out there. Having that confidence to be able to travel and look wider, it's very important.**"



III. Enhancing creativity and self-efficacy

Successful youth engagement in rail can lead to opportunities for young people to feel a greater sense of purpose, particularly if they have been marginalised or felt excluded in some way.⁴⁶ This is especially valuable where young people are empowered to lead projects and use their energy, ideas, and enthusiasm to bring about positive change. The flexible and adaptive nature of community rail creates an environment where young people are able to think innovatively and express themselves. Stations themselves are ideal, public-facing settings for creative hubs, and many across the network, while still performing their traditional function, have become art galleries, exhibitions, museums, and performance venues.⁴⁷ Youth-led arts projects, resulting in a diverse range of murals and other colourful displays, already brighten up many stations across the UK, including, for example, Fenny Stratford, Newton-le-Willows, Radcliffe-on-Trent, Smethwick Rolfe Street, Kilmarnock, Dronfield, Stroud, Stonehouse, Penkridge, Sleaford, and Nuneaton.

These types of projects are popular within community rail, and well supported by the rail industry, as they can: increase community pride in stations and railways, boost customer satisfaction and passenger numbers, bring abandoned or neglected buildings or sites back into good use, reduce anti-social behaviour, and even cut costs for train operators. Research shows that arts and culture can be used to make connections with young people, even those in ‘hard to reach’ settings,⁴⁸ and community rail groups have recognised that visual projects, which could also incorporate local history and tradition, are an effective and appropriate way of allowing young people to express their views about emotive issues or places that are important to them.



Daisy Chapman-Chamberlain, who coordinated and delivered education projects as equality, diversity and inclusion lead with Community Rail Lancashire, said: “In terms of the young people, the **benefits I’ve observed are a building of their social skills, the creation of a group mentality, and the really nice atmosphere that is generated via the projects.** That is really important for young people who might be lonely, or might have mental health problems, it’s just a really good way of supporting young people.”

Talking about her involvement with various Community Rail Lancashire projects, including ‘Stand Clear of the Closet Doors’ and ‘Ticket to Pride’, young volunteer Elena Summers, 21, spoke of the “huge” positives young people could experience by taking part, and how necessary such opportunities were for young people to express themselves and realise the impact they could make. She said: “I think young people have so much to offer. For me, **it was just great to get the chance to be involved in a project where we could really express ourselves,** that was the immediate thing that drew me in. It gave me an opportunity to feel like I was useful in some way, and that is really important. It has given me so much to look back at and self-validate with, so I know it can make such a huge positive impact on young people’s lives. In that sense, it is not only essential for community rail to keep engaging with young people for the sake of community rail, but also for the sake of young people too, because they really need it.”

“
Young people have so much to offer.
”

BENEFITS TO COMMUNITY RAIL AND RAIL

I. Hearing young voices

Effective youth engagement helps to ensure that young people have a voice in decisions that affect them, and can make positive change, on their terms. They become “agents of change, instead of targets to be changed.”⁴⁹ Research shows that young people feel engaged when they feel like they are listened to and feel their views have the potential to make a difference.⁵⁰ Despite this, organisations, and society in general, often fails to listen to young people’s views or recognise their ability to play a productive role in delivering change.⁵¹

Young people commonly state that they want to play an active part in what is happening around them, and have shown that they are equally able to contribute as decision-makers as well as recipients of support.⁵² For community rail and rail, this means working in partnership with young people, not simply providing services to them or making decisions on their behalf.⁵³

Organisations willing to embrace the contributions of young people can benefit from their natural and expert views on what affects them, and be provided with innovative solutions that may otherwise have been missed by decision makers. Andy Place said that when Sheppey College students saw the SwaleRail Line stations first-hand, they quickly came up with ideas as to how they could be improved and appeal to a younger demographic. He said: “The students said, ‘you don’t know where to go when you get there’, which developed into posters and the website. **There are things they’ve thought of that we hadn’t come up with that have been really proactive. Having their voices heard is what we want, so they feel recognised and valued.** Having their input and creative ideas, and voices on why young people might not use the railways, and what the issues are. Hopefully, we can then work with the train operator to make those things better.”



Gage Carter-Rowe added: “Our generation are going to have to use public transport and trains, especially on this island, to get around, so I think our opinions on it, people who are genuinely quite passionate about helping, can help make travel much nicer and safer.”

Bringing the college on board as official station adopters, as well as onto the community rail partnership’s steering group for the line, has added a “student and pupil voice” to how the line is developed in the future, which Andy Place acknowledged was key if the views of Sheppey communities were to be fully represented.

He said: “Most of the people on our steering groups are aged 60-plus, we get their voice but we don’t get the younger voices, and **it’s the younger people we need to encourage to use rail and make it effective.** We want to get diverse views, true reflections from people who want to use the trains about what the barriers are. We serve all ages, but sometimes the viewpoints we get are restricted.”

The need for young people to be properly involved in consultation and decision-making was also highlighted by Richard Isaac, who stated that enthusing and including youth voices was a necessity in any major investment project.

“It’s the younger people we need to encourage to use rail and make it effective.”

Referencing the Halifax Station Gateway project, in which Northern worked with partners including Calderdale College to gauge young people’s views on the development of the station, he said: “Young people are key, as whatever we develop in the next five or ten years they’ll be living with for the next 45 years. It’s got to work for them. What do they want to see from Halifax Station? **There is a link to be made to ensure young people are included in that decision-making process. If you don’t involve them, they have no ownership. If we want a railway of the future, we need young people with us.**”

One method of increasing youth voices within community rail is to encourage participation in planning, decision-making, and governance. This may also support young people to progress into leadership roles in the future. Research shows that early experience of leadership can help young people’s transition to adulthood and increase their social mobility,⁵⁴ by increasing self-esteem and efficacy, developing networks and connections, and building a resilience to overcome challenges.

Many community rail partnerships now involve young volunteers in shaping plans and activities, and some station groups are either youth-led, e.g. Friends of Bescot Station, or have young people as regular members, such as those at Templecombe, Haslemere, and Hindley. Some are also beginning to draw on the ideas and perspectives of young people to enhance and serve on boards or committees, such as the Tyne Valley Community Rail Partnership, which recently appointed 18 year-old Joseph Codling – a station adopter at Blaydon – to its board, to aid the group’s education programmes and help attract a younger audience to the line.



II. Embracing new ideas and succession

Innovative changes and improvements can be spearheaded by youth-led action, as young people will approach problems and issues with different perspectives, and can be well-placed to find solutions, particularly on issues that directly affect them.⁵⁵ By engaging young people in planning and decision-making, organisations can gain not only fresh impetus, but also a level of honesty and insight that they may not expect, tapping into the lived experiences of youth they may not have had themselves.⁵⁶ This can help to create more inclusive structures and policies within rail and community rail. By engaging with young people, and considering not only what current passengers need now, but how communities are evolving and what future passengers may need, the rail industry too can enhance its social, economic, and environmental impact, visibly demonstrating that it cares about the services it provides to people, building trust, understanding, positivity, and accountability.

“
If we want a railway of the future,
we need young people with us.”



Our study also shows that young people can offer views that challenge the status quo, questioning whether things can be done differently, and potentially, better. As Carolyn Watson explained: “As an industry, we’re very risk averse, but we need to challenge ourselves around innovation and think differently. **Engaging young people gets us to think differently and think about what we can do, not coming up with barriers first.** We’re offering a service that will be their service in the future, so it absolutely has to work for them.”

Research suggests that organisations should actively look for, and create, opportunities to engage young people in project planning, governance, and policy development, as they can offer leadership qualities that can mobilise and inspire themselves and others towards common goals, ensuring initiatives resonate with their peers.^{57,58} Our discussions found that this should be facilitated by an environment that is inviting, non-judgmental, and inclusive, where young people feel confident their input is valued and never ridiculed or dismissed. They will naturally need guidance and support from colleagues or partners with greater experience or expertise, but should be given opportunities to express themselves and shape projects in their own mould. This is evident in a number of community rail schemes that have been driven by student or youth groups, such as on The Abbey Line, where the community rail partnership challenged local college students to come up with ideas on how to attract new passengers, with the most popular – ranging from date nights to cycling events – put to the relevant train operator for consideration.⁵⁹

Fiona Horne said that adopting an ideas-led, ‘try it and see’ ethos within the 6VT group was vital in attracting interest and enthusing young people. She said: “Because of the nature of what we do, and the fact we work with young people who are not young professionals, we always think a bit ‘out of the box’, nothing is a stupid idea. It’s very much been put into their hands as to how the partnership goes. **That’s one of the great things about working with young people, they are very creative, very inventive, and they come up with great ideas that we, probably too sensibly, wouldn’t think of.**”

Successfully engaging young people, bringing their views on board, and embedding their involvement is also valuable for succession in community rail and rail. Relying solely on what older generations perceive to be the best way to attract and retain young people runs the risk of groups missing opportunities to recruit new and enthusiastic staff and/or volunteers, which may hinder growth, or prevent them fully representing their communities.

Young volunteers have the potential to show lasting commitment to the organisations they work with, developing loyalties and connections that might see them offer their services, continuously or intermittently, over an extended period.⁶⁰ Highlighting the importance of effective youth engagement to the future of community rail, Daisy Chapman-Chamberlain said: “The most obvious reason is simply the continuation of the movement. We need to be looking to the future and getting new people involved, and we need people who can take community rail forward. **It can be a danger if you’ve only always got the same team around you that you always produce the same ideas, whereas young people can often suggest some weird and wonderful things.** That is really valuable and not something that you can artificially create, it has to come from that organic engagement.”

“ We need to be looking to the future and getting new people involved. ”

Signs of the next generation taking community rail forward are evident with the 6VT Youth Community Rail Partnership, and an increasing number of youth-led station groups. Numerous stations have been adopted by schools, and some by youth groups aiming to develop their services and opportunities for young people, including Harrogate being adopted by the Girl Guides and Kirkdale by Everton in the Community and Everton Free School. Others have been adopted by organisations and charities working with people, including young adults, with learning disabilities and other support needs, such as Delamere, adopted by Petty Pool College, and Ben Rhydding, cared for by ‘Outside the Box’, run by Ilkley Community Enterprise Ltd, with the aim of ensuring that rail is open to, and developed by, young people of all ages and backgrounds.

On the importance of attracting new ideas and ‘new blood’ to the community rail movement, Roseanna Campbell said: “If you just stop at the older generation, where will it go after they’re done? For us, working with other (adult) partnerships, it’s about letting them know we’re working with them, not against them. **We’ve got new, fresh ideas, but we’re all in it together and we’re here to help.**”



BENEFITS TO SOCIETY

I. Building inclusive and cohesive communities

Youth engagement is vitally important for the future of society, helping to improve sustainability, equality, integration, social mobility, community cohesion, and collective health and wellbeing, all indicators of strong communities as outlined in the government’s Communities Framework.⁶¹

Young people generally take part in social action because they want to, not because they have to.⁶² Often, one of the main reasons for this is their desire to make a difference; they care about making the world a better place, for fellow young people and everyone else, and believe they have skills and attributes to offer.⁶³ By being more inclusive of young people, groups and organisations can nurture this desire to contribute to society and allow young people to play a greater role as active citizens.

Communities benefit when young people feel valued and engaged as active citizens, becoming more socially inclusive, resilient, connected, and adaptable to change.⁶⁴ In turn, our study shows that young people feel a greater sense of community and an inclination to give something back to it. Their involvement can create an empowering environment, where aspirations are raised not only among young people but also whole communities, stimulating a more vibrant sense of local democracy, and creating a culture of cohesion, where people, sometimes across different generations, work together towards common goals.⁶⁵

Tutors involved in the community rail projects at Sheppey College found that while benefitting their communities may not have been the original goal for students, it quickly became a significant motivating factor, creating feelings of pride and a desire to continue and do more. Creative media tutor Stephen King said: “I think when you initially tell them it’s to benefit the community, they’re like,

‘yeah, alright’. But when they actually get the feedback, they really feel part of it, like they’ve achieved something. **It’s brought some of them out of their shells and really given them a purpose.** They need some facilitation and guidance, but they do honestly feel like they’re doing something for the community, and that’s a nice feeling. My class is buzzing when the project starts, we don’t get anything done but Swale Trains!”

Given that projects in community rail often take place in outside environments, young people can have their work seen and recognised by friends, family, and the public. Seeing and feeling an appreciation of their efforts appears to foster a sense of excitement and a determination for projects to succeed. This resonates with research suggesting that creating a reflective culture, where contributions and achievements are recognised, valued, and communicated, helps to facilitate continued engagement and commitment.⁶⁶

Speaking about 6VT, Fiona Horne said: “The things that we tend to do are fairly high-profile and public or community-facing, and I think they like that. They’re very keen to be out and about, but out and about helping people. That is why they want to do it: they want to help people and make people’s lives better, young people especially.”

Carolyn Watson, referencing the Northern apprentices, added: **“Getting involved in the community projects offers something very tangible, there are clear end results that impact directly on the communities they work with.** That altruistic, externally facing approach is really powerful.”

Being involved in community rail could also potentially play a role in terms of ‘early intervention’, an approach in which children and young people are given the support and nurture they need early in life, to prevent problems arising later on, such as poor physical and mental health, addiction, and crime and anti-social behaviour.⁶⁷ Projects such as Community Rail Cumbria’s ‘Rail Journey to Recovery’ illustrate how powerful an intervention community rail can be in rehabilitation programmes for adults, increasing social interactions and self-esteem.⁶⁸ It seems likely that the same principles may apply in prevention. By becoming involved in community rail, young people may develop pride, confidence, and resilience, and be able to take advantage of opportunities that help them avoid problems that can emerge from social exclusion, allowing them to feel part of, and contribute to, their community from an early age.

“ They want to help people and make people’s lives better. ”



II. Adding value to society

Our previous research has shown that community rail, and, by extension, rail, delivers social value to communities, individuals, and society across all themes of the Community Rail Development Strategy: providing a voice for communities; promoting sustainable and healthy travel; bringing communities together and supporting diversity and inclusion; and supporting social and economic development.⁶⁹ By becoming involved in community rail, young people appear to recognise and respond to social value being delivered, and embrace this as a significant motivating factor. They learn that rail is more than just a form of transport: it is embedded within communities and central to the development and prosperity of those areas. For example, members of the Friends of Bescot Station said that one of the reasons they chose to adopt the station was because they saw how vital a link it was to the community, and had the potential for further development as a social and economic hub.

Despite their apparent willingness to want to work with older generations to support and improve communities, some young people retain an underlying feeling of having to overcome negative stereotypes in certain areas. As a population, they are still viewed by some as selfish and uncaring, and in terms of the railway, can be portrayed as youths who congregate at stations and cause vandalism or anti-social behaviour. One of the reasons that young people involved in community rail and rail seek to give back to communities seems to be a determination to challenge those views and show how important community is to them. This fits with wider research suggesting that young people can counteract negative stereotypes of youth when they are successfully engaged in leadership and social action.⁷⁰ Talking about her experiences with 6VT, Roseanna Campbell said: “Sometimes it can be quite scary. Some people have such a negative way of thinking about young people, that stereotype that we’re all just out to cause trouble. When people



come up to us at events, say the hate crime stuff or if we’re fundraising for hospitals, they’re kind of taken aback because they don’t know the community rail partnership even goes on.”

By developing and delivering projects that bring demonstrable social value, young people also have the opportunity to showcase the impact they can have, raising public awareness of their activities. Roseanna Campbell of 6VT explained: “A lot of recognition has come out of the community stuff that we do, and being able to tell people and show them the impact, they see that there’s young people trying to help our community and that’s a positive thing for everyone.”

Explaining how the youth-led Friends of Bescot Station group was established, co-founder Asad Kalang, 17, said one of the key reasons was that he and others wanted to show that young people cared about their communities and wanted to give something back. He said: **“We want to show that young people do care, because quite a lot of the time, they still get a bad reputation.** Since starting the group, we’ve had loads of volunteers offer support, not just young people, but people of all different backgrounds who wouldn’t normally speak to or socialise with each other. It’s an outlet for people who are really enthusiastic about giving something to their community but don’t know how to show it. It’s a visible way young people and others can show that they care and work together.”

Northern work in partnership with the National Citizen Service (NCS), a national youth programme for 16-17 year olds, on social action projects across the region. These initiatives encourage and develop confidence, communication, and leadership among participants, and aim to impact positively on local communities to improve social cohesion. Richard Isaac, who coordinates the programme, said being able to add value and make a positive impact via their actions was the driving force for young people taking part. He said: “The young people involved are adding value to their community and they can see it locally, they can see that by being involved there is benefit, they are making a difference. That is really powerful, and we find knock-on effects in terms of things like a reduction in anti-social behaviour and vandalism around the stations. **It’s that sense of, ‘I have added value, I have contributed to this, and I have given something to my community’.**

Sometimes young people don’t think like that, but you’ve just got to give them the opportunity and let them run with it, and then they flourish.”

Youth social action and volunteering can also add economic value to communities, based on benefits to young people themselves, the organisations they work with, and impacts on wider society. One study found that a full-time volunteering programme involving 10,000 young people could add anywhere between £28million and £119million per year to the UK economy.⁷¹ The same report found that by enhancing professional and employment skills, alongside ‘softer’ skills that may not have been developed through formal education, young people involved in volunteering could potentially boost their lifetime income by up to 6%. The improved wellbeing brought about by young people engaging in volunteering or social action also has an economic impact. In our ‘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>, we calculated the social value of volunteering within community rail using RSSB’s Common Social Impact Framework and figures from the HACT Social Value Bank.⁷²

This states that the monetary value of the social benefits accrued by ‘regular’ volunteers is £3,249 per adult volunteer per year. The equivalent figure for young volunteers, anyone aged under 25, is **£2,895** per volunteer per year. That means that if every community rail partnership (71) and station friends’ group (a conservative estimate of 1,000) had just one regular young volunteer, the total social value to those volunteers and communities would be **£3.1million** per year.

III. Promoting sustainability and the environment

Sustainability is integral to community rail, in the sense of promoting rail travel and improving local environments. There is now a rising consciousness within the movement of its ability to lead on sustainability locally and support efforts within rail, towards addressing the environmental crisis. Tackling the crisis requires long-term strategies and perspectives, highlighting the need for input from younger generations.

As highlighted earlier, the environment is an important and emotive issue to young people, who are acutely aware of the impacts on their future. Research has found that young people spend a significant amount of time outdoors in their local area, using a network of formal and informal green and open spaces, and have strong views about how those spaces could be improved.⁷³ Supporting young people to become informed, active local citizens by playing a bigger role in looking after the physical fabric of their neighbourhoods can be an important step in developing their decision-making skills, and in securing the long-term social and environmental benefits of green communities by enthusing young people as their future custodians and champions.⁷⁴ A recent study has shown that when people get involved in projects that enable them to connect with nature, as many community rail projects do, it also encourages environmentally-sustainable habits to form.⁷⁵

Participants in the Northern apprenticeship programme described how one aspect of the scheme was called ‘Destination Green’, encouraging them to develop projects around issues such as sustainable energy and environmental impact. **They said it was “exciting” to see Northern commit to a green agenda, acknowledging how rail could potentially lead the way for transport in this area.**

Many young people involved in the delivery of the projects in our study spoke about the importance of young people’s perspectives in making rail travel an increasingly attractive and viable travel option. This was illustrated by the website and posters produced by Sheppey College students on the SwaleRail Line, which were designed in line with their thinking on what might encourage more young people, and others, to use the railway instead of driving. When such projects come to fruition, they not only remove barriers to travel by changing attitudes and behaviours, but send a signal that the railway cares about its locality and is listening to local input, in this case, from young people. This chimes with communications research suggesting that interactive, engaging, empowering communication may be key to achieving behavioural shifts on sustainability.⁷⁶

Our study also found that young people are aware of the ability of community rail to improve local environments, such as through community art or biodiversity projects. Our previous research suggests that well-tended stations are appreciated by rail users, local people, and railway staff, resulting in benefits including improved public and passenger perspectives and reductions in vandalism and anti-social behaviour.⁷⁷ On the SwaleRail Line, students have worked to improve the appearances of stations and their surrounds by creating flower displays, adding seating, building birdboxes and adorning trees with colourful art, and there are plans in place to add sculptures and murals. Landscaping student Peter West, 17, said: “Seeing the flowers outside the station (Queenborough), it brightens it

up a bit and makes people feel better when they’re going to work. It gives people a boost, and we’ve been involved with that. It’s made a difference, it’s lightened up the area, and it’s made people feel good.”

EXPERT COMMENT:

“

There are so many benefits to successful youth engagement and participation. Young people have a right to be informed and to influence decisions that affect them, but all too often the balance of power is not in their favour. If we truly want to empower our community to shape and use all the community services available, then this must include young people. Even the simplest actions of listening to and sharing information with young people, can lead to an incredible amount of insight and learning (for both young people and organisations), leading to greater understanding, better relationships, and the discovery of mutual interests.

Encouraging youth participation, from volunteering to work experience and sharing decisions, leads to a ‘double benefit’: as you build the skills and opportunities available to young people, they become advocates for the community causes you have in common, and your community organisation become more sustainable. As you apply and share learning with young people, and develop your plans for the future alongside young people of various ages and background, in waves, you are future proofing your organisation, gaining a range of new supporters and new perspectives for current and future projects.”

Stephanie Lynch, Groundwork UK

ENCOURAGING AND MAXIMISING YOUTH ENGAGEMENT

As well as considering the benefits of existing youth engagement, we wanted to explore principles and approaches that might encourage wider and more impactful engagement across community rail. There are various theories about how to maximise the benefits of youth engagement and create an environment most conducive to success. Some organisations and resources^{78,79,80,81} refer to a framework of key principles that can underpin quality and inclusive youth social action, as shown to the right.

I. Youth-led projects and ownership

One of the proposed key principles of successful youth engagement is for it to be genuinely youth-led, with young people recognised as worthy contributors with critical knowledge to add. This can take time and support from groups and organisations facilitating youth projects, but can result in activity that is tailored to the needs, aspirations, experiences, and interests of young people, and delivers greater impact.

Within this approach, projects are shaped by young people’s needs, rather than this being assumed, or only considered as an afterthought. Activities are independent and self-directed, where young people make decisions about what they want to do and are responsible for their own engagement.⁸² This ‘learning by doing’ is an essential part of development and critical in building confidence in young people, enhancing leadership and management skills.⁸³ This approach underpins the activities of 6VT, as Fiona Horne explained: “It has to be young people-led. The minute you try to impose things, it’s just like, ‘back off’. Everything we do is about youth participation and leadership and it’s from the heart, we don’t just say it and then do something else. It’s not tokenistic. We’re just here to facilitate and make sure everything runs safely.”

Youth engagement framework – adapted from National Youth Agency and #iwill:



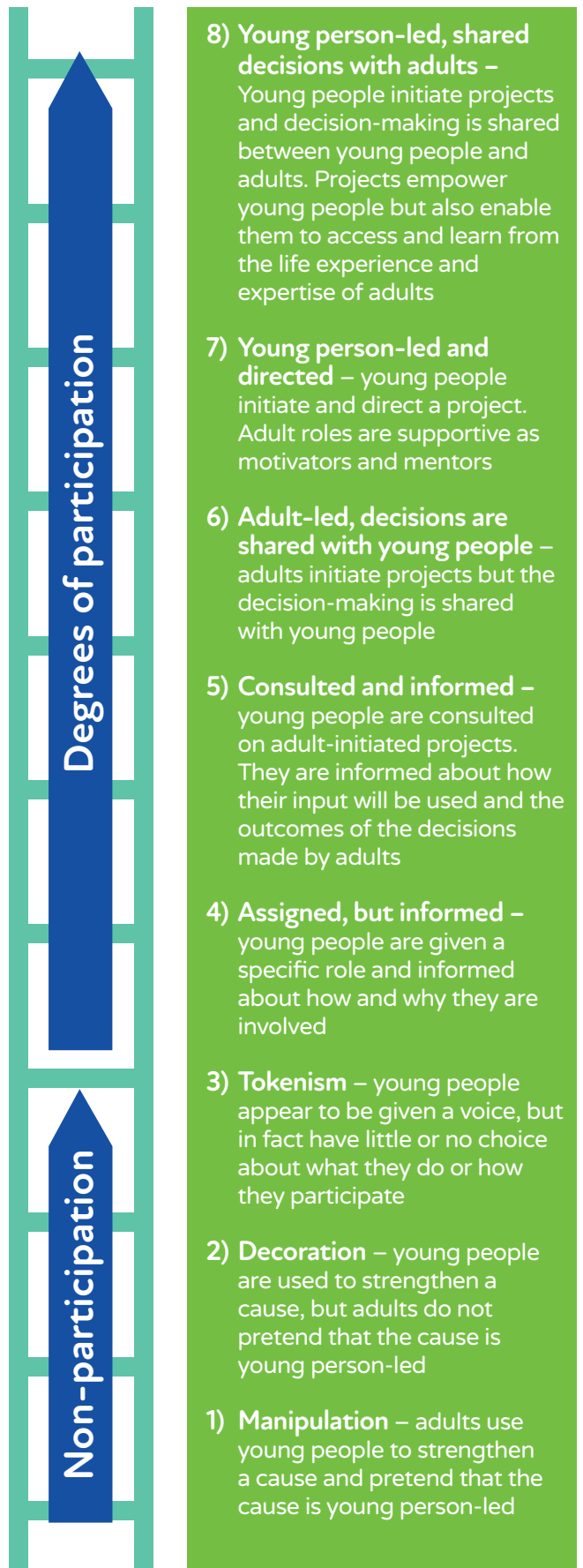
Having the freedom to plan and deliver projects in their own way within an inclusive, non-pressurised environment is very important to young people involved in community rail projects, with many citing it as a key reason behind the success of their initiatives, and a significant factor in their sustained involvement. Describing his engagement with the Sheppey College projects, media student Owen Luckhurst, 18, said: **“Having the freedom to do what you want to do within the project is important.** Like with the website, we were able to choose what we wanted to build. It makes you feel more involved in the project as a whole. **It makes you want to do more because it’s come from you and not from someone who has told you what to do.”** Ciara MacDonald, 19, of 6VT, added: “The reasons why our events have run so well is that we’ve been able to take the lead, no-one has put a stop on it. We’ve had that freedom to do things ourselves.”

Allowing and encouraging projects and activities to be youth-led offers levels of responsibility and trust that appear to create a sense of ownership among young people involved. Youth action driven by young people themselves, through its empowering effect, is associated with higher levels of personal development and, particularly, civic awareness and social responsibility.⁸⁴ Research also shows that young people are more likely to make a dedicated commitment to a programme or project when they have been involved from the outset in its design and implementation.⁸⁵ Speaking about the carpentry projects completed by Sheppey College students on stations on the SwaleRail Line, Nicole Fitzpatrick said: **“They’re involved from start to finish. There’s that ownership, it’s their baby. They’ve helped to design it, that’s really important and gets them on board. They grab hold of it, and they love that.”**

Karen Bennett, education development officer at Community Rail Lancashire, said that giving young people the chance to lead on and ‘own’ projects was rewarded by them naturally increasing the amount of effort they put in. She said: **“You lose a bit of enthusiasm if your creativity is taken away, you don’t feel respected or valued. Being given that freedom, you will throw yourself into it a lot more because it’s about you and it’s that intrinsic feeling of ‘I want this to succeed’, you’re naturally invested in it.** To begin with, that level of autonomy can be quite scary, but it allows you to come up with weird and wonderful things.”

Daisy Chapman-Chamberlain added that young people needed to be given ownership throughout the process, from the conception of ideas through to post-project evaluation and celebration. She said: **“I don’t think you can go to young people with a ready-made project and say ‘this is what you’re doing’, you just wouldn’t get anything authentic or something that reflected the group you were working with. So, it’s not a question of whether it’s possible to include young people in the decision-making process; it’s impossible not to if you want to create a project that is genuinely engaging.”**

Ladder of participation – adapted from Hart⁸⁶



A model that is widely used in relation to young people being empowered and included in projects is the ladder of participation. It is generally agreed that projects towards the top of the ladder, with young people responsible for shared or sole decision-making, have increased levels of ownership and greater chances of sustained engagement. This suggests that those planning and facilitating projects need to avoid manipulating young people or involving them in a tokenistic way. As an example, a community rail partnership may decide to consult with a local youth group about transforming a blank space at a station. The group may decide to create a mural, and decide what it is going to depict, perhaps influenced by the partnership giving information about the history and traditions of the local area. In this scenario, the project could sit at the top rung of the ladder, as decision-making is shared, and young people and adults learn from each other to develop ideas and move the scheme forward.

It is important to note, however, that the ladder of participation is an aspirational model and groups should not be expected to be able to start right at the top. To be able to do so, for example via a new project, would take careful planning and adequate resource. You may evaluate the activities of your group and identify more with the mid-sections of the ladder, and this should not put you off, as experience suggests it is the journey towards the top through which organisations can learn lessons at every stage.



II. Engaging through studies, interests, and passions

One of the biggest barriers to youth engagement in community rail and rail appears to be a difficulty in gaining access to schools, colleges, and youth groups, with around four in ten Community Rail Network members citing this as an issue.⁸⁷ The most common way community rail groups in our study have tackled this is by linking projects to curriculums or programmes of learning, or important issues such as rail safety. Due to the flexibility and breadth of projects that can be linked to stations and the railway, they can be aligned with a wide range of subject areas, from traditional studies such as art and history, to a host of more vocational programmes. Subjects themselves can then be broken down into numerous possibilities, with art potentially including drawing, painting, ceramics, sculpture, print-making, design, crafts, photography, video and filmmaking, and performance art.

One of the key factors behind the success of the projects undertaken by Kent Community Rail Partnership and Sheppey College was a recognition by the partnership that the range of activities they could offer meant that student groups across the entire college could be involved. This allowed elements of the projects to be spread out across different departments, tied in with specific assignments and units that students needed to complete. Planned on a quarterly basis, the bulk of the work takes place during designated 'community weeks', where students are actively encouraged to get involved in extra-curricular activity. As Andy Place explained: **"I'm very conscious that if you go to a school or college and say, 'can you do this', and it's not part of the curriculum, they're going to often say, 'no, we haven't got time'.** You need to tie the project to something they are doing already, not for it to be seen as extra work." This suggests a need for dialogue between community rail groups and educational establishments, about how community rail can meet curriculum needs, with suggestions and discussions about how rail can align with and support educational priorities.

Research shows that young people can find it challenging to relate major policy areas like transport and sustainability to their daily lives, and are more interested in local issues that directly affect them.⁸⁸ This suggests an opportunity for community rail to help young people to link ‘big issues’ like climate change with the realities people face in their locality. This further supports the idea that young people should be given the freedom to focus on issues that matter to them and that they believe in, translating that passion into projects that work and deliver impact in their areas. This is vital if their participation is to deliver mutual benefit, and potentially develop into long-term and dedicated involvement.

Asad Kalang said that one of the reasons he and others established the Friends of Bescot Station was to take collective action to help solve issues that both group members and local communities were passionate about. He said: **“A big thing for young people at the moment is the environment, so we thought that by getting involved in station adoption, we could help to increase footfall on the station and trains and get cars off the road.”**

Working together can really help to identify and tackle issues that are important and meaningful to young people themselves. If you impose something and say, you’re a community group, you have to do this, it just becomes forced and young people won’t be passionate about it. But if it’s your own decisions you’re making, then you’ll see that passion and the projects will have more of an impact.”



III. Promoting opportunities for engagement

What young people say about social action – adapted from #iwill⁸⁹

What Young

- Seek me out and find me, it might take a while, but it will be worth it. You’ll find me on my turf, not yours!
- Make it easy for me to get involved and play a part (e.g. ask me what help I need); I might need extra help and/or time to do this.

people say

- Involve me in discussions about what’s possible and how to make it happen.
- Help me to find out what I’m interested in and passionate about, and to work on the things that matter to me.

eight key

- Work with me to find out what I’m good at as well as what I can gain through my involvement.
- Use my talents, experiences and ideas; and stretch and support me to develop new talents, gain different experiences and be confident in my own abilities.

messages

- Recognise and celebrate my success and help me realise my aspirations and ambitions.
- Tailor and adapt what you do to enable me to make change happen; personalise the opportunity for youth social action and my experience of it.

Even if young people are interested in getting involved in social action or volunteering, many state that they don't know how to go about it, feel that no-one has ever reached out to contact and ask them, or are unsure as to what the experience will be like and what they might gain from it.⁹⁰ To combat this, as the previous diagram shows, groups need to not only have clear and accessible information that's appealing and relevant to young people, but must proactively reach out to them via a range of methods, including going 'where they are'. This includes publicising activities and opportunities via effective and appropriate networks and in relevant spaces, being clear on benefits young people can gain, e.g. practical skills and social opportunities, and how they can shape the experience.

Research shows that social action can be a key lever for ensuring young people feel part of society, in terms of their involvement in communities and civic participation or improved future job or career prospects. However, many who might benefit most from taking part in volunteering and skill development programmes are often those least likely to independently seek them out.⁹¹ This is where partnership working with other organisations that work with disadvantaged or marginalised young people can be vital in promoting inclusive youth engagement. Groups need to work to try to ensure that engaging in their community projects or social action is attractive and rewarding for those young people, recognising that it may be a new and unfamiliar experience for them.

An army of volunteers are involved in community rail, with around 8,500 people giving more than 390,000 hours every year to a huge range of projects and activities.⁹² Despite this, community rail has a relatively low public profile, and may not be considered by young people looking to seek out opportunities to give their time in support of their local communities. This is why it is so important for community rail groups to actively promote the opportunities that are available, and specifically to embrace and include a youth contribution.



Daisy Chapman-Chamberlain said: "I think a lot of community rail groups tend to preach to the converted. **If we're just advertising opportunities and activities at train stations, we're only going to get people who already use the rail network. We need to think about how we can advertise in communities, in youth groups, in social groups, in schools and colleges, and do so in a more authentic way.** We also need to look at how we position and present ourselves, how we promote outwards and the visuals we use. I think we also need to look to work with groups who maybe don't have privileges and the benefits of automatically positive futures, and think about, as a movement, how we can support them."

Elena Summers, who has been involved in a number of the Community Rail Lancashire programmes, added: "It's about getting the message out there, the more we speak about it in our social circles, letting people know what is available, the better. I had no idea about community rail until Daisy came to the Proud Trust, so it's all about telling people how accessible it is." This shows the importance of community rail accessing youth environments to visibly demonstrate that they are keen to welcome, work with, and value young people, and showcasing the opportunities available. This would ideally be done by referencing examples of young people involved already, or similar groups elsewhere if an inaugural youth project, or better still, encouraging young people to share their successes and experiences.

Many community rail partnerships and groups are working to overcome any lack of awareness by developing relationships with organisations whose area of expertise and primary function is working with young people, such as schools, colleges and universities, youth groups, uniformed groups, and branches of national organisations. This allows the pooling of knowledge, resources and expertise, and integrated programmes that offer greater levels of support and reward for young people. Current partnerships include projects with the Prince's Trust – who also operate in partnership with train operators, including their 'Get Into Railways' programme with Govia Thameslink Railway⁹³ - and the Scouts, who in partnership with CrossCountry and local community rail partnerships developed a rail-specific personal safety badge.⁹⁴ Other examples include Devon & Cornwall Rail Partnership working with local college students and the National Citizen Service to revamp Barnstaple Station,⁹⁵ and Purbeck Community Rail Partnership working with young volunteers doing their Duke of Edinburgh Awards.

Community rail can also appeal to young people by drawing on career and personal development opportunities linked to partnership working with the rail industry. For example, Community Rail Lancashire's 'On Track to Train' focuses on providing hands-on employment experience for underrepresented youth groups across a range of rail industry roles. Other examples include Community Rail Lancashire's 'Women in Stem' projects, which specifically look to engage young women and girls to consider the STEM roles within the rail industry,⁹⁶ and 'The Rail Partnership', a collaboration between CrossCountry, the Tyne Valley Community Rail Partnership, and Newcastle College's Rail Academy, which gives college students the chance to take what they have learnt in the classroom and apply it to practical projects, e.g. station redevelopment schemes, on the Tyne Valley Line.⁹⁷ Such projects not only develop aspirations and opportunities, but send a message that young people can make a valuable contribution to rail.

EXPERT COMMENT:

“

There are many ways you can integrate youth engagement with your existing projects and plans. Communication is central to the success of any project: with partners, with participants, in celebrating the impacts of your work and ensuring its sustainability. Look at your communications plans – and think about the channels and format that would enable your message to reach young people – better still, ask young people to develop a communications plan or materials aimed at families and youth with you. Also, look at your events calendar and decide whether there are any events that young people (or existing youth groups) could take a lead in organising or make more youth-friendly, with their ideas and presence as stewards and organisers.

Take your whole project plan and review it with groups of young people – they simply know best how to make various aspects of your activities youth-friendly and generally more inclusive for the whole community. Creating your own youth engagement plan for your existing projects is also a useful step, as you will need to think about the schedules of young people, settings in which you can engage meaningfully, and planning time needed to sustain your engagement with various youth groups. Map these out alongside all of the other community stakeholders you contact regularly about your projects and plans, for successful engagement. ”

Stephanie Lynch, Groundwork UK

IV. Reaching and enthusing young people

What encourages young people to volunteer? – the **FLEXIVOL** approach – adapted from Gaskin ⁹⁸

- F**lexibility - in both time and commitment - offer a range of opportunities, both one-off and ongoing
- L**egitimacy - young people need to know that what they're doing is worthwhile
- E**ase of access - many young people don't know how to start volunteering or who to contact. Remove those barriers for them
- E**xperience - young people want relevant, useful experience and the chance to learn new skills. Consider roles that help with employability and career options
- I**ncentives - what is in it for them? Show there are returns for their 'investment of time'. Consider skills and experiences as well as awards and accreditations
- V**ariety - consider this in both the type of work offered, and the level of commitment required
- O**rganisation - think about how to make volunteering efficient, but not bureaucratic
- L**aughs - ensure volunteering is sociable and fun

What roles can young people play? ⁹⁹

Short-term or one-off roles	Long-term or ongoing roles
Social event volunteers - help with planning, physical set-up, stewarding, running information points, events promotion	Youth ambassadors/ champions - group promotion, peer recruitment, public relations
Photographers, filmmakers, graphic designers - promotional films, campaigns, posters, artwork	Marketing and communications - updating websites/blogs, organising market research, completing surveys, helping with newsletters
Project workers - artists, gardeners, researchers, fundraisers, environmentalists, performers	Organisational level roles - board/ steering group members, youth forum members/ coordinators, trustees (if over 16)
School visitors - buddies, support for younger children, running games, arts and crafts, holiday club volunteers	Group leaders - youth volunteer coordinator, chair, secretary (e.g. of station friends' group), mentors
Micro-volunteering - completing surveys, contributing to focus groups, sharing promotion	Formal roles - administrator, social media coordinator, regular project volunteer, e.g. station adopter

Engaging and recruiting young volunteers – some practical ideas:¹⁰⁰

Think about how you can create roles that young people will find interesting and worthwhile. How can you link them to their skills and passions, or their career or social aspirations?

Think about your promotional material. What language and visuals do you use? Will it appeal to young people? Could you ask a young volunteer to design something for you, make a film, or host something online?

Advertise wisely and creatively. Can you use social media to help? Can you engage existing young volunteers to help via word of mouth and peer recruitment? Can you take advantage of events such as careers or jobs fairs?

Consider who else you could work with to promote your opportunities. Could you dovetail with volunteer initiatives at local schools/colleges/universities? Could you work with youth clubs, uniformed groups, your local volunteer centre, your local authority?

Explore the use of local branches/officers from national organisations specialising in youth provision, e.g. Prince’s Trust, Groundwork, Duke of Edinburgh’s Award, National Citizen Service, British Youth Council. How could you work with them to reach young people, promote your opportunities, and develop your programmes?

Think about how young volunteers could approach you to get involved. Is your group accessible and welcoming? Would anything put young people off? Would they feel wanted and valued? Are the processes simple, quick, and informal enough to retain young people’s interest and motivation?

Think about the initial volunteer experience. Could you offer taster sessions or one-off roles for young people to allow them to develop their interest? Could young people be supported by a buddy or mentor, perhaps an existing young volunteer, to help them settle in?

Volunteering and involvement in community rail can be promoted and managed in ways that make it more appealing and beneficial to young people.¹⁰¹

As the previous diagrams show, this might include:

- Promoting a range of volunteering opportunities to suit different interests and skills;
- Making clear that people of all ages are encouraged to get involved and showing that your group is there for the community as a whole;
- Making clear the benefits of volunteering, in terms of skills, employability/CV development, fun, enjoyment and social interaction;
- Recognising and celebrating volunteer achievements.

Groups should also offer varied opportunities, where possible, for young people with different availability and commitment levels, and offer challenge and progression for those who might want to take their volunteering further, e.g. encouraging young people to serve on committees or boards. Embracing short-term or ‘micro-volunteering’ has been discussed in Community Rail Network member workshops communityrail.org.uk/wpcontent/uploads/2018/08/ACoRP-social-inclusion-and-volunteering-workshop-round-up-FINAL-300818.pdf.

If you can successfully access environments in which to promote youth engagement, it is vital to pitch information at the right level, ensuring that the interactions feel authentic and are appealing to a youth audience. Getting this wrong can lead to young people feeling confused, alienated, and put off from giving their time and effort.¹⁰² Bear in mind that young people may be wrestling with other barriers, including pressures to study or find paid work, a lack of their peers taking part, or the notion that volunteering or campaigning is not ‘cool’.¹⁰³

By allowing young people to take the lead, projects and programmes can be promoted in a way that other young people can easily relate to and understand. Despite their vast differences, young people, to an extent, are said to ‘talk the same language’.¹⁰⁴ Hearing about activities and experiences from a young person who has been directly involved,

and benefitted from, projects is a far greater motivating factor for young people than being ‘talked at’ and told why something new might be good for them. Championing your work via this ‘positive peer pressure’¹⁰⁵ can harness young people’s influence on each other to help encourage and normalise voluntary and social action, making it more accessible and visible to all.

Talking about her experience in promoting 6VT, Ciara MacDonald said: **“If you put young people forward to tell other young people about this, that’s always the best way to do it. It’s much better on a peer-to-peer level than having people tell you what to do.** It’s about going into schools or youth organisations and getting more young people involved, showing them it’s not just an adult thing. Working with young people you need to have that balance between not being too official or too informal, talking at the right level.” Northern apprentice Molly Birkett, 20, added: “Trying to involve young people in rail, some people can have all the right intentions, but not say the right things. I think sometimes when you’re a bit older you’re not on the same level, it’s not relatable. If you see someone from your own age group talking about it, the potential changes you can make, there’s more enthusiasm there.”

Using young people as role models and advocates to champion community rail was seen as a “powerful” way of promoting and securing the future of the movement, with Daisy Chapman-Chamberlain noting the effects young volunteers had on their peers when talking about their experiences. She said: “The response that young people like Elena and Tanzina (Community Rail Lancashire ambassadors) get is electric, and the potential value of that to the movement is something we should be capitalising on more. We should think about how we can use their incredible passion and drive to promote the movement rather than it just being us.”

One of the engagement strategies now employed by Northern, and other train operators, to promote rail as a career opportunity is to go beyond traditional marketing, e.g. school talks/visits, and give young people the chance to experience ‘wow’ moments linked to rail. This is also being used in community rail, via programmes such as Women in Stem. Although taking young people out of classrooms or other youth settings, for example to factories and engineering depots, is limited in terms of time and capacity, the ethos of ‘wow moments’ can also be applied within environments like school visits via technology such as driving simulation headsets, adding novelty and excitement. Lucy Taylor, HR business partner at Northern, said it was about using all the tools available to show young people what is exciting about the railway, rather than just giving traditional classroom talks. She said: “It’s about women in rail days, trips to see the Hitachi factory, things like that. **Taking them around the engineering depot, they saw something that was exciting and different, it engaged them.** If we don’t pitch it right, we’ve lost them.”



“It would be great to share ideas and connect more young people.”

Richard Isaac added: “When they see beyond the façade of the industry, we can provide those wow moments. So, they come to the engineering depot, it’s ‘wow, this is massive’. They come to the operational control centre at York, it’s ‘wow, this is massive’. **It’s about showing young people rather than just telling them, and if we can do more of that, with open days and links with community groups, then all the better.** It opens their eyes to what is out there.”

From our discussions, it was apparent that an effective way to reach and appeal to a youth audience was to promote the social aspect of volunteering and youth action, encouraging young people to see it as accessible, inclusive, and enjoyable activity. Social interaction is a hugely important component of successful youth engagement projects, with the opportunity to share experiences with friends and peers a key motivating factor.¹⁰⁶ The chance to meet and make new friends is also crucial, providing opportunities for people to gather and share their passions about a shared interest.

With young people particularly prone to being affected by loneliness,¹⁰⁷ fun and inclusive opportunities for socialisation and integration within community rail is a big selling point. As Daisy Chapman-Chamberlain explained: “The community sense, especially for older young people, those at college or university age, having opportunities to be part of a social group is a huge draw and the key thing is to provide those socialising opportunities. **Community rail at its heart is obviously a community movement, and without the socialising, you’re missing some of the point.**”

Using digital and interactive ways of communicating has also shown to be effective in working with young people to share ideas and make connections, as discussed in detail in our ‘Communicating Community Rail’ report communityrail.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/CommunicatingCommunityRail-researchreport-2017.pdf.



The ‘tech-savvy’ skills of the younger generation offers an opportunity for community and voluntary groups to adapt their approaches to secure the involvement of young people in a less managed, more networked way. Social media has given young people platforms to demonstrate their desire and capacity to create, campaign, and bring about change, and groups should consider ways they could use such abilities to deliver practical benefits to volunteering, consultation, and decision-making.¹⁰⁸

Another way to develop youth engagement could be creating more youth-led community rail partnerships and/or station groups, or integrating youth-led principles into existing partnerships and groups, by appointing young people into leadership roles and ensuring young voices are heard. Those behind 6VT said having more young people involved in community rail could provide a network for people to travel, socialise, take on more responsibility, and share ideas and best practice. Fiona Horne said: “It would be great to share ideas and connect more young people. It’s good practice that could be shared, like a domino effect. It would also allow our young people to again develop their personal skills, travelling and meeting new people.” Roseanna Campbell added: “It would definitely be better if there was more than one youth community rail partnership. Having more around the country would open up more opportunities, more ideas, we could all work together.”

CONCLUSIONS AND IDEAS

“

If we don't bring young people into the movement, in 10 to 15 years' time, there is going to be a serious problem with succession in community rail. Youth engagement is not only beneficial, it is essential for our survival, and we really need to start prioritising it.

”

Daisy Chapman-Chamberlain,
Community Rail Network board member

I. The importance of youth engagement in rail

One of the most common barriers to youth engagement cited by groups within community rail, and by rail industry staff, is a lack of time and resources to focus on it. To move forward, youth engagement needs to be seen not as a separate work strand, but one that can be assimilated with all projects and initiatives, drawing on young voices, creativity, and perspectives, to maximise impact.

As with all community rail activity, there is no 'one size fits all' approach: activities should be guided by needs, aspirations, and opportunities within specific localities. Young people are not a homogenous group, and engagement activities must not only be appropriate to their diverse needs, but also driven and shaped by them. However, the themes and principles in this report should be applicable across different localities, helping youth engagement to be expanded and delivered in ways that are as beneficial as possible.

Our research has found that effective youth engagement within community rail can result in benefits at a host of different levels:

- For the young people as individuals involved in the programmes;
- For organisations who can develop policies and practices more responsive and in tune to the needs of young people; and
- For wider society, with young people becoming connected to communities and contributing to something bigger than themselves.

Youth engagement within community rail gives young people valuable opportunities to learn new skills and hone talents in a real-life environment. They acquire attributes to help improve their personal and professional prospects, broadening their horizons and increasing their chances of fulfilling their potential. They gain self-efficacy and feel valued as their voices are heard, giving them the confidence to fully integrate and connect with their peers, older generations, and the communities they live in. They can also gain confidence and familiarity using their local transport networks, opening a raft of opportunities that they may have otherwise thought out of reach, and developing healthy and sustainable transport habits.

Adding youth voices brings greater inclusivity, with community rail partnerships and groups becoming more representative of the communities they serve, and better positioned to build stronger relationships with local people and partners. Successful youth engagement adds creativity and impetus to community rail, with the need to harness young people's energy, ideas, and enthusiasm to secure the progression and future of the movement a recurring theme emerging from this study.

Society also benefits from effective youth engagement in rail, as young people relish their roles and responsibilities as active citizens and embrace opportunities to play their part in improving sustainability, equality, integration, social mobility, community cohesion, and collective health and wellbeing. They can make important contributions to projects that add social value, and take greater control of their own futures on major issues such as sustainability and climate change. Involving young people in transport seems to hold particular significance too in decarbonising transport and bringing about more sustainable travel behaviours.

Our research shows that to maximise the above benefits, projects have to be meaningfully youth-driven or led, empowering young people through encouraging ownership. There are countless opportunities for engaging young people in specific community rail projects or campaigns, and experience shows that they tend to be brimming with ideas, particularly in environments where their natural creativity can be allowed to shine, or where projects deal with issues they are passionate about. Groups must speak to young people to identify and develop these interests, rather than assuming their thoughts or imposing plans upon them.

To promote engagement opportunities, groups within community rail need to reach out to young people on their ‘own turf’, offer activities that are flexible, authentic, appealing, and enjoyable, and create an environment where volunteering and social action is seen as an accessible and aspirational activity. This can be encouraged by highlighting the impact made by young people already involved in projects, or within similar groups elsewhere, encouraging them to enthuse others via their positive experiences, which may lead to more young people accessing community rail or pursuing career opportunities in the rail industry.



II. Embedding youth engagement: ideas for future development

Community Rail Network’s framework¹⁰⁹ positions youth engagement as a key priority over the coming years, in response to the needs, interests, and enthusiasm of its members. It recommends engagement of young people in community rail should be founded on principles of listening and respecting; empowering participation; and broadening horizons, underpinned by a strong focus on building a positive, sustainable future.

Those principles are reflected in the key themes identified by this research, as the following diagram shows. Some also complement the recommendations of the #iwill campaign on ways organisations can meaningfully embed youth engagement into their ‘normal’ ways of working.¹¹⁰

Key themes identified by our research:

<p>Why is youth engagement important? What benefits does it provide?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Young people can learn and apply new skills, increasing levels of confidence, pride and self-esteem • Rail enables mobility, and can be used to broaden young people’s horizons, increasing opportunities and ambitions • Community rail offers real-life, hands-on experience for young people to develop personally and professionally • Rail benefits from a youth voice, adding new ideas and enthusiasm, helping to create the next generation of workers, volunteers, and passengers • Community rail projects add impact and social value, creating more inclusive and cohesive communities • Young people are engaged as agents of change, helping to promote and enable sustainable travel attitudes and behaviours
<p>What does effective youth engagement look like?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Projects are genuinely shaped and led by young people, who are empowered and gain 'ownership' by the planning and decision-making process • Young people have the chance to express themselves through activities they believe in, linked to their studies, interests, and passions • Engagement opportunities are promoted in a manner that reaches out to young people and raises awareness of community rail and potential rail industry careers • Projects offer opportunities for social interaction, positioning engagement as an inclusive, enjoyable, and aspirational activity • Youth engagement is embedded as a priority within rail, with youth voices seen as an integral element of projects and activities

Five ways to embed youth engagement and social action – adapted from the #iwill campaign

POWER

<p>Prioritise youth - incorporate youth engagement into your organisational strategies and development plans, to increase the quality, scale, and reach of opportunities provided</p>	<p>Offer leadership opportunities - support young people in ascending to leadership roles within groups, using their skills, knowledge, and enthusiasm to enrich and enhance decision-making</p>	<p>Work in partnership - work collaboratively with a diverse range of partners - from within community rail and rail, and further afield - to pool knowledge, resources, and expertise, and promote inclusive engagement</p>	<p>Evaluate impact - regularly assess the benefits and opportunities you are offering to young people, and monitor the impact and value that youth-related projects have on individuals and communities</p>	<p>Recognise young people - celebrate the impact of young people, and work positively and inclusively to recruit and retain youth membership, highlighting the benefits it offers your group</p>
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Some suggestions for ongoing development are set out below, which we hope will keep the conversation on youth engagement moving forward, and which Community Rail Network will be taking on board and facilitating.

For community rail partnerships and groups:

- How could youth engagement be incorporated into strategies and plans, to embed the need for a youth voices in all relevant projects? Consider how working with young people supports your group’s wider aims and how you will you know that you have achieved what you set out to do.
- Might you work with existing youth groups, e.g. youth clubs/social action groups/uniformed bodies/branches of national organisations (e.g. Prince’s Trust, Groundwork UK), to pool resources and expertise? Could you establish joint initiatives, or bring a transport element to their existing programmes?
- How could you ensure opportunities for young people to get involved are accessible, appealing, and promoted visibly and effectively, ideally utilising young people in some way? These might not necessarily be new opportunities, but could involve making existing volunteering more accessible, taking and offering opportunities to young people where they are.
- Have you considered all possibilities for young people to take on leadership roles, e.g. on boards/committees/steering groups, to add youth voices to decision-making and planning? Have you considered representation from, or links with, youth councils or youth transport forums? How could you ensure young voices are heard and understood by your rail partners?
- Could you share the success of youth engagement by submitting award entries or case studies, working with Community Rail Network to share ideas and best practice, or working with your local media?

For rail industry partners:

- How might you support the development of youth-led projects, programmes, partnerships, or station groups within community rail, encouraging links to youth organisations or other partners? Could you provide practical support and ensure they are linked in to Community Rail Network advice and membership?
- Could you create dedicated ‘youth engagement’ champions, who can lead on the issue, ensuring young voices are heard in your planning, decision-making and consultations, and acting as the main point of contact for community rail groups, schools, youth groups etc?
- Could a community rail project or work experience be included as an integral part of your apprenticeships and year-in-industry programmes?
- Could you commit to continuing to work with community rail groups to coordinate joint benefit schemes/projects that give young people greater access to rail travel or experience of jobs/careers within the industry?
- Could rail partners develop and support youth ambassador schemes, encouraging young adults to progress to leadership roles within community rail groups and act as champions of community rail and rail?

Community Rail Network will consider how it can support these strands of youth engagement development, and whether there is scope to further facilitate UK-wide interaction between young people and rail, and the development of youth peer networks. We will also continue to build and extend relationships with key national youth organisation partners who can offer support to community rail, and explore and promote any relevant funding opportunities.

WHO ELSE CAN HELP?

Prince's Trust:

The Prince's Trust supports young people aged 11-30 to build confidence, kickstart a career, learn new skills or even explore self-employment. They work with businesses and supporters to engage with young people and help them to move towards a more secure and positive future, benefitting them and the wider community.

The Trust delivers programmes in partnership with organisations in a variety of industries, including rail, offering work experience, and matching young people with a diverse range of mentors and volunteers, who share their wisdom on everything from CV writing to launching a business. More than three in four young people involved with the Trust successfully progress into jobs, education, or training, empowering them to fulfil their potential and giving them an increasing stake in our economy and society.

For more information, including a list of regional offices, go to www.princes-trust.org.uk/

Groundwork UK:

Groundwork is a federation of charities working both nationally and locally to transform lives in some of the UK's most disadvantaged communities. They are passionate about creating a future where every neighbourhood is vibrant and green, every community is strong and able to shape its own destiny, and no-one is held back by their background or circumstances.

Groundwork helps people gain confidence and skills, get into training and work, protect, and improve green spaces, lead more active lives, and overcome significant challenges such as poverty, isolation, low

skills, and poor health. They bring about change by giving people the confidence, skills, and support to take action for themselves, and have experience of supporting community rail.

For more information, visit www.groundwork.org.uk/

National Citizen Service (NCS):

NCS is a youth programme that runs across England and Northern Ireland. It exists to engage, unite, and empower young people, building their confidence so they can achieve their potential, regardless of their background. Programmes help to build bridges between communities and deliver impact in terms of social cohesion, social mobility, and social engagement.

For details, visit wearencs.com/

#iwill:

The #iwill campaign wants to make participation in social action the norm for young people under 20. To achieve this, it communicates with, connects, and challenges organisations across the UK to embed support for youth social action into their culture and practice. See www.iwill.org.uk/

The campaign also offers funding opportunities via the #iwill fund, a central investment pot managed by the National Lottery Community Fund. For more information and details of potential funding partners, go to www.iwill.org.uk/about-us/iwillfund

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About Community Rail Network:

Community Rail Network is dedicated to supporting community-based groups and partnerships that connect their community with their railway and deliver social benefit. Members can access operational support – including advice on referrals to national youth organisation partners such as The Prince's Trust – training and development, written resources, networking opportunities, and advice on good practice within all aspects of community rail.



For further information, visit communityrail.org.uk, which includes our regularly-updated information on potential funding opportunities communityrail.org.uk/resources-ideas/funding-advice/.

About Rail Delivery Group:

The Rail Delivery Group (RDG) brings together the companies that run Britain's railway into a single team with one goal - to deliver a better railway for you and your community. RDG continues to work with Community Rail Network to further the case for community rail activity and support for it, as well as improving train operators' knowledge of how the community role can help them and the communities they serve through practical examples.

For information, see raildeliverygroup.com.

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