

Community Rail Consultation by the Department for Transport, January 2018 Response from the Association of Community Rail Partnerships (ACoRP)

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About ACoRP

The Association of Community Rail Partnerships (ACoRP) is a national, not-for-profit umbrella organisation working across Britain to support, advocate for and represent the community rail movement. ACoRP's membership includes 57 community rail partnerships (CRPs) and 100 station adoption groups and other community-based groups. Our work includes providing a programme of seminars and training, resources and materials, annual awards recognising good practice, and supporting members through ad hoc advice, planning support, networking and relationship development, and sharing ideas and experience.

We are funded by the Department for Transport (DfT) to support and enhance community rail in England, and we receive funding from the Welsh Government and a range of other agencies and industry partners. ACoRP remains a small organisation (with 13 staff), but underwent major expansion and reorganisation in late 2016. We are therefore significantly stepping up our work to support members and promote community rail, working collaboratively with the DfT to help the community rail movement realise its potential.

Our consultation response therefore draws on our extensive experience of supporting and championing community rail over the best part of two decades, our unique, wide-ranging understanding of current activities, opportunities and challenges within community rail, and our views on how this can be developed further. We have highlighted throughout ACoRP's ongoing role working with the DfT and our members and partners to nurture and enhance community rail, and specific opportunities for us and those we represent to have greater impact. However, we also acknowledge the importance of ACoRP working with DfT to consider responses to this consultation and its implications for our ongoing development, and how we work with members, government and partners over the coming decade.

Executive summary

A detailed response to each of the consultation questions, and an overview of our position, is given below. To sum up the main recommendations we make to the DfT throughout this response, for inclusion in its new community rail strategy:

A strong focus on sustainable, healthy, accessible end-to-end journeys for all – we support the themes and topics identified in the consultation as a far more holistic and constructive framework for community rail, but recommend a clearer focus in the strategy specifically on achieving *sustainable and healthy* journeys that are accessible for all, including bringing in the issue of affordability. The role of community rail volunteering in delivering major benefits to local communities (as well as railways and passengers), and opportunities for developing this, should also be clearly acknowledged.

Support the development of community rail's capacity, capabilities and independence – central to the strategy should be the DfT's commitment to continuing to work with ACoRP to help community rail to achieve more, through greater and more diverse funding, and development of skills, confidence and capability. This should include ongoing development of rail industry support for community rail, but also attention to how community rail's independence and unique position as a grassroots movement is protected and enhanced.

Removal of bureaucratic and other barriers to community rail delivery – we recommend that, using responses to this consultation and further investigation, the DfT works with ACoRP and the National Community Rail Steering Group to develop and undertake an action plan to overcome practical and bureaucratic barriers to community rail's delivery. In particular, there seems a need to address barriers that commonly arise in developing stations for community use, achieving better, more sustainable and active end-to-end journeys, and improving rail accessibility, and to develop clearer, more efficient and consistent processes for community rail to engage with the rail industry on such matters.

Ensure effective collaboration and engagement of community rail – there seems much the DfT might do to ensure effective engagement of community rail, not only by the rail industry, but also local transport

authorities, planners and developers, ensuring they consult with and draw on community rail's knowledge, expertise and unique position. This could be aided by championing and communicating community rail, cross-departmental working, and greater use of the rail franchising system, as set out below.

Championing and communicating community rail – including in official guidance and funding requirements, through industry events and training, aiding development of links with third sector (especially to support diverse engagement and social inclusion), local and devolved authorities and local enterprise partnerships (LEPs), and supporting community rail to communicate its own achievements and plans.

Cross-departmental working – as well as championing and communicating community rail amongst third and public sector partners, nationally, regionally and locally, we suggest that much potential could be unlocked through improved cross-departmental working by the DfT. This could help to foster wider partnership working, more diverse funding opportunities, and create greater recognition of the role of rail and sustainable transport generally in health, wellbeing, economic and community development.

Use of refranchising to support community rail's development – there seems more the DfT can do to use rail franchising to further support community rail's development, ensuring not only a sustainable funding base and greater capacity, but also protecting its independence, ensuring genuine collaboration and engagement, *and* engendering a positive environment for community rail to work with government and industry to develop the rail 'brand'. We suggest this is clearly recognised within the strategy.

Investigate ways to make fuller use of designation and community rail regarding rail development, innovation and reopenings – although designation has not been made full use of as originally envisaged, there is scope to consider how the flexibility it affords could be used in a context of a developing, expanding railway. This might add another valuable element to community rail playing a pivotal role in railway development and ensuring communities have a voice and are at the forefront of this, which we argue should be central to the strategy.

Overview of our position

We very much welcome this consultation on supporting the further development of community rail, and are pleased to have advised the DfT on its preparation. We recognise the importance of the previous Community Rail Development Strategy in providing direction and leadership among community rail partnerships and groups and their partners within the rail industry especially. We therefore look forward to working with the DfT to consider the responses to the consultations, its implications for our own work as well as government, and to communicate the results and new strategy when it is launched.

As well as responding to this consultation directly, drawing on insights gleaned from our members and partners and our experience supporting them, we have actively encouraged our members, partners and contacts to respond themselves. Our response is written in acknowledgement that it will be read alongside these more specific, detailed and local and regional perspectives, which are of course critical to building a full picture of how community rail can be developed, given its nature as a grassroots movement. We have therefore generally kept our remarks broad, general and strategic, rather than going into lots of detail on the specifics of community rail work. We also know the DfT to be well aware of our catalogue of case studies of community rail activity, such as collected through our Community Rail Awards and reports (for example, our [2017](#) and [2016](#) Winners' Booklets and '[What's been achieved in community rail?](#)' report, being used as a key source of information alongside this consultation). However, should DfT require any supplementary evidence alongside our response, we are happy to provide this.

Generally speaking, we strongly agree with the premise of the consultation that further opportunities and greater value can be brought about through effective collaboration between community rail, governments, rail industry and wider stakeholders. We are broadly supportive of the themes and focuses of the consultation, and its recognition of the diverse ways that community rail can deliver social value. In the main, the four themes seem to offer a useful framework for considering the strategic development and support of community rail, and a more holistic and constructive basis going forward than the aims of the previous strategy. However, we have made a few suggestions on how these might be refined to more obviously point to important opportunities, if these are used as themes and objectives in the new strategy.

In our responses to the questions below, we regularly explain how we see ACoRP's role in relation to this developmental work, and how we would like to work with the DfT, our members, partners and wider stakeholders to achieve the aspirations discussed. Generally, we are clear that we have a fundamentally important role to play in the development of community rail, working alongside the DfT and industry, public and third sector partners in support of this strategy, albeit with ongoing collaboration and consultation with our members to ensure we remain attentive and responsive to their needs, ideas and contributions as they emerge. We also draw attention to our vision and mission (published last year in our own 2017-22 strategy, which will be further reviewed in consideration of the results of this consultation), which summarises our long-term aspirations, and our role in supporting our members to achieve their full potential:

Our vision is of a flourishing community rail movement¹, connecting communities and their railways, and enhancing the wellbeing, sustainability and development of communities and railways across Britain.

Our mission is to empower, support and champion the community rail movement, helping community rail partnerships and groups to:

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

Response to consultation questions

1a: What role can community rail play in improving end-to-end journeys?

1b: How can community rail help to:

- **Make journeys more sustainable?**
- **Encourage more healthy travel?**
- **Reduce the environmental impact of travel?**

Community rail is already playing an important role in this area, but there is much potential for further development. Improving end-to-end journeys – making them easier, faster, more pleasant, healthier and more sustainable – can deliver far-reaching benefits to society. This includes improving mobility, economic development and access to opportunities, while also helping to tackle air pollution, congestion and climate change, and the myriad of critical public health and wellbeing problems associated with sedentary, car-dependent lifestyles². However, working towards these important goals requires holistic thinking that extends far beyond the railways and the status quo, and puts people's lifestyles, social trends, and community aspirations at the forefront. Community rail partnerships and groups are well placed to develop and bring this type of thinking to discussions with industry and policy-makers (at a local and regional level, and collectively at a national level), given their position as community-based organisations. In other words, community rail can help industry and policy-makers to more fully consider the needs of individuals and communities (present and future) in their efforts to develop our railways. Given that political and rail industry discourse related to rail development can be quite narrowly focused on 'passengers' (those already using rail, while on the railway) and the 'rail network' (rather than the wider sustainable and active travel network), encouraging this broader perspective is surely a critical part of community rail's contribution to better, healthier, more sustainable journeys. However, for community rail to play this role effectively, its independence and position as a grassroots, community-led movement must be protected, and its ability to engage with wider transport and travel providers and networks, and to advise on regional and local development (rail, transport and travel, and wider community development) supported and developed. This latter point is expanded below under questions two, eight and nine.

¹ We define the community rail movement as consisting of community-based partnerships, groups, organisations, social enterprises and volunteers seeking to benefit their local community and railway, through connecting people with, and engaging them in, the railway, and vice versa.

² For example, see Flint Ellen, Cummins Steven, Sacker Amanda, 2014, '[Associations between active commuting, body fat, and body mass index: population based, cross sectional study in the United Kingdom](#)', BMJ 349:4887; and House of Commons Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee, 2016, '[Air Quality: Fourth Report of Session](#)'

At a practical level, we are aware of a range of initiatives by our members – either led by or involving them as key partners – to improve end-to-end journeys, such as:

- Improving/developing walking and cycling routes connecting stations to town centres or residential areas, or other pedestrian and cyclist facilities, including securing funding and project managing, sometimes linked to wider station improvements (e.g. Three Rivers CRP's Romsey Station path³);
- Advising train operators on problems that hinder connectivity with other modes of travel, such as poorly located cycle storage or inadequate signage, and working with them to achieve and promote improvements (e.g. Kent CRP's station audits, which identified issues with walking routes to stations and subsequently achieved numerous improvements⁴);
- Engaging local transport operators and community transport groups, or in some cases running local transport, to identify and achieve improvements that aid connectivity between rail and other modes (e.g. the Friends of Baildon Station talking to the bus operator and timetabling authority to get a better train/bus connection⁵). Some CRPs, such as Sussex, have bus companies on their boards to aid development of integrated transport, which appears to yield positive results;
- Working with employers to support, enable and incentivise employees to use rail as part of their commute or business journeys, such as by identifying barriers, advising the train operator, local authority or employers on removing barriers, and communications and educational work to encourage modal shift and raise awareness (e.g. Community Rail Cumbria's work with Sellafield);
- Providing advice and information through workshops, visits, materials and communications, to aid understanding and confidence using rail, including interchange with other modes, to help people make smooth, comfortable, affordable journeys that work for their needs (e.g. Sussex CRP's Active Access project with East Sussex District Council⁶).

Alongside the selection of examples above, we draw attention to the Citizen's Rail Project, which ran 2012-2015 in Lancashire, Devon, France, Germany and the Netherlands. This showed how communities could be engaged in a range of ways across various locations to improve journeys and access to rail, with positive results. It was found to be a low-cost way to boost connectivity and address transport needs⁷.

While there are some excellent examples of community rail partnerships and groups delivering in each of these ways and more in their localities, with demonstrable results, there is scope for far more of this type of work across the country. This is underlined by the fact that ACoRP ran an award for Local Transport Integration until 2012, but stopped due to only getting a handful of entries each year. Development of this area might involve a stronger, clearer focus on sustainable and healthy end-to-end journeys (as opposed to simply increasing rail use), and dealing with common barriers to make delivery – which can be halting, slow and frustrating – smoother and more efficient. This could enable community rail to play a pivotal role in ensuring everyone in society is able to get around and access opportunities without polluting the atmosphere, causing congestion and danger, and damaging their own and others' health. DfT can work with ACoRP, industry and wider partners to help achieve this, through:

- a stronger funding environment for community rail, and supporting community rail partnerships to diversify and strengthen their income base (see question nine), helping them to extend their often-limited capacity and work in a focused, effective manner;
- through provision of local transport funding and official guidance to local transport/combined/devolved authorities, the DfT could reference or stipulate the importance of collaboration, support and joined-up planning with community rail;
- cross-departmental working, to improve awareness, identify opportunities and show leadership on the relationship between transport, health, and economic and community development. This seems to be an area of considerable and largely untapped opportunity, often raised in discussion with our members and partners, which we would suggest the community rail strategy could lend impetus to;
- working to address policy inhibitors to community rail engaging with other transport providers and integration across modes, such as non-competition clauses contained in the legislation under which bus companies and community transport providers operate. We suggest that the view taken by the

³ See p11 of ACoRP's 2017 Community Rail Awards Winners' Booklet, <https://acorp.uk.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/Acorp-Comm-32pager-WEB-LR.pdf>

⁴ Example provided by the ACoRP team

⁵ Example provided by the ACoRP team

⁶ Example provided by the ACoRP team

⁷ See www.citizensrail.org/about/

Competition and Markets Authority that buses and trains should operate competitively is of significant hindrance to community rail and others working towards better, sustainable end-to-end journeys, and therefore should be taken up by the DfT;

- removal of bureaucratic and practical barriers to achieving improvements around stations and better connectivity with other modes. This includes ensuring community rail partnerships and groups have ready access to information on land ownership and planned improvements from Network Rail and train operators, are not subject to unreasonably stringent rules and regulations (sometimes unnecessary, inappropriate and of hindrance in a community rail context) and can expect appropriately responsive and open communication and cooperation from Network Rail and train operators (explored further below). In particular, feedback from our members suggests relations with Network Rail could be significantly improved in many areas;
- consideration of how community rail can be supported to engage with industry more fully on rail affordability, such as offering residents' cards, free and discounted travel for young people, or schemes to support part-time travel. We see isolated examples of this among our members, but working with industry to establish and maintain such schemes is a real challenge;
- further development of information, learning and tools for community rail on sustainable and healthy travel, focused on linking rail with walking, cycling and other public transport. ACoRP is already developing its range of advice, training and tools and would be pleased to explore with DfT and other partners how this can be taken forward (this would also be aided by the two points below);
- helping community rail to understand, anticipate and respond to wider trends and innovations in transport and travel (including those DfT is supporting) and how it might tap into these, such as growing interest in cycling, walking and running (and associated funding opportunities), the development of demand-responsive transport, and moves towards autonomous driving technology;
- fostering constructive relationships between community rail and other organisations working in the sustainable and active travel arena, such as local transport authorities, charities like Sustrans, Campaign for Better Transport and Living Streets, bus companies, and the Community Transport Association, to enable collaboration at local level, and networks to be integrated at a strategic level (such as community rail and the National Cycle Network), and funding opportunities to be realised.

We anticipate more specific and detailed insights coming through from other responses to this consultation, particularly from our members outlining barriers that they have encountered in this area and suggesting how these may be overcome.

Finally, we highlight the importance of leadership in this area, to help those delivering community rail activity to recognise the great contribution they can make in bringing about better, healthier, greener journeys, and unleash wider opportunities. ACoRP is already striving to do this through our advice, materials and communications with members, and by forging partnerships that can support our members in this area, such as with sustainable transport organisations. However, we believe that making this topic of central importance to the DfT's Community Rail Development Strategy would be very helpful too. We therefore welcome this question being top of the list in the consultation, and hope this is reflective of its standing in the strategy itself when this is developed. However, we recommend that, if the consultation's themes are to be developed into key pillars or objectives of the strategy, this topic of achieving better, healthier, more sustainable end-to-end journeys should be explicitly recognised.

2: How can community rail help:

a. Communities have a voice in influencing the provision of rail?

b. Complementary transport services and development of the rail network?

Given the altered context community rail is operating in, and unprecedented investment going into our railways, we see this as an increasingly important part of the community rail movement's role. For government and industry to achieve its aims in relation to rail (including a better deal for passengers, and a more productive, sustainable and innovative railway, as per the DfT's Vision for Rail⁸), attentiveness to the needs, interests and aspirations of individuals and communities is crucial. This is important in relation to passengers, but also those not currently or often using rail. If our railways are to develop further, and play a greater role in benefitting society, they must better serve the needs of both existing passengers and

⁸ As per the DfT's Vision for Rail summary, 2017,

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/663124/rail-vision-web.pdf

potential and future passengers too, such as children and young people yet to form travel habits, and those who might be able to switch modes given greater access and incentive. Therefore, the needs of society generally, and whole communities, must be considered, linked to the points above about improving end-to-end journeys. As stated above, given that community rail partnerships and groups are community-based and -led, they can make a great contribution to this, by advising train operators, Network Rail, local authorities, government and others of needs and opportunities they identify. The potential for this to make a big difference at a local, regional and national level should be recognised in the DfT's strategy.

Our members tend to hold a great deal of knowledge and understanding of local travel and transport needs and opportunities, and can offer many useful insights for improving rail locally or regionally to meet these. Because of their position, this comes from a different, more community-orientated (and extremely valuable), perspective than that of industry and government. We are aware of a great many examples of community rail partnerships in particular, and to some extent station groups, feeding into the rail industry and local government in this way. This ranges from consulting on proposed timetable changes, to advising on rolling stock needs, to feeding in local perceptions of the train operator, to suggesting needs and priorities for station improvements. This often brings attention to matters and ideas that may otherwise be overlooked. In some cases, it has influenced area-wide transport strategies (e.g. Cornwall County Council and Rail North), and in others helped lead to major service improvements with a transformative effect (e.g. Esk Valley's early morning service giving greater access to employment and the local hospital, and Cumbrian Coast Line's forthcoming Sunday services⁹). In addition, the movement as a whole can be drawn on for such insights at a broader, strategic level, especially through ACoRP as a national umbrella body with a unique (albeit constantly evolving) overview of our members' work, aims and concerns. We suggest that drawing on the bank of knowledge, ideas and insights within community rail, as a valuable resource for government, industry and society, should be central to the DfT's community rail strategy. It might also be specified by government in its requirements of rail industry companies, and encouraged among local authorities, planners and developers, to ensure more is made of community rail as a resource.

However, for this type of input to yield results at a local and regional level especially, it is critical for the rail industry to take a collaborative, partnership-based approach to working with community rail, ensuring there are opportunities for consultation, dialogue and, crucially, to *act* on community rail groups' input *in partnership with them*. In many cases this appears to be happening, perhaps increasingly so with train operators now investing in community rail, and through devolved governments consulting and involving our members on long term strategies (e.g. Rail North at a recent consultation seminar) but there remain frustrations among our members of not always being involved and consulted on changes early on. There also seems to be much untapped potential in developers, planners and local/combined authorities engaging and consulting with community rail, especially to ensure links with rail are fully considered and realised in relation to housing and civic developments. For example, we are aware of examples of large developments being built in close proximity to railways, but developers failing to engage community rail or connect new houses with stations. This of course ties in closely with the points under question one. We would suggest that leading on this matter is a crucial role for the DfT to play, ensuring that community rail is being utilised, engaged and heeded to do with rail, community and regional development. As well as communicating and championing community rail among government at different levels and across departments, the DfT might undertake work to ensure community rail and its role in development is recognised in official guidance, and strategic level transport events and learning opportunities. Also, the point above about safeguarding independence is once again critical here. If, for example, a community rail partnership becomes subsumed or controlled by a train operator, it is likely to compromise their ability to play an expert, community-led advisory and partnership role from this unique vantage point.

There are without doubt ways that community rail partnerships and groups can be supported to be effective in this respect. As noted by the DfT in the consultation, the issue of how widely community rail engages and listens to the community, and whether it is representative of and in tune with the community as a whole, is highly relevant here. While often possessing a strong and nuanced appreciation of the role of the railway in local life, and opportunities for its development, community rail partnerships and groups are often not engaging their communities as widely as they themselves might like. The ambition to 'engage more widely', particularly across diverse, younger and 'hard-to-reach' groups, is raised frequently by our members, and came through strongly in the results of our recent members' survey.¹⁰ Supporting our members to develop in this area is a priority theme for ACoRP, which we are picking up through resources, events, direct

⁹ Examples provided directly by the ACoRP team through contact with members

¹⁰ See ACoRP's 2017 members' survey write up, at <https://acorp.uk.com/acorp-2017-membership-survey/>

support, and our training and development programme (being set up at present). We are pleased to already have the support of DfT and other funders on this, but there is clearly a need for further and ongoing focus on this. We anticipate a need to continue to offer – and continually grow and adapt – further advice, training and tools, and to develop supportive partnerships, over the lifespan of this strategy, and hope to have the ongoing support of the DfT on this. The appetite and interest is there from our members, and we see many examples of good practice in this area (such as those detailed under question four below), but we need and want to do much more to help our members engage, represent, understand and converse with their communities in the broadest possible way. This should greatly enhance their ability to ‘help communities have a voice’, and to provide strong, constructive and fully community-led counsel and involvement to industry, government and beyond.

While there is much experience across the community rail movement in working with the rail industry (although this doesn’t always go smoothly, as mentioned), there is scope to develop skills and capacity on influencing development on a wider scale. Linked to question one, community rail might (and sometimes does) raise its sights further, beyond the railway, considering the way rail and its development is bound up with wider transport networks, systems, trends and strategies. This can be enormously valuable, effectively meaning that the community is championing the railway and its social value, outside of railway circles, at a strategic level – not only championing the railway within the community, as per the traditional view of community rail. There seems to be a greater role ACoRP could play, with support from the DfT and others, to help community rail partnerships and groups to understand, influence and align with community development, regeneration and planning strategies. These sorts of opportunities are being raised by some of our members, and we are starting to work towards this, such as advising members on evidence-based communications, and working with RSSB on development of a framework on the social value of rail, which we plan to adapt for use by our members. However, we might take this further, by providing specialist advice and support on responding to consultations and engaging with planning, and helping smaller groups like station friends play an advisory role in a manageable way. Again, this is a resourcing issue as well as a skills one, as community rail partnerships and groups are often working with limited means, or may believe that this type of work lies outside what they are funded to deliver. As well as the recommendations under question nine on funding, central government and industry might provide useful leadership on this, through communicating the value of and opportunity for community rail to play a greater role in wider development, suggesting that it is a valuable part of what community rail can contribute. If community rail partnerships and groups sometimes see themselves as being only about championing rail to the community, then leadership and engagement on this topic may assist with reimagining community rail as being about more than this: the community championing rail among strategic planners, policy-makers and thought-leaders. The DfT can also, as noted above, encourage transport authorities and other relevant parties to engage and consult with community rail in this way, through its leadership, funding provision and guidelines.

3: Where should the Government encourage community rail to develop on parts of the network currently without active CRPs or other community participation?

ACoRP believes that community rail can play a highly beneficial role in any locality served by a railway. Therefore, we are committed to helping the community rail movement to grow, as well as develop its effectiveness benefitting communities. A significant part of ACoRP’s work is supporting emerging and embryonic community rail partnerships from the initial idea forming through to (and beyond) becoming a fully-fledged CRP and full member of ACoRP. We are working with about 12 such groups at present, although the number fluctuates. We are ideally placed to do this work, as a not-for-profit umbrella organisation dedicated to serving, supporting and championing community rail, and able to share insights and lessons across the movement. This work is funded by the DfT in England, and in a few areas is starting to be supplemented by train operator funding. We would stress the importance to the community rail movement’s development of this support continuing, and ideally being enhanced further across the country. However, we are clear that development of new CRPs needs to be community-driven, and believe that if it is ‘imposed from above’, it can have ramifications for the independence and sustainability of the CRP, should the enthusiasm and supportive frameworks not be present and rooted in the community. We are also clear that, given its nature as a grassroots movement whose independence should be safeguarded, community rail will inevitably take many shapes and forms. ACoRP therefore works to support and advise, rather than dictate a particular route, set-up or practice (unless, in rare situations, we have concerns that practices adopted by members are unsafe or unethical, in which case we will intervene). We do, of course, work to share good practice, encourage and guide, where certain approaches are evidenced to work and may be beneficial for others. This means that, increasingly, as new community rail partnerships and groups

start to form, we are able to point them at a range of examples that have worked elsewhere.

These assertions are not to the exclusion of ACoRP and partners working to identify areas where community rail activity is lacking and where there may be particular needs and opportunities for it to spring up. We already keep an ear to the ground and encourage community groups, organisations and individuals to approach us for advice if they are considering starting any kind of community rail activity – and of course we support and advise where existing partnerships look to expand their work. We have also worked in some cases with train operators to undertake research into specific opportunities along their lines, such as a project with Virgin Trains East Coast to identify potential community uses for disused station buildings. We will also shortly be stepping up work under new rail franchises, with funding from those train operators, to identify and support emerging opportunities for new station adopters and CRPs. With funding from train operators in other areas, we might undertake similar enhanced work elsewhere, but it is dependent on dedicated resourcing being put in place. We would stress the value of this work being delivered by ACoRP, given our existing skills and experience, our ability to deliver this work cost-effectively, our ability to share lessons across the community rail network, and the need to protect the independence of community rail, and nurture its development rather than impose it. We have started to make these sorts of opportunities clearer in our liaison with franchise bidders, and our work advising the DfT on refranchising, but it would be beneficial to include this ambition to grow the movement, and ACoRP's pivotal role in this, within the strategy, and for DfT to look further at how refranchising can be used to support community rail's expansion and development, while also protecting its independence. For example, new franchises that include funding for community rail should allow for and support the emergence of additional and expanded community rail activities, which ACoRP can advise on.

Finally, we would also emphasise the importance of communications, and raising the profile of community rail, to the movement's growth and development. It seems likely that, if the movement is to be supported to grow organically in a community-driven manner, then raising wider awareness about its existence and importance will support this. If more people understand the concept, and the value of communities being engaged and involved in their railways, this should galvanise interest in setting up more of this kind of work (as well as encouraging wider engagement with community rail as a resource, as noted above). In particular, if there is greater awareness of community rail across the rail industry, government (across central government departments, and at devolved and local level), and the wider public and third sectors, this would enable more opportunities to be identified to encourage and nurture community rail activity to spring up. We are conscious that community rail remains relatively low profile, even within rail and related sectors, and there is a much opportunity for DfT to work with ACoRP, industry and other partners to help address this, through networking, PR and digital communications, especially to share the successes and value of community rail. We have set out within our organisational strategy that a key aim for ACoRP is to raise the profile of and champion community rail, but we remain resource-limited in this area. Working in partnership is crucial therefore, something we are taking forward gradually, but would welcome greater support and involvement from the DfT and rail industry in this area. It seems this could be of great benefit too in improving the 'image' of rail, which has of course taken a battering in the media, supporting wider government aspirations.

We also recognise the importance of empowering CRPs and groups to communicate their own work and messages effectively, and are conscious there is much more to do in this area, especially to help the movement take advantage of digital opportunities. See our recommendations, p22-23, in our recent report on [Communicating Community Rail](#).¹¹ We have stepped up our work to address this, particularly with support from Northern, including producing a research report and running workshops and webinars, but this will need to continue and be expanded over coming years, again requiring wider support. We would anticipate that by helping CRPs and groups to communicate effectively, alongside and inter-linked with engaging more widely (as explored below), it may inspire others in neighbouring areas, or new station adopters in that area, to develop community rail work. Once again, as shown in our research report, the independence of CRPs and groups is critical to this communications activity being effective, due to the need to establish and convey a clear sense of identity, as much as resourcing and skills.

4a: What is the role of community rail in supporting:

- Community cohesion?**

¹¹ ACoRP, 2017, *Communicating Community Rail*, <https://acorp.uk.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/Acorp-Comm-32pager-WEB-LR.pdf>

- Promoting diversity?
 - Enabling social inclusion?
- 4b: How is this best achieved?**

As stated above, community rail activities are varied between different localities, and rightly so as they are driven by needs and opportunities within local communities. However, the concept of bringing people together and promoting social inclusion is common to much community rail work, even if its delivery takes many forms. We can identify six main ways that community rail partnerships and groups are working at present in this arena, each over-lapping:

- **volunteering** – all community rail partnerships and groups coordinate and/or support volunteers to carry out work connected to railways, often gardening and basic upkeep of stations through station adoption, as well as involvement in activities like those below. For example, at London Road Station, volunteers grow fruit and veg, maintain gardens that brighten up darker corners, provide pick your own herb boxes, oversee station heritage boards, and have weekly socials¹². A 2015 report estimated that 3,200 volunteers are active in community rail, giving 250,000 hours per year¹³, although we suspect this is a major under-estimate. As well as benefits to the railways, passengers and local people through station improvements and reduced vandalism¹⁴, volunteering is shown to greatly benefit volunteers and their communities through improved health, wellbeing and cohesion¹⁵;
- **social and creative activities** – most partnerships and groups we work with organise some form of sociable and creative activities that aim to bring people together and create pride and enjoyment in the railway. These include ‘music trains’, festive events, summer fun days and fetes, community art projects, and competitions such as photography. The value of such activities should not be overlooked; as well as providing social, recreational and creative opportunities that aid wellbeing and cohesion, they are likely to play an important role in raising the profile of community rail and generating positive connections with, and attracting people to, the railway (see p16 of our [Communicating Community Rail](#) for examples, and more discussion and evidence on this¹⁶);
- **educational work** – the majority of our CRP members work with schools, youth groups or others to deliver educational sessions, visits, materials or communications that aim to promote awareness and confidence in using rail, particularly among younger generations and those with particular needs. Much of this is geared towards developing understanding of both the benefits and practicalities of travelling by rail, such as to do with ticketing, interchange, sustainable and healthy travel, and safety. A sophisticated example is Community Rail Lancashire’s education programme¹⁷. By improving the ease and confidence with which people can travel by rail, this can increase access to employment, education, training and recreation opportunities (discussed further below), and may have profound implications for individuals’ and communities’ prosperity, health and wellbeing by helping to build long-term (perhaps life-long) healthy and sustainable mobility;
- **rail accessibility and affordability** – a broad spectrum of work takes place among our members to help to ensure that everyone can access the railway by breaking down physical, social, financial and psychological barriers. This is explored in detail under question five below;
- **stations as community hubs** – making stations and railways more pleasant, sociable and welcoming places, where individuals and local groups can interact, celebrate heritage and culture, and engage in healthy and fun activities. This is explored in detail under question seven;
- **targeted engagement** – an increasing number of our members deliver targeted programmes with groups with specific needs, to aid wellbeing, health, rehabilitation or social development. These sorts of programmes often engage groups that might otherwise be unlikely to get involved in

¹² See <http://londonrdstationpartnership.wordpress.com/> or contact Sussex CRP for more information.

¹³ Transport Regeneration, 2015, *Value of Community Rail Partnerships and Volunteering*, <http://acorp.uk.com/research-projects/research/value-of-community-rail-partnerships/>

¹⁴ ACoRP has catalogued many examples of stations being transformed into brighter, more pleasant and productive places through such volunteering, including through its ‘It’s your station’ awards. There is also some evidence of reduced vandalism, including at the example given in the text, London Road Station, where British Transport Police statistics show a drop in crime at the station from 2011 onwards, when the station partnership was set up (data provided directly to ACoRP by Sussex CRP).

¹⁵ For example, see Andrew G Haldane, Bank of England, 2014, ‘In giving, how much do we receive? The social value of volunteering’ speech, <http://www.bankofengland.co.uk/publications/Documents/speeches/2014/speech756.pdf>

¹⁶ ACoRP, 2017, *Communicating Community Rail*, acorp.uk.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/Acorp-Comm-32pager-WEB-LR.pdf

¹⁷ See <https://downtheline.org.uk/>

community rail and who may face mobility issues and social marginalisation, such as ex-offenders (e.g. On the Out's adoption of Salford Central¹⁸), people recovering from addiction (Community Rail Cumbria's Rail Journey to Recovery project¹⁹), people with disabilities or support needs (e.g. Sussex CRP's Try The Train²⁰), or people living with dementia (Bentham Line's dementia friendly railway work²¹). This is an emerging area, with an increasing array of examples. While evidence is still emerging on its value, initial feedback and case studies suggest that there can be life-changing implications for individuals involved (see, for example, [Community Rail Cumbria's film](#)).

As set out above, work in each of these areas appears to offer great value to communities and the railways themselves, and there is without doubt scope to develop this further. The social and economic value being delivered is difficult to quantify, but we hope the project underway by RSSB to assess the social value of rail will help us and our members to begin to better assess and understand this, alongside efforts by some CRPs to evaluate their specific activities, such as Community Rail Lancashire's education programme. This should aid further development of this type of community rail work: if we have a better appreciation of the value being delivered in this area through different methods, then we can better support our members to prioritise and focus their efforts in an intelligent, evidence-led way, and achieve sustainable funding for such work (as set out below under question nine). We would suggest that the DfT's strategy should clearly highlight the importance of this work to better understand the social value being delivered through community rail, especially to aid further development of impact in relation to social inclusion, and the DfT's commitment to supporting its roll-out by ACoRP, in partnership with its members, clearly stated.

While most community rail partnerships are delivering work under most or all of the broad headings above, we believe that with improved capacity, skills and efficiencies much more could be done in this area – and our members' survey and direct contact with members shows great appetite for this. As well as creating and rolling out a framework that can be used to assess the social value of community rail, there are a number of ways this development can be supported. Firstly, we encourage the DfT to work with industry to ensure a collaborative and supportive approach to working with community rail on this area, including specifically exploring opportunities for improving affordability for marginalised and disadvantaged groups especially. As noted above, this is currently not referenced in the consultation document, and we believe there is much potential for community rail to work more widely with industry to ensure young people, groups with particular needs and disabilities, low income families and part-time workers can afford (as well as physically access) rail travel. This would surely have a marked effect on how inclusive our railways are, especially if used in conjunction with education and community engagement work.

As with the other development areas discussed above and below, funding, capacity and resourcing within community are clear factors here, which we consider in depth under question nine. However, development of expertise and skills in community engagement and diversity, as outlined under question three, is also pertinent here, to help community rail to reach and involve people across their communities. Generally, community rail partnerships and groups work with an open, inclusive, collaborative ethos – and we are certainly not aware of any examples of deliberate exclusion – but there is without doubt scope for community rail to engage on a broader basis, with some groups under-represented at present. Our members tell us they want to engage harder-to-reach groups, including minority groups and those who face disadvantage and marginalisation, and there is particular interest in engaging younger generations. Members and partners often express worries that the community rail workforce, voluntary and paid, lacks diversity and faces associated problems to do with succession and representativeness. However, there are some signs of change in the paid workforce at least becoming more balanced in terms of gender, age and ethnicity, and this is something ACoRP will continue to support and advise on to help members adopt good practice in HR, equality and diversity. Supporting members to engage more widely through good practice in volunteer recruitment and retention, and effective, multi-channel communications, will also be a key area of focus for us. It is important to note that a lack of diversity among volunteers is not unique to the community rail movement, but a common challenge across the third sector²². Nevertheless, we recommend the community rail strategy gives attention to this need to support development of volunteering within

¹⁸ Information provided directly to ACoRP by Northern

¹⁹ See <https://acorp.uk.com/the-rail-journey-to-recover/>

²⁰ See <http://www.sussexcrp.org/try-the-train-trip-to-london/>

²¹ See <https://www.communityraillancashire.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/Bentham-Line-Dementia-Friendly-reduced-copy.pdf>

²² For example, see Sport England, <https://www.sportengland.org/our-work/volunteering/volunteering-explained/diversity/how-can-we-attract-volunteers-from-more-diverse-backgrounds/> and Volunteer Now, 2005, *Diversity in Volunteering*, <http://www.volunteernow.co.uk/fs/doc/publications/diversity-in-volunteering-information-sheet.pdf>

community rail, which we return to under question six below. There is much that community rail might learn from wider efforts across the third sector to improve diversity in volunteering – such as through ensuring volunteers can access benefits that suit diverse interests²³ – and important that ACoRP and the DfT support community rail to access and understand these lessons and examples. Indeed, this is something that is being picked up as a key area of focus through ACoRP's forthcoming training and development programme, and we stress the importance of the DfT's ongoing support of this aspect of our work.

Where we are seeing great success in community rail being inclusive and representative, engaging diverse groups, and effectively targeting disadvantaged and hard-to-reach groups, it invariably involves close partnerships with local charities and other community and voluntary groups. Aiding the development of such links is another important way ACoRP, the DfT and others can help community rail to achieve more. In some cases, this involves working with local groups to inform people about community rail and encourage them to take part, volunteer and have their say. An example is Smethwick Rolfe Street Station, where the train operator worked with local faith groups to recruit station adopters across the diverse community, who now deliver and steer the initiative alongside station staff, and engaged a college in a renovation project. This not only led to a revived station that passengers and local people can take pride in, but brought together people of different ages, faiths and ethnicity, and helped them to develop skills and give back to their community²⁴. Another example is the Rail Journey to Recovery, where Community Rail Cumbria established a partnership with a branch of the charity Turning Point. People recovering from addiction being supported by Turning Point are enlisted as volunteers on stations, carrying out maintenance and gardening. The experience appears to be extremely beneficial, as volunteers can take pride in their work while coming into contact with local people²⁵. With these examples, there is scope to replicate or adapt in other areas, dependent on local contexts. This can be achieved through ACoRP continuing to share and point to good practice case studies (and results and lessons as they emerge), and to further support members to develop skills and thinking on partnership development. However, there seems more ACoRP, DfT and industry could do to further promote this type of partnership working. ACoRP is starting to identify and engage potential partners (like Turning Point), where there is scope to work with the national organisation or umbrella body to encourage and broker links at a local level between our members and their branches or groups. We would welcome DfT and cross-government support in making such links, and its inclusion in the DfT's strategy. We also suggest that industry and devolved and local government might support introductions and the forging of links at a local and regional level. This sort of work can also help the railway industry to be more caring and community-focused.

5: How can community rail help to make sure that the railway is accessible to as many people as possible?

We agree wholeheartedly with the points made in the consultation under 3.28 about the importance of rail being accessible and a safe, supportive and inclusive environment for all, and recommend that this is a key pillar of the DfT's strategy. We welcome the DfT's holistic description of this theme as relating to accessibility for all, as well as groups with disabilities and particular needs, although we would highlight again that a key part of people and especially marginalised groups being able to access rail not mentioned in the strategy is its affordability.

We believe that supporting the railway to be more accessible, and supporting communities to access rail, is a critical part of community rail's role, and passion and concern for this area of work comes through strongly from our members. The fact that community rail partnerships and groups' position are community-based and -led – as well as friendly, personable and local – means that they are very well suited to play a pivotal role in taking this critical issue forward. Again, there is a wide range of activity across the community rail movement at present, but much scope for further development, and this is an area where ACoRP would like to do more to help and facilitate our members in their efforts. This topic intersects a great deal with topics discussed above to do with supporting end-to-end journeys, communities having a voice, and social inclusion, so some of the examples mentioned above are also relevant here. However, to give a sense of how community rail is already working in this area, it includes:

²³ For example, see NCVO, 2016, <https://blogs.ncvo.org.uk/2016/03/14/recruiting-volunteers-how-variety-can-reap-benefits/> and Guardian Voluntary Sector Network, 2018 <https://www.theguardian.com/voluntary-sector-network/2018/jan/03/volunteer-transform-life-charities-councils>

²⁴ See p5 of ACoRP's 2017 Community Rail Awards Winners' Booklet, <https://acorp.uk.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/ACoRP-CRA17-Winners-Brochure.pdf>

²⁵ See ACoRP's 2017 article, <https://acorp.uk.com/the-rail-journey-to-recover/>

- Advising train operators, Network Rail and/or relevant authorities of accessibility problems, such as at stations. For example, at Driffield, the station adoption group highlighted that the large, difficult-to-negotiate overbridge caused problems for anyone with limited mobility, families, cyclists, and people with baggage, with hopes that this may be addressed soon²⁶;
- Running workshops and visits for groups facing accessibility barriers or with particular support needs, to build confidence, familiarity and understanding of the practicalities of using rail. For example, Community Rail Lancashire's Railway Confidence programme²⁷;
- Managing, spearheading and/or seeking funding for improvements that aid accessibility. For example, the Bentham Line worked with train operator Northern to get wider gates and doorways, ramps and signage put in at Bentham Station, aiding access to trains and station facilities²⁸.

As well as telling us that they are keen to develop impact in this area, our members are proactive in making us aware of the barriers they face, and we know that this came across through the DfT's consultation workshop in York, hosted by ACoRP. We anticipate that specific concerns will come through in more detail in our members' consultation responses, and would encourage the DfT to work with us and industry partners to address these through the new strategy. These barriers overlap with those mentioned under question one, to do with achieving better end-to-end sustainable and healthy travel, and those explored under question seven, to do with maximising use of station buildings and land. They are often to do with communications and engagement with the rail industry, particularly common difficulties in engaging Network Rail, and bureaucracy and slow progress surrounding industry taking forward community rail ideas and proposals, often disproportionate to the scale of projects being suggested.

Once again, for community rail to develop its impact in this area, it requires a collaborative, responsive and partnership-based approach from the rail industry, and leadership from government. In the case of accessibility, we would suggest that there is particular scope for government-led change, with greater consistency and improved standards across the rail network, in terms of how this work is conducted, in partnership with communities and community rail. We would suggest that clear, consistent and effective procedures that community rail partnerships and groups can use to raise issues and inform improvements to stations and services would be useful here, alongside examination of common barriers and how these can be overcome. We therefore recommend that the DfT work with ACoRP, and other expert partners such as disability groups, to conduct a major review of this area and set out a detailed action plan, including working with industry and using government guidance, standards and franchising to remove barriers. This plan could have a particular focus on rail accessibility, but might extend to community uses for stations and integrated end-to-end journeys, since the barriers are often similar across these areas of work.

Finally, we would also suggest there is untapped potential to link up the outreach work being done by our members to build confidence and understanding among specific groups in their communities with the rail industry's services supporting passengers with disabilities and other needs while they are using the railways. This could involve a two-way training and awareness programme to ensure railway and community rail people are aware of each other's services and activities in this arena, and able to inter-refer appropriately and give feedback. In this way, railway staff could direct passengers to local community rail workshops or supported trips, and community rail partnerships and groups can advise local people on accessing railway support services. This seems like something ACoRP might develop and deliver through its training and development work, supported and facilitated by the DfT.

6: How can community rail support local economies and railways grow through:

- **Increasing employment?**
- **Education and training opportunities?**
- **Supporting small businesses?**
- **Social enterprise development?**

There are many examples of community rail supporting community development, regeneration and economic growth, but we also believe this is an area with much opportunity for growth, and where we are only just starting to assess and understand the impact of community rail. Activities under this theme are again wide-ranging and vary across our members, as is appropriate if they are in tune with local needs and opportunities, although there is no doubt scope for replicating and adapting successful initiatives in more

²⁶ Example provided directly by ACoRP team

²⁷ See <https://www.communityraillancashire.co.uk/railway-confidence-programme/>

²⁸ Example provided directly by ACoRP team

areas. We again anticipate that the consultation responses submitted by our members will be very useful in exploring in more detail the extent of work of this type and specific opportunities for development. However, we offer below some broad suggestions and ideas. We also strongly agree with the DfT's recognition of the need for engagement from and with local authorities, business groups and local enterprise partnerships, and suggest that the DfT use the strategy to strengthen its role in championing community rail and encouraging greater engagement from such parties.

Firstly, in regards to community rail supporting, offering and increasing access to employment, education and training, this is an area we have been considering as part of researching and planning our new training and development programme. As well as aiding skills development and pathways within the community rail movement, we aim through this programme to help our members deliver greater benefit to their communities in terms of skills development and economic opportunity. The main opportunities we have identified for delivering on this aspect of the programme this over the coming three years relate to: (a) supporting the development of volunteering in community rail; and (b) helping community rail to link up with and support wider opportunities and skill/career pathways, such as rail industry apprenticeships, work experience/placements/reintegration schemes, and STEM ambassadors.

On volunteering, as well as improving diversity and inclusiveness (as discussed under question four above), we see much scope for community rail partnerships, station friends and other community rail groups to identify, develop and promote skills-development opportunities among current and new volunteers. Without doubt, community rail volunteering is already helping to develop transferable skills and knowledge, ranging from organic food growing (e.g. at Todmorden's edible station planters²⁹), to building maintenance (e.g. Greater Anglia 'Community Space' scheme³⁰), to event management (e.g. Essex and South Suffolk CRP's Bucket and Spade Train³¹). However, our training and development programme will seek to refine this further, such as by helping our members to identify skills being developed already, additional ways volunteers can help them and benefit themselves, and establish easy to manage recognition schemes such as skills badging. We want to support members to be clear about what they want from volunteering and help them to recruit the volunteers they need, including a more diverse range of volunteers, and develop their volunteer management skills. We note that supporting the development of community rail volunteering – and the benefits this can bring to the community rail movement, the volunteers and the railways – is not expressly mentioned in the DfT's consultation. We suggest this should be clearly flagged up in the strategy as a major development area that ACoRP, the DfT, industry and wider partners can and should support, which benefits social inclusion and economic development.

In relation to community rail linking to and supporting wider skills and employment pathways and opportunities, again there appears to be much potential, largely untapped at present. While a few of our members host work experience and apprentice placements, we have identified a need among many to develop their ability to host such placements in a way that is manageable and mutually-beneficial. This could of course aid development, capacity and community engagement within community rail, as well as developing skills and awareness in transport and travel from a unique community perspective. It is important also to note the multiple ways this can benefit industry, such as by providing a more work-ready, skilled *and community-aware* recruitment pool, and other sectors that can gain from such skills, such as local government and the community and voluntary sector. In addition to placements and work experience, through our training and development programme we will be supporting community rail to connect with skill pathways and wider opportunities through signposting and provision of off-the-peg templates, tools and training materials, to enable easy, constructive take-up and linkage with national initiatives, and a menu of offers to support existing, related apprenticeships, such as in the rail industry. We have discussed with the DfT these plans in detail, and hope to have the DfT's ongoing support rolling this out.

In relation to supporting education, we know that our member Community Rail Lancashire is submitting a detailed discussion based on their extensive experience and plans in this area of work. We also anticipate many of our members will detail their educational work and ideas for further development in their consultation responses. However, it is important for us to stress the value of work in this area and give thoughts for its further extension. Working with schools, colleges and youth groups such as scouts and guides is a common feature of community rail partnerships and groups' work. In most cases, this is focused on building confidence and understanding in using rail (e.g. the Penistone Line Partnership's visits and

²⁹ See <https://www.incredible-edible-todmorden.co.uk/projects/community-herb-gardens>

³⁰ See <https://www.greateranglia.co.uk/about-us/community-space>

³¹ See <https://www.essex.gov.uk/News/Pages/Bucket-and-Spade-Train-hailed-huge-success.aspx>

talks with schools and Brownies³²), although there are signs that there is a growing focus too on promoting understanding of sustainable travel specifically (e.g. Devon and Cornwall Rail Partnership's Carbon Reduction Challenge³³), which we welcome linked to reasons set out under question one. In some cases community rail educational and skills development work is based around or linked to stations property development (e.g. Helmsdale Station's photographic darkroom³⁴), so this also links to question seven.

We would suggest that the DfT's strategy could lend support and leadership to community rail stepping up its educational work with young people especially (i.e. secondary age up to young people starting their careers), with the particular aim of playing a pivotal role in encouraging a shift towards sustainable and healthy travel work. This is important to help young people to access employment and training opportunities, as well as developing healthy, happy, sustainable lifestyles – and is especially vital given the prohibitively high costs and significant risks involved in young people learning to drive and running a motor vehicle³⁵. In other words, by helping young people understand and access sustainable travel, it can help to open up broader employment and training opportunities, as well as developing useful skills and awareness relating to sustainability, community and travel issues. There also seems scope for community rail to offer wider practical and technical skills development opportunities linked to the railways by working with colleges especially, as in the example of Smethwick Rolfe Street's renovation by students from a local building college, detailed above. This topic of engaging young people therefore seems to be an area of great opportunity, where community rail work can have profound, lasting consequences for people's lives, and where our members want to do more. We are being told by our members (through our survey³⁶ and directly) they are keen to engage teenagers and young people more – much community rail educational work is presently with under-12s – and would like advice on this. We intend to step up our efforts in this area, and would welcome the DfT's further support with this, and urge that it is strongly recognised in the strategy. We also recommend the DfT consider how such educational work can be linked to practical solutions to help young people to afford and access rail travel, such as through better integration of modes (see question one) and supported/discounted travel, such as with Northern's Lakes Line trial, which could be of huge benefit if rolled out more widely, but we understand its future is uncertain³⁷.

This question also refers to community rail's involvement in and support of small businesses and social enterprises. We would firstly draw attention to the important role of community rail in promoting and enhancing tourism and leisure travel by rail, which delivers social and economic benefit in a number of ways. This work is important in gaining maximum value from our railways at a time when spare capacity is mostly available at off-peak times. It is also important to health and wellbeing, in aiding access to affordable, active and enjoyable leisure, recreation and social opportunities for families, groups and individuals. However, we would also suggest that this work helps to encourage not just economic development, but sustainable, community-orientated economic development which is especially beneficial for small businesses, enterprises and the environment. Tourists and visitors bring money into the localities they visit, and encourage investment opportunities and regeneration. But how they spend their money and how they travel is important too. Community rail encourages people to travel by train, to explore local culture, heritage and landscape, and to engage with local people. This type of tourism and travel builds pride in and awareness of an area, is less damaging and detrimental to the community and environment (through less traffic congestion, noise and air pollution) and probably means money is spent with small, independent local businesses, rather than big chains and supermarkets that involve 'capital flight' out of the area. Good examples include Devon and Cornwall's new 'Foodie Guides'³⁸, which showcase small, independent food businesses along rail routes, and East Suffolk Lines' shuttle buses to the Folk East Festival³⁹, enabling people to travel sustainably into this beautiful area to attend this locally-organised festival. We are keen to support more work of this type. Our tourism and heritage officer is currently funded to focus her efforts in the Northern franchise area, so there is certainly scope to step up this work, with appropriate funding, in other areas.

³² See http://penline.co.uk/?page_id=344

³³ See p3 of ACoRP's 2017 Community Rail Awards Winners' Booklet, <https://acorp.uk.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/ACoRP-CRA17-Winners-Brochure.pdf>

³⁴ See <https://graysartschoolaberdeen.com/2017/03/06/helmsdale-photography-residential/>

³⁵ See <http://www.brake.org.uk/facts-resources/15-facts/488-young-drivers-the-hard-facts> and <https://www.theguardian.com/money/2017/mar/06/young-drivers-bear-brunt-car-insurance-costs-rise>

³⁶ See ACoRP's 2017 members' survey write up, <https://acorp.uk.com/acorp-2017-membership-survey/>

³⁷ Example provided directly by the ACoRP team through contact with members

³⁸ See Devon & Cornwall Rail Partnership, 2017, <http://greatscenicrailways.co.uk/food/>

³⁹ See ACoRP, 2017, <https://acorp.uk.com/east-suffolk-lines-encourage-people-to-flock-to-folk/>

As well as supporting local businesses and enterprises around the railway through tourism and leisure promotion, another growing area in community rail – again where further development is possible – relates to small businesses and social enterprises being established on or through the railways, especially at stations, sometimes by or as part of a community rail partnership. A successful example is the Settle to Carlisle Railway, which operates on-board catering services selling locally-produced food and drink, produces special timetables, and operates the Dales RailCard⁴⁰ (an example that also relates to the affordability issue discussed above). In other cases, community rail partnerships, station friends, or other community-based groups have set up small businesses or social enterprises based within stations, or provided facilities for others to do so, often as part of station renovation and redevelopment. These sorts of projects deliver wide-ranging benefit to the community and railway, bringing under-used and sometimes unattractive, run-down and inhospitable stations back to life for the good of passengers, local people and businesses. Gobowen is an excellent example, where a ticket office and station café has been set up as a social enterprise at a previously unstaffed station. This provides a warm welcome and personable services for passengers, work experience opportunities for local college students with special educational needs, business for local food producers that supply the café, and greater interest and pride in the station⁴¹. Another example is Wickham Market, where the CRP has supported a local community group to lead on a project to turn the station into a fully renovated small business centre and community hub, delivering many benefits, including community spaces and fast wifi⁴². There seems to be much scope for more of these sorts of initiatives, setting up new ventures like station cafes and hubs, but also supporting and engaging existing local producers and microbusinesses that could benefit enormously from affordable space and the profile and footfall that a railway location can offer. Recommendations on how further station-based projects of this kind can be supported to come to fruition are made under question seven below.

As well as supporting these sorts of ‘community stations’ projects to be developed as set out below, there is also opportunity to provide greater support and advice to community rail partnerships and groups on social enterprise specifically, and, again, this is an area that ACoRP is working to develop, with support from the rail industry. Two years ago we worked with Rail Delivery Group and Professor Paul Salveson to produce a report on the *Socially Enterprising Railway*, showcasing ways that community rail could undertake and engage with socially enterprising work⁴³. This makes a number of recommendations ([see p29-31 of the report](#) for further detail) including the following, some of which overlap with recommendations made elsewhere in this consultation response:

- Flexibility and willingness to negotiate a reasonable, realistic rent, and to maintain the premises, on the part of the train operator, including tailored packages with peppercorn rents;
- Train operators building good relationships with enterprises, through a consistent, communicative approach founded on respect and trust, and a dedicated point of contact;
- Train operators working with ACoRP and CRPs to identify areas of potential and nurture these, especially regarding ticket sales, station and on-board catering, and complementary transport and travel, such as bike hire and community transport;
- Government and industry to support the sharing of good practice in this area.

Following this report, we worked with Cross Country last year on their workshop on community rail and social enterprise, which was well-attended and suggested much appetite and opportunity for supporting development in this area. We are now about to undertake a project sponsored by Cross Country to produce and disseminate a toolkit for those working in community rail on social enterprise, which SFEDI will be contributing their expertise to. We anticipate that the development and roll-out of this toolkit will help us to further understand needs and opportunities in this area, which we are keen to continue working on with SFEDI, Cross Country and Arriva Group, and wider partners. It seems appropriate for this area of work to be recognised in the DfT’s strategy, and for DfT to work across government to help generate wider recognition and support for the ‘socially enterprising railway’ and address the recommendations above.

The final point we wish to make under this question relates to the ways that community rail can help to drive wider economic development and regeneration. There are many signs of community rail helping to build momentum, and bring partners and interests together that can galvanise wider change. The most concrete examples of this tend to be based around station redevelopment, like those mentioned above and

⁴⁰ See Settle to Carlisle Railway, 2017, <https://www.settle-carlisle.co.uk/>

⁴¹ See p6 of ACoRP’s 2016 ‘Community Rail Awards Winners’ Booklet’, <https://acorp.uk.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/CR-Awards-Winners-Booklet.pdf>

⁴² Example provided directly by the ACoRP team

⁴³ See ACoRP and Rail Delivery Group, 2016, https://www.raildeliverygroup.com/files/Publications/2016-05_socially_enterprising_railway.pdf

examined further below. In some cases, ‘community stations’ projects involving or led by community rail partnerships and groups are being delivered in tandem with, and therefore helping to support and contribute to, wider redevelopment efforts, such as Ellesmere Port, Edge Hill and Moorthorpe⁴⁴. In other cases, like Millom,⁴⁵ it appears that community rail work to transform and reinvigorate a station is spurring interest and enthusiasm for extending that transformation into the wider area. However, we would also assert the idea that community rail can drive development in a wider sense, by focusing attention of a broad range of partners on the development that communities (including marginalised, impoverished and ‘remote’ communities) need and aspire to. Community Rail Lancashire is a good example of a CRP strongly focused on economic development, with a broad range of educational work, stations redevelopment and strategic influencing taking place in support of this⁴⁶. However, all the examples and opportunities we refer to throughout this consultation response contribute to social and economic development in some way, so in many ways we would argue that this is what community rail is all about, and making this link clearly in the DfT’s strategy, and through the DfT’s ongoing leadership, would be valuable.

7: What role can community rail play in making best use of:

- Station buildings?
- Railway land?

This question is explored in detail in our 2017 report ‘[Community stations: innovative community uses for railway stations and land](#)’, funded by Rail Delivery Group, which we would direct to. The report examines three broad and overlapping categories of community stations projects: the ‘incredible edible’ station, involving cafes, catering and food growing; the creative station, involving art, museums and literature; and the station as a marketplace or cluster, involving multiple, mutually-supportive uses. Under each of these categories numerous examples and their impact on passengers and communities are considered and longer, more detailed case studies are additionally available [here](#) to supplement the report. The report concludes that the benefits of such projects are often considerable and wide-ranging, some of which are highlighted elsewhere in this consultation response, to do with:

- **economic development and regeneration** – such as through social enterprises, support for local businesses and community groups, skills development through volunteering and work experience in some cases geared at groups that may otherwise be economically disadvantaged, and contributing to wider regeneration of an area (as explored in more detail above);
- **better quality stations for passengers** – including more welcoming, useful, and sometimes safe and accessible, station environments, such as through services like shops, cafes and cycling facilities, points of interest and learning like notices and displays, greater human presence, and often renovation and physical improvements;
- **stations brought back into the heart of communities** – stations become more central to and useful for the community, a source of pride and enjoyment that are truly gateways and hubs for the area, and offer facilities for local people. This builds a more positive relationship between community and railway, likely increasing usage and footfall.

As the report highlights ([see p27](#)), this sort of work creates major benefits for train operating companies, Network Rail and local and central government. Although there are challenges at present with fully assessing and quantifying the value of such projects (something we hope the framework mentioned above to assess the social value of rail will assist with), this range of benefits suggests the sharp distinction and contrast between such ‘community uses’ and ‘commercial uses’ for stations (alluded to in the government’s own requirement for ‘Social and Commercial Development Plans’ to be created by rail franchise holders) may be an unhelpful dichotomy. Although we welcome the development of these plans, and recognise the need to encourage profitable uses for station buildings, a (sometimes narrow and unrealistic) focus on and prioritising of commercial uses can throw up barriers for community projects, potentially of great value to railway and community, getting underway and succeeding. We are aware of many cases – usually involving commercial lettings agencies that are of course squarely focused on ‘commercial uses’ – of community groups keen to bring disused property back into use being held off on the basis that a commercial let may

⁴⁴ See <https://acorp.uk.com/research-projects/communitystationsreport/edge-hill-an-exciting-arts-venue/> and ACoRP’s 2017 ‘Community stations’ report, <https://acorp.uk.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/ComStasRep-Online-Master.pdf>

⁴⁵ See <https://acorp.uk.com/research-projects/communitystationsreport/millom-social-enterprise-and-heritage-in-action/>

⁴⁶ See p13 of ACoRP’s 2017 ‘What’s been achieved in community rail?’ report, <https://acorp.uk.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/ACoRP-wbater-report-web.pdf>

be possible, even where this seems unrealistic. We also know of several examples of existing, successful and valuable community projects at stations facing uncertainty over their rent or lease on the basis that a commercial let may materialise. We would argue that supporting a community group to rejuvenate a station and set up a social enterprise or provide facilities for local clubs and small businesses, will deliver greater value overall, particular for the community, but possibly even for the railway in the long term, than another chain café letting the space (especially if this never actually comes about).

We therefore urge the DfT to highlight the great, often under-estimated, value of ‘community stations’ in the community rail strategy, and work proactively with industry, including through refranchising, to ensure greater priority is given to community uses, and further progress made to nurture and encourage these projects. We reiterate the detailed outline of challenges, progress made so far, and recommendations for government and industry in this area of work as set out on [p27-31 of our Community Stations report](#), and encourage the DfT to consider how these steps could be integrated into the community rail strategy and where relevant wider policy and actions. ACoRP will continue to provide expert support and advice to such projects with our dedicated resourcing in this area, but we would emphasise again that this is dependent on the ongoing crucial support we receive from DfT, in some areas supplemented by train operators.

8: How can community rail be best supported to act:

- **Innovatively?**
- **Effectively?**

It is firstly important to emphasise a point of which the DfT is well aware, that the community rail movement is already highly effective and cost effective in the sense of being evidenced to deliver far greater economic and social value than the investment put in. Transport Regeneration’s 2015 report commissioned by the DfT-administered National Community Rail Steering Group referred to community rail partnerships and station friends as being ‘low cost, high value’, with the partnerships studied found to more than pay for themselves, and known volunteering carrying a value of £3.4m per year.⁴⁷ As the report acknowledged, this is likely to be a gross under-estimate, since it assesses the value of community rail only in a narrow manner, not factoring in the value created through in many other ways explored above, such as developing local mobility, skills and opportunities, improving access to sustainable, healthy travel, and impacting on wider regeneration. However, as stated repeatedly in the answers to the above questions, we believe there is much scope for supporting community rail partnerships and groups to be more effective, something ACoRP is already striving to do with support from the DfT and industry partners, but which must be ongoing over the coming decade if community rail is to reach its fuller potential.

There are many opportunities for developing effectiveness within community rail, and we stress that this work must be carried out in collaboration with and with respect for the experience, expertise and passion of those working across the movement at a grassroots level. In other words, it is critical to listen to and work with the people that make up community rail, to enable and empower them, rather than attempting to control, impose or homogenize. For reasons described above, the latter approach is likely to be detrimental in the long-term by affecting the movement’s independence and unique standpoint as community-based and -led. This is the approach being taken by ACoRP, as emphasised within our organisational strategy and work planning, and for obvious reasons ACoRP is better placed than industry to lead on the delivery of this work, although the input and support of industry is vital too. Opportunities for developing community rail’s effectiveness are discussed in terms of delivery topics under questions 1-8 and 11, but from the perspective of different types of need within community rail, we might sum these up as:

- Planning, management and evaluation – to do with structure, set-up, constitutional and governance issues, and the running of organisations, such as HR and administration, planning and strategy;
- Funding and fundraising – discussed in detail under question nine below;
- Community engagement skills and knowledge – such as to do with volunteering, and engaging and communicating with communities as widely as possible, as described under question four;
- Influencing and partnership skills and knowledge – relating to the points made under question two;
- Delivery skills and knowledge – on specific topics such as education, tourism promotion, rail accessibility, and marketing.

ACoRP is working to meet these needs through five main service delivery work-streams:

⁴⁷ Transport Regeneration on behalf of the National Community Rail Steering Group, 2015, ‘[The Value of Community Rail Partnerships and Community Rail Volunteering](#)’

- **Line planning** – working with CRPs to on an annual review and planning cycle, usually based around a planning meeting to consider the past year and draft plans for the coming year. This forms the backbone of our CRP support, and is currently under further development as we strive to make the process more structured and as constructive as possible, and help CRPs to think in a strategic, outcomes-orientated way that is in tune with local needs and opportunities. We hope this will help to improve the standards of planning, which should be a critical strand in developing effectiveness, as well as improving understanding and collaboration among rail industry, government and wider partners. Our new guide to line planning, and strategic aims of this, has been discussed with and provided to the DfT. We stress that this guide will be under ongoing development as we roll it out and discuss with our members, but suggest this is referenced in the strategy;
- **Direct advice** – support and counsel on specific projects, activities and issues, provided on an ad hoc and as-needed basis, or as directed by what is set out in line plans, through meetings, visits, phone calls, emails and signposting to our own and others' services;
- **Training and development** – a programme funded by the DfT for three years, being developed for launch this year, which will offer a range of training, learning and development opportunities to help CRPs and groups to become more effective organisations, connect with wider skills, training and employment initiatives, and offer skills, training and employment opportunities within their communities, such as through volunteering. This piece of work is highly relevant to this question;
- **Events** – a year-round programme of conferences, seminars, workshops and webinars, and our annual Awards, seeking to highlight and share good practice examples, updates and advice from across the community rail movement and from experts and practitioners outside it, and provide space for networking, sharing and discussion among members;
- **Research and resources** – this includes production and dissemination of research reports, guidance booklets, briefing sheets, templates, toolkits and case studies, exploring and advising on a wide range of topics from social inclusion to social media, sharing good practice, practical tips, ideas and insights. Again, this is an area of development for ACoRP, with a growing range of materials (which will be showcased more clearly on our new website going live shortly).

Across these services, we strive to connect our members with each other, and provide a space for sharing good practice, ideas and lessons across the movement, and bringing in wider expertise, which we believe to be crucial in encouraging innovation and effectiveness.

This service provision to our members forms the bulk of our work, although it is supported, strengthened and complemented by a range of administration, communications and marketing, partnership development and policy, public affairs and advisory activity. We think the range of methods we are using is about right, meeting needs in different ways, and we know these are widely accessed, utilised and appreciated by our members. However, as referenced above, each of these five work-streams is undergoing considerable development and expansion, and this needs to continue over the coming decade. All of this work is dependent on the ongoing support of the DfT, particularly the first three, although we continue to bring in funding from a growing range of sources, particularly sponsorship for our events and resources, to support our own development, independence and sustainability.

While ACoRP plays a lead role in supporting community rail to be more effective, and will continue to do so, the support of others, particularly the rail industry and government, remains vital, and this should be asserted within the DfT's strategy. We propose throughout this document numerous ways to take this forward, so we will not reiterate the points in detail here, except to suggest that this support should always be provided following the same principles as above: collaborative, supportive, enabling and empowering, rather than controlling, dictating, or 'doing for'. This last point is worth expanding a little more in relation to this question. We are aware of some examples of organisations with good intentions for supporting community rail taking over aspects of the work themselves, which we believe could more appropriately be carried out within community rail. Of course, there will always be instances where organisations working in partnership agree to share work between them, and in some cases, it may be quite right and appropriate that a train operator, Network Rail or local authority carries out work directly. However, such partners should ensure not to take over work that could and should be delivered by community rail partnerships and groups with the right support, even it requires development of skills and capacity. These partners should always consider if they can help community rail partnerships and groups to do things themselves, and to learn and develop in the process, rather than having work done for them in a way that may impinge on their identity, independence and development. We recommend this point is made in the DfT's community rail

strategy, and the DfT shows leadership on this in its work with industry. This may also be a relevant issue where CRPs are hosted by local authorities.

We discuss the first part of the question, on innovation, last because it follows on from the above arguments about effectiveness: if we support CRPs and groups to act effectively, as described above, it helps to provide greater capacity and confidence for innovative thinking and working. In addition, we argue that protecting and enhancing the independence of CRPs, while ensuring constructive and collaborative working relationships with industry and wider partners, is of great relevance here. Innovation tends to emerge from thinking or considering issues in a different light, or bringing together and debating multiple perspectives. This therefore represents another way that community rail can help to achieve benefits for the rail industry, government and society, by bringing an alternative, more community-orientated standpoint on our railways' development to the table, as described under question two, and indeed by bringing together multiple partners, groups and individuals who may not otherwise be involved in rail or even transport, such as local schools, charities and community groups. As acknowledged by the DfT, there are some positive examples of innovation emerging from community rail work, ranging from physical, technical innovations like the Harrington Hump, to railway volunteering being combined with rehabilitation, as in Cumbria's Rail Journey to Recovery. We would stress that innovation should be seen in this broader sense, not only relating to technical and infrastructure innovations, but any alternative approach that is more constructive and community-minded, so it could be related to community engagement, communications, accessibility and affordability too. However, for community rail partnerships and groups to play this role effectively, and more opportunities like this to be realised, the independence and position of community rail as grassroots and community-led must be protected. If, for example, CRPs are increasingly brought into the fold of the rail industry, it seems likely they will increasingly take on a similar perspective. At the same time, the commitment of the rail industry, and others such as transport authorities, to working with community rail collaboratively and openly, as set out under question two, and maintaining regular dialogue and engagement with community rail and its wider partners, is vital. We suggest the DfT's community rail strategy should show strong leadership on these points. We would also direct to our suggestions under question 10 on community rail designation, which relate strongly to this question too.

9: What opportunities are there to secure a:

- **Diverse income base for community rail?**
- **Sustainable income base for community rail?**

As the DfT is aware, the funding environment for community rail has shifted dramatically in recent years, with local authority funding drying up entirely or in large part in most if not all areas. This means that increased core funding from train operators has become critical for many community rail partnerships, replacing income previously secured from elsewhere. This funding is particularly useful to CRPs where it is provided over multiple years, enabling longer-term security and planning, with clear agreements put in place in terms of expectations, yet not infringing on CRPs' ability to plan and deliver their work with autonomy. However, we are conscious that where CRPs become dependent on a single rail industry funder, it is likely to bear consequences for their independence and sustainability. We therefore agree with the idea that CRPs should be supported to achieve a more diverse and sustainable income base, but would emphasise that core funding from the rail industry must continue in the meantime, and indeed seems appropriate to continue longer-term even with additional funding secured from other sources, given the value community rail delivers back to the industry. We therefore outline below how we recommend this funding continues, and might be provided in a more constructive manner, as well as opportunities to secure funding from wider sources, since both these factors are critical to community rail being sustained and developed over the coming decade, and therefore should be highlighted within the DfT's strategy.

Transport Regeneration's 2015 study showed that through delivering social, economic and environmental value, community rail partnerships more than cover the amount invested in them, often by some margin⁴⁸. They invariably have a lean set-up, usually with one or two paid officers working full or part time, and benefitting from in-kind and voluntary support and local and national partnerships and networks. They can access various sources of funding for project work, such as the DfT's ACoRP-managed Designated Community Rail Development Fund (DCRDF), and other private, public and third sector sources, although

⁴⁸ Transport Regeneration on behalf of the National Community Rail Steering Group, 2015, '[The Value of Community Rail Partnerships and Community Rail Volunteering](#)'

the extent to which they do this in practice varies, as we return to below.⁴⁹ Their potential to generate funds from different sources is demonstrated by the match-funding generated through DCRDF, which in the first half of 2017-18 alone nationally has totaled £472k, about double the £240k awarded. However, it is evident from ACoRP's long-running experience in supporting CRPs that reliable core funding, ideally confirmed for several years, is vital to them operating effectively. This need for reliable and sustained core funding, covering a paid officer for at least three days per week per line (as a bare minimum), to enable a CRP to be successful, is underscored in Transport Regeneration's study.⁵⁰ In the current climate this cannot be expected from local authorities, hence core funding starting to be awarded through new franchises has been critical in enabling CRPs to continue, and in many cases expand and develop, their work.

We currently recommend that franchise agreements include resourcing for one full time officer (or equivalent) per line, or three days per week as a minimum for smaller CRPs, to enable them to deliver value in tune with local needs and opportunities. This should be index-linked or otherwise set up to allow for increasing staff costs over the life-time of franchises. We recommend that both ACoRP and its members within each franchise area are consulted by franchise bidders, and engaged on an ongoing basis by franchisees, on current and projected core funding needs to enable them to continue and develop their work over the franchise period, and that this is allowed for throughout each franchise. In this way, CRPs covering larger areas, or groups looking to expand their work, can put forward a case for a larger funding award, but with a baseline in mind of covering at least one officer per line, and taking into account rising resourcing costs over the franchise. We also recommend bidders and franchise holders work with ACoRP to identify opportunities for further growth of community rail, and allow funding to support any emerging CRPs. In addition, we recommend that a commitment through franchises to additional project funding for CRPs, station adoption groups and other groups working to develop community stations, such as through a community investment fund, helps to encourage innovation, development and greater value within community rail. This type of funding has been shown to help a wide range of successful projects come to fruition, from volunteering initiatives to improve the appearance of stations, to improved walking and cycling facilities in and around stations, to educational schemes involving school children. However, it may be that in the future, these sorts of projects in particular can be increasingly funded by a broader range of sources, as we discuss below.

We additionally argue that the manner in which funding is provided, and the approach taken by train operators to working with community rail partnerships and groups in receipt of funding, is equally important, and suggest there is room for improvement here. Through and immediately following the refranchising process, communications with CRPs and ACoRP can be disjointed, limited or patchy, linked to confidentiality issues, which creates uncertainty, and makes planning difficult. Sometimes CRPs are unclear what funding they can expect until they get it. We would suggest that even with confidentiality arrangements, this might be mitigated, such as by bidders making clear to ACoRP and its members what they are including in their bids in relation to supporting community rail, and the DfT might stipulate this. We also suggest the DfT considers whether arrangements could be put in place to aid transition between franchises, such as community rail funding being awarded for periods that extend slightly beyond the end of the franchise, and/or allowing the DCRDF fund to be used for emergency or transitional core funds. In addition, on occasions, funding from train operators is provided with little clarity and agreement with the CRP on how that funding can and will be used. In other cases, comprehensive agreements are reached, but this may give rise to concerns about unrealistic expectations, bureaucracy or too much control from the train operator. There is clearly a balance to be struck, to ensure that arrangements are transparent, CRPs know where they stand, but are able to set their own priorities and plans, and retain control and a level of flexibility with their work. We would suggest that much can be learnt from wider third sector funding practices, in providing funding in a way that is clear, supportive and aids the effectiveness of recipients.

By and large, train operators are increasingly taking a supportive approach to community rail alongside providing crucial investment, and we see many positive examples of partnership working between the rail industry and community rail⁵¹. Facilitating joined-up working with industry and wider partners is part of ACoRP's role, and collaboration is an inherent part of the community rail ethos. However, we are also aware of examples where partnership working is not as successful as one might hope, and where

⁴⁹ For numerous examples, see [‘The Value of Community Rail Partnerships and Volunteering’](#), [‘Community Stations’](#), and www.acorp.uk.com/news

⁵⁰ Transport Regeneration on behalf of the National Community Rail Steering Group, 2015, [‘The Value of Community Rail Partnerships and Community Rail Volunteering’](#)

⁵¹ For numerous examples, see www.acorp.uk.com/news and our [Community Rail Awards 2016 winners’ booklet](#)

community rail work and development has faltered due to difficulties engaging industry, misunderstandings and poor communication. We are also conscious that sometimes well-meaning industry partners may impinge on the independence and position of community rail through support veering into managing, steering or 'doing for', as noted above. This is something for industry to be cautious of, in the way it treats and conceives of community rail: we sometimes hear, for example, industry partners talking of CRPs as though they are a *part of* their company, and sometimes this is reflected back in the way CRPs talk about themselves. We therefore recommend that franchises not only include appropriate financial support to enable community rail to flourish and grow, but also a firm commitment to communication, consultation and genuine collaboration with community rail. This should be based on an understanding of CRPs, station friends, and other community rail groups as independent, community-based partners that, with support and joined-up working, can deliver great value to the railways and the communities they serve. As touched upon under a number of questions above, this collaborative approach, and safeguarding the independence of community rail partnerships and groups, is critical to community rail continuing to develop its impact.

Alongside working with industry to ensure funding is provided in a supportive and beneficial manner, there is also opportunity for the DfT to work with ACoRP to ensure the DfT grants funds we administer (DCRDF and Small Grants Fund) are working as well as possible. These funds remain extremely important to our members, but we also welcome the DfT's current review of how their impact can be increased, and look forward to further feeding into this. This includes considering how the provision of funding can be better aligned with ACoRP's support, whether the criteria might usefully be broadened and improved, and how regular analysis of the funds' use can inform our support. We especially think there is an opportunity to analyse the match-funding being achieved for DCRDF to help us support fundraising development in community rail, as set out below. We would therefore suggest that a commitment to further developing the impact of these funds is reflected in the DfT's strategy.

Having discussed the important continuation and further development of existing industry and government funding for community rail, we would emphasise our agreement that the community rail movement should be supported to diversify its income base. This diversification is important to the sustainability, independence and effectiveness of community rail partnerships in particular, themes we have discussed at length above. We suggest that support and advice ought to be provided by ACoRP, albeit drawing on wider expertise and examples, and can be picked up through our existing work-streams part-funded by the DfT, most notably our events and communications, and our forthcoming training and development programme, which can be used to develop skills in fundraising. However, we would suggest that we discuss and explore in more detail with the DfT the exact nature of this work and its resourcing, and how DfT can help us to draw on wider third sector insights and input from other government departments. It may be beneficial, for example, for ACoRP to work closely with a partner such as NCVO or NAVCA to develop a robust, long term strategy for development of this area, and the DfT's support and input will be critical to this. We would also emphasise the importance of DfT playing a role to connect community rail with opportunities linked to other government departments, such as Department for Health funding to promote active lifestyles.

In addition, we direct back to the comments and recommendations made under question six, to do with helping community rail to be more enterprising, which also helps to provide additional income. Helping more partnerships and groups to establish enterprising activities like ticket sales, station or on-board catering, or to take up currently unrealised opportunities like providing parcel delivery points or other local services – and encouraging train operators to nurture such opportunities – could be of enormous benefit to community rail.

Finally, on the topic of funding, we want to draw attention to the critical importance of ACoRP receiving ongoing support from government and industry under the new strategy, while also diversifying our own funding base. We have referenced throughout the consultation document the work we do, its importance to community rail, and how this can be further developed. At present, nearly 30% of ACoRP's funding comes from the DfT (not including the DfT grants we manage), with the remainder mainly provided by rail industry partners and sponsors, plus an annual Welsh Government grant, and a small proportion through membership fees. We have started work to diversify our funding base, such as improving our approach to corporate sponsorship, and moving towards setting up a corporate partnership scheme, and we will in future be looking to wider sources such as grants. However, in the meantime we remain dependent on ongoing DfT and rail industry support. An increase in DfT and industry support in recent years has enabled us to grow in size significantly and correspondingly step up our services, but there is ongoing work to do to capitalise on this growth and support our members as effectively and comprehensively as possible. With

some new franchises including significant funding for ACoRP to increase resourcing and step up our support in these areas – most notably the Northern franchise – we are starting to be able to offer enhanced services in some parts of the country. However, this is by no means stretching across the country, and therefore DfT funding being maintained at its current levels, ideally on a rolling three-year arrangement, remains critical to us being able to support community rail nationwide, and developing emerging areas of work such as our training and development programme.

10: How can community rail designation be developed to more fully realise its potential?

ACoRP's views on designation largely align with those in the paper presented by our board member Richard Watts to the National Community Rail Steering Group last year. This asserts that there have been benefits of designation, to do with it deferring status and prestige on community railway lines, but the original intentions – particularly enabling innovation through flexibility around regulations – have not been fully realised. ACoRP is not aware of particular disadvantages being accrued by non-designated lines or services, except for not being able to access DfT grants. It does not necessarily follow that designation should be abandoned, but there might be opportunities to reform the system to deliver greater benefit. We believe there still is scope for the DfT to engage industry to identify and encourage take up of opportunities where the flexibility afforded by designation might yield results, particularly in relation to making rail accessible and affordable to more people. This seems of great relevance to the ambition to expand the railways, such as when looking at the temporary reopening of stations to test their commercial viability (where looking to lessons from other countries would be useful too). This better use of designation could be prompted through refranchising, and seems appropriate if the new strategy is to have a strong focus on innovation. If this cannot be made to work, then there is probably a case for phasing designation out. However, it could instead be replaced with a simple certification or recognition scheme, so the status and access to funding benefit can be retained, as helping to develop standards. This could take the form of an externally monitored 'Quality Award' such as the one NAVCA awards to its members who meet agreed criteria⁵². We also suggest that if a benefit of the scheme is to aid recognition of community railways, then plainer, more accessible terminology might make it more useful in external communications.

We cannot see a logical reason why CRPs working on non-designated lines or services should be excluded from the DfT's ACoRP-administered DCRDF grant scheme, since any controls this is intended to place on the scheme can be better covered through the scheme's criteria and application process, and probably already are to a large extent. This scheme's management by ACoRP has previously been audited by the DfT and found to be a robust process, but as noted above, we are currently feeding into the DfT on how we think the scheme might be further refined to be as beneficial to the community rail movement and its beneficiaries. We therefore recommend that, following review and refinement of the process and criteria, DfT works with ACoRP to open up the scheme to all CRP members of ACoRP, while ensuring suitable checks are in place to prevent spurious CRP setting up simply to access the funding.

11: How can community rail:

- **Support the development of rail line and stations improvement?**
- **Contribute to the development of rail line and station improvement?**
- **Make greater use of heritage railways?**

For reasons set out under questions one and two, we believe that community rail can play an important role in the expansion of the rail network, and ensuring communities' needs and aspirations are put at the forefront of this. The relationship between community rail and rail user/campaign groups is highly relevant here, and we are keen to work with Rail Future and other relevant partners like Campaign for Better Transport to explore how the two might be better inter-linked in relation to rail's expansion. Although there remain some relevant distinctions between community rail and rail user groups, largely to do with the former being more about collaboration and engagement and the latter more about campaigning, there are of course overlaps and examples of integration and joined-up working, which we support. Many CRPs successfully include local rail user groups within their partnerships, and this might be further supported and encouraged where these sorts of opportunities exist. In some cases, we have seen groups that campaigned for railway or station (re)openings morphing into community rail partnerships and groups that work with the rail industry to promote and enhance the line or station. This is the case with TransWilts CRP

⁵² See <https://www.navca.org.uk/how-we-can-help/quality-awards>

and Blackmore Vale, where campaign groups have become formal partnerships, and the recently founded Friends of Low Moor Station. There seems scope for this type of approach to be supported elsewhere.

Another interesting (still developing) example of community rail spearheading a rail reopening is the case of Purbeck, where the CRP has worked since 1997 to facilitate the reintroduction of a regular passenger service from Swanage to Wareham, after a 45-year absence. The Partnership brings together local authorities, employers and funders, Network Rail and the train operator, and local volunteers. After funding was committed from a range of public and private sources for the infrastructure and rolling stock improvements needed, the Partnership worked to facilitate a complex range of steps and interactions to enable the service to be re-launched in June 2017 on a heritage line. Although many steps related to technical infrastructure and stock improvements, the Partnership's main role was to facilitate successful coordination and interaction between numerous partners and funders, to engage and communicate with the community to build enthusiasm and interest before and following launch, and to maintain momentum through a challenging project that had to overcome many hurdles. The initiative was recognised at our 2017 Awards, so a detailed case study is on p19 of our [Winners' Booklet](#).⁵³ We recommend that this example is considered closely by the DfT as it shows both the positive role community rail can play in terms of coordinating, motivating and communicating, but also barriers to entry into the rail industry as a service provider. In this case, the barriers and requirements might be argued to be disproportionately high for the level of service provided, with the same expectations for this 20 trains per week service as with a major train operator on an intensive service. While safety cannot be compromised, a review of entry into the rail service delivery market for community operators should be considered by the DfT.

The Purbeck example shows how community rail groups can work with local authorities, business partners and the rail industry to facilitate development where there is scope for or movement towards rail expansion, if there is appropriate support and finance in place to achieve infrastructure and service requirements. This is something ACoRP can support, drawing on our experience and the wider community rail network, to help ensure that it is well-grounded in and led by the community. As stated under question three, we recognise that supporting embryonic community rail partnerships to become established – and advising at the initial ideas stage – is a critical part of our role, and something we hope to continue to focusing on, with the DfT's support. At the moment, this tends to be on quite a reactive, ad hoc basis, with us responding to requests and leads as they crop up. We would suggest that with the DfT turning its attention increasingly to working with industry to enable railway services, lines and stations to be (re)opened, it would be useful under the new strategy community rail strategy for us to work in a more planned, structured and strategic manner with the DfT and rail industry partners. We would relish the chance to work with the DfT, industry and third sector partners to look not just for where there are gaps in community rail and opportunities for growth in the movement, but how community rail might support the gaps and opportunities for growth in our rail network.

This question also relates closely to the arguments we set out under question two about supporting existing community rail partnerships to engage with planning and wider regeneration strategies, to champion the potential for rail to support and be woven into such strategies. This would help existing CRPs to play a key role in rail's expansion too. Again, ACoRP is keen to support more of this type of strategic work, but as we state above, leadership from the DfT is critical, as is consideration of resourcing needs for existing CRPs to take on additional work of this kind. We would suggest that this might be picked up in part through refranchising: where there are known opportunities for rail expansion, the resourcing implications for community rail should be considered and accounted for within the franchise. However, this also ties in with points made under question nine, about supporting community rail to access funding from wider sources, and about considering how DCRDF might be made more impactful, such as whether it might provide for work on this kind.

Finally, the consultation asks about the role of community rail in collaborating with the heritage rail sector. We believe that the greatest opportunities lie in relation to our members promoting tourism and leisure travel, which we see as an important, growing area, as set out under question six. We are aware of some good examples of this type of collaboration (e.g. North Norfolk Railway and Bittern Line) and believe there is scope for more work of this kind, particularly when accompanied by through ticketing fares (e.g. as with East Midlands Trains offering fares onto the Ecclesbourne Valley Railway at Duffield and Peak Rail⁵⁴). Through our tourism support, we are currently exploring how such links can be further encouraged, through

⁵³ See <https://acorp.uk.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/ACoRP-CRA17-Winners-Brochure.pdf>

⁵⁴ Example provided directly by the ACoRP team through contact with our members

consulting with heritage lines and members in these areas. In these cases, it seems appropriate that community rail links to heritage lines as part of the ‘tourism offer’ that they promote, showing how these lines are attractions in their own right, and how they can enable access by rail to wider areas and some of the country’s hidden gems. In doing so, they help to promote the heritage lines and encourage green tourism and economic development across their regions. In return for this, there is no doubt scope for heritage lines to promote their links with the wider network and the role of community rail in enhancing this. We see this as a positive, mutually-beneficial relationship that will help community rail to deliver and benefit local communities and economies, and therefore would welcome its inclusion in the DfT’s strategy, and further support from the DfT in brokering and encouraging such partnerships.

There may also be occasional opportunities for redeveloping heritage railways to form part of the main rail network, and therefore improve its capacity, but we suspect such examples will be rare and fraught with challenges. It firstly depends on whether the owners of a heritage rail line are minded to develop their railway in such a way, and whether an economic case can be demonstrated for running connecting services or even through trains. In these cases, we believe that the appropriate local CRP is well placed to facilitate such developments. It should be borne in mind, however, that the business cases of heritage and community railways are different, and a more extensive public service on a heritage line (where it can be implemented by agreement of those concerned) requires significant external funding to enable the adaption of the line, probably best achieved through the relevant train operating company’s franchise commitment. See also our comments above relating to Purbeck’s example, showing the time, energy and funding required to overcome (and manage on an ongoing basis) the infrastructure challenges of making a heritage line fit for even a limited service.

We suggest, therefore, that this type of work with heritage railways does not form a key pillar of the DfT’s community rail strategy, unless the DfT is aware of opportunities that we are not, in which case we would be pleased to discuss this further. Instead, we suggest that the focus of the strategy is more broadly on community rail working alongside industry and government to improve capacity and develop the railway in other ways, in tune with local needs and more forthcoming opportunities. For example, rail electrification is not mentioned in the consultation. Although we are well aware of current plans being scaled back, we are conscious that wider electrification offers great scope for increased capacity, and that community rail can play a major role in communicating and engaging communities in its roll out and implications. We also believe that negative press around government decisions on this issue, coupled with that around industrial action and fare increases, is creating a difficult environment for community rail to play a growing role in rail’s development. Such coverage plays against community rail’s efforts to promote rail as a sustainable and attractive mode of travel that unlocks opportunities. As one of our members recently remarked, it’s hard to build enthusiasm for rail travel among a group of school children, when they are repeating their parents’ negative views of rail travel.

We therefore suggest that the DfT also use this strategy to consider at a strategic level the rail ‘brand’, alongside the physical rail network, and how this might be developed over time in partnership with community rail. This will require ongoing support of community rail and its ability and capacity to communicate with and engage the public effectively at a local level, as detailed above. However, it also presents a need for government and industry to work with community rail to more clearly articulate the story of rail and its contribution to society at a strategic level. In particular, we believe the DfT could do more to communicate and champion the social value of rail (not just how much money it makes, or, worse, its burden on taxpayers), how rail is being developed in line with communities’ needs (not only to satisfy existing passengers), and future ambitions, related to the values that may spur more people to use rail, to do with sustainability, health, wellbeing, a sense of place and community. In other words, we urge the DfT to consider not just how community rail can support our railways’ development, but how our railways’ development and its communication by government can learn from the key principles of community rail – particularly to overcome the challenges we face in convincing people of rail’s critical role in bringing about a healthier, happier, greener and more prosperous society.

For a summary of the main recommendations made throughout this response, see p1.

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