



Community rail and inclusive, accessible travel

Written by Rob Lowson
Edited by Jools Townsend

Produced by



Sponsored by

Rail Delivery Group



Contents

- **Executive summary** 1
- **Introduction** 2
 - I. The need to tackle transport-related exclusion and the ‘accessibility gap’ 2
 - II. Government support for accessible, inclusive rail 4
 - III. Accessibility and inclusion in the Community Rail Development Strategy 5
- **Accessible and inclusive journeys – the role of community rail** 6
 - I. Dementia and community rail 6
 - II. Autism and community rail 8
 - III. Mental health conditions and community rail 10
 - IV. Marginalised groups and community rail 12
- **Accessible and inclusive stations – the role of community rail** 14
 - I. Community rail and accessibility infrastructure 15
 - II. Community rail and inclusive and welcoming station environments 17
 - III. Community rail and accessible and inclusive volunteering 19
- **Emerging lessons: key principles of success** 21
 - I. Designing projects with those with lived experience 21
 - II. Engaging people via creative means 23
 - III. Embracing access for all 24
- **Conclusions and recommendations** 25
- **End notes and acknowledgements** 27

Executive summary

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

We worked with our community rail members and rail industry partners to advance understanding about how community rail is supporting and enabling accessible and inclusive journeys and stations, breaking down barriers for those who might otherwise feel excluded or marginalised from rail.

The report finds that community rail is playing a leading role in enabling accessible, inclusive journeys and preventing isolation, opening up rail travel to those with a wide range of physical and non-visible disabilities and other support needs. Community rail partnerships and groups are increasing travel confidence and supporting rail journeys, and in some cases repeated rail use, for people living with dementia, autism, and mental health conditions, promoting independence, and broadening social mobility.

With regards to stations specifically, our research indicates that community rail partnerships and groups are: making stations physically accessible to those with a disability or impairment; creating more inclusive and welcoming environments that encourage social interactions; and coordinating inclusive volunteering.

The report finds that community rail's local knowledge, and relationships with other community groups, is vital in making these initiatives a success. Impact is enhanced when projects are built on genuine involvement and shaped by those with lived experience. Creative, holistic approaches are evidently working to bring people together, provide a voice and empower marginalised groups.

This report presents recommendations on how the community rail movement can continue to expand its impact on accessibility and inclusion, especially by enabling those with lived experience to shape these initiatives, maximising partner networks and funding opportunities, and taking a pan-disability approach.

It also offers direction for the rail industry, including encouraging decision makers and strategic planners to appreciate and understand the accessibility and inclusion work within community rail, and be responsive to the vital insights these projects offer.

Trying the train on the Cumbrian Coast Line



Introduction

Community rail puts railways and stations at the heart of communities, helping people derive maximum social, economic, and environmental benefit. This growing, thriving grassroots movement, brought together under Community Rail Network’s umbrella, includes 76 community rail partnerships (CRPs) and 1,200+ ‘station friends’ and other local volunteer groups across Britain. Opening up rail travel to more people, and working with partners to make rail more inclusive and accessible, is a common thread through community rail, and often where great gains can be made with social value – in some cases transforming lives – while contributing to sustainability. It means thinking beyond existing passengers, and breaking down barriers for those who don’t or rarely use rail, opening up new opportunities.

In this report, we explore how community rail supports and enables accessible, inclusive journeys, by breaking down barriers for those who might otherwise feel excluded or marginalised from rail. We also highlight projects to create accessible, inclusive stations and communities, considering how railways and stations can be used as sites to foster cohesion and empower and give voice to people with diverse lived experiences.

I. The need to tackle transport-related exclusion and the ‘accessibility gap’

“ Accessible transport is a key part of having an equal society.”¹

“ Public transport not only enables community, it embodies it.”²

Transport is of great importance to everyone, with the ability to stimulate or inhibit access to opportunity, and physical and mental health. Accessible public transport

Community Rail Lancashire’s Railway Confidence Programme



helps to prevent isolation and create more inclusive, cohesive, sustainable communities, through people being empowered to: access recreation, education, employment, and services, and stay connected with family and friends, while using greener, healthier travel that benefits, rather than harms, current and future generations.

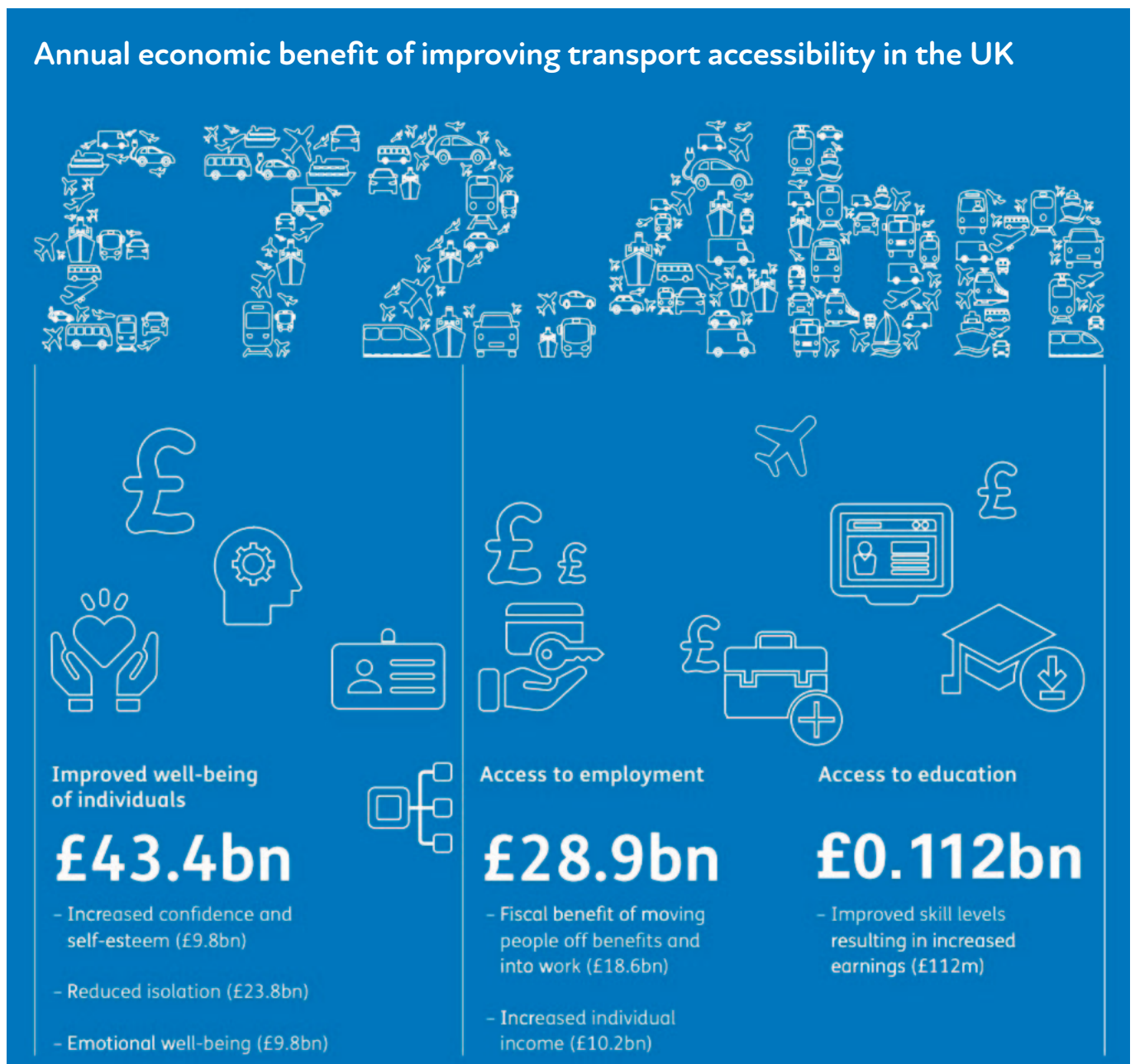
Where fair and equitable access to transport does not exist, people are negatively affected by transport-related social exclusion.³ Research by Transport for the North describes a vicious cycle of transport-related social exclusion, with disproportionate negative impacts on specific groups, such as those with a disability, and multiple forms of exclusion and deprivation through limited access to opportunities, services, and community life.⁴ This can lead to high dependency on personal car use too, impacting on local environments and the climate crisis. Transport is the largest source of greenhouse gases in the UK, with road transport emissions rising by six per cent from 1990 to 2017.⁵

Car dependency further exacerbates transport inequalities by creating an assumption in society that driving is the norm and public transport less important. More than one fifth of UK households do not have a car, while nearly a third of UK adults do not have personal access to one.^{6,7} This is far higher among low-income groups, disabled people, young adults, and people from ethnic minority backgrounds. These groups are therefore far more reliant on public transport.⁸

According to the National Travel Survey (2021), disabled people made 28% fewer trips than those with no disability.⁹ A study by Motability suggests a major factor in creating this ‘transport accessibility gap’ is transport not catering for the needs of disabled people.¹⁰ It found that two in five people with physical or non-visible disabilities frequently experienced difficulties when travelling by train. It also estimated that closing the transport accessibility gap in the UK would deliver £72.4 billion in benefits per annum.

Research has found that people with some form of disability, both users and non-users of rail, face various

barriers to rail travel. These include issues with ticketing, problems at or getting to/from stations, and difficulties on-board or joining/leaving trains. A recurring theme is a lack of confidence, at various stages of the journey process. Over half of disabled rail passengers who reported a problem at the journey planning stage cited a lack of confidence as having the biggest impact on their journeys and subsequent rail use.¹² Feeling unconfident was the most common experience among disabled people who had travelled by rail previously but now class themselves as non-rail users, affecting 27%.¹³



(adapted from¹¹)

II. Government support for accessible, inclusive rail

“

This Government wants to deliver a fully inclusive transport system. Our desire is to move from infrastructure design and service provision which focuses mainly on achieving 'accessible transport' (i.e. retrofitting existing infrastructure to meet the needs of disabled people) to delivering 'inclusive travel', (i.e. with services designed through dialogue with disabled people and other groups so that the needs of transport users are identified upfront). Such an approach...takes a more holistic approach to the wide range of measures that can support people with visible and less visible impairments.”¹⁴

Since its Inclusive Transport Strategy was published in 2018, the government has tasked the rail industry to make accessibility-related improvements to ensure that everyone has the same opportunity to access rail. This has led to:¹⁵

- Requirements on all train operators to create and deliver accessible travel policies;
- Principles of inclusivity and accessibility being embedded into staff training;
- Campaigns aimed at raising awareness of disabled travellers' rights and needs, e.g. 'it's everyone's journey';¹⁶
- More visible promotion of support available, e.g. Passenger Assist;
- Creation of digital tools such as interactive access maps;
- Funding for physical infrastructure, e.g. via Access for All.

Further commitments on accessibility are in the government's Plan for Rail, which states “the first robust national accessibility strategy and long-term investment programme will improve inclusion and access for all.”¹⁷ Great British Railways, set to be the new 'guiding mind' for the rail industry, will be tasked with a statutory duty for accessibility, and is due to publish a National Railway Accessibility Strategy before the end of 2023. This will provide the first system-wide approach to accessibility, introducing standards so passengers know the level of service to expect, and ushering in improvements in staff training and a “more inclusive culture.” Work to underpin the strategy included an accessibility audit of Britain's 2,500+ stations.¹⁸

Community Rail Network is working with the Great British Railways Transition Team to feed in insights from community rail in areas such as station design, highlighting how accessible and welcoming stations can act as key gateways to the communities they serve.

Dementia training on the Bentham Line



III. Accessibility and inclusion in the Community Rail Development Strategy

While the range of activities undertaken by community rail partnerships and groups continues to expand and be led by local needs, they are steered by the four pillars of the Department for Transport’s Community Rail Development Strategy,¹⁹ including two that specifically name accessibility and inclusion, and two more that are related:

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

The strategy recognises the multi-faceted role that community rail, working with rail partners, can play to “put rail in reach of more people.” It acknowledges that barriers for those marginalised from rail comprise of a range of social, cultural, physical, and psychological factors.

The Travel with Confidence project. Pic from Winchester Go LD

“Community rail partnerships and station adoption groups should be able to reach out to groups and individuals not currently accessing rail services to identify their barriers to travel and gaps in service, and to work with partners to prioritise and secure the necessary improvements and changes required to make rail services accessible to all.”²⁰

As the umbrella body for community rail, Community Rail Network recognises the importance of accessibility and inclusion in its overarching strategy, and supporting its members to develop their impact in this regard.

Our vision is of a flourishing community rail movement connecting people and railways, contributing to inclusive, empowered, sustainable, healthy communities. Our mission includes helping community rail partnerships and groups to maximise access to and use of the railways, and ensure communities have a voice in rail’s development, to meet community needs.



Accessible and inclusive journeys – the role of community rail

In previous reports, we explored the impact of community rail in opening up rail to wider audiences:

- **Community rail and modal shift** – how community rail can encourage and enable people to use greener travel and modal shift from private car use to rail;²¹
- **Community rail and youth engagement** – how community rail can support young people aged 11-25 to access rail, and empower them in other ways, and benefits of this;²²
- **Community rail and social inclusion** – how community rail promotes social inclusion and equity in a multitude of ways.²³

For this report, we focus on the ways community rail partnerships and groups are widening access to rail for those who are more likely to be excluded due to a disability, impairment, or health condition.

We also examine initiatives that support other marginalised and vulnerable groups with limited mobility, and touch upon schemes that promote accessibility and inclusivity more widely.

“

There are over 13 million people in the UK who have a disability, which can include physical or sensory impairments, as well as less visible... disabilities such as autism, dementia, learning disabilities or anxiety which can be just as much of a barrier to travel.”²⁴

I. Dementia and community rail

It is estimated there are 944,000 people with dementia in the UK, and this is projected to increase. More than half of the UK public, 34.5 million people, know someone who has been diagnosed with some form of dementia.²⁵ People living with dementia often lose confidence with public transport, as it presents cognitive, emotional, and sensory challenges.²⁶ This is in addition to practical issues, such as journey planning and noisy, disorientating, time-sensitive environments.

Despite these issues, the freedom to get outside and travel is an important part of living a fulfilled life for those with dementia, their carers and families.²⁷ Research shows that particular enjoyment is gained from activities that give relaxation and pleasure, and encourage emotional connections.²⁸

Some community rail partnerships and groups run special trips complemented by activities to encourage happiness and evoke memories. The Settle-Carlisle Railway Development Company worked with Dementia Forward on ‘Making Memories.’²⁹ This gives people with dementia and their carers the chance to enjoy a trip along the iconic line, after which they are given a photobook to help recall and share their experience.

For people with dementia, music can be a powerful way to trigger positive feelings and connect with others³⁰ and as such, some community rail partnerships have incorporated a musical element into projects. Severnside Community Rail Partnership joined forces with local dementia services during Dementia Action Week to organise a special Singing for the Brain session on the Severn Beach branch line. More than 40 people living with dementia enjoyed the trip, which for many was the first time they had used rail in years.

Singing and music is also a key element of the Esk Valley Community Rail Partnership’s ‘Forget Me Not’ dementia trains,³¹ and was the main attraction in Essex and South Suffolk’s dedicated dementia-friendly service.³² Activities like this create a supportive, inclusive environment in which people living with dementia can enjoy the pleasurable aspects of rail travel, and evidence suggests it increases the likelihood of a return to rail use in the future to help them lead more active and fulfilling lives.

CASE STUDY: Leeds-Morecambe Community Rail Partnership – The Dementia Friendly Railway

Working to make the Bentham Line dementia friendly by ...

- ... supporting the journeys of those living with dementia, their carers and helpers
- ... raising awareness of dementia with staff, volunteers and passengers
- ... creating dementia-friendly station environments, services and activities

Making the Bentham Line a place where people living with dementia are understood, respected and supported.

Dementia-Friendly Journeys and Walks

The scenic journey along the 75-mile Bentham Line, from the bustling city of Leeds, through the Pennines, to the seaside resort of Morecambe, provides an ideal opportunity to sit back, relax and enjoy mile upon mile of superb scenery.

Four dementia-friendly walks are available from the stations at Morecambe, Bentham (two walks) and Saltaire. All are designed to help recall fond memories of previous visits or of experiences from earlier times in life.

A

MORECAMBE PIER PROMENADE
A dementia-friendly walk from the Bentham Line

B

Bentham Heritage Trail
A dementia-friendly walk from the Bentham Line

C

Birch Hills Trail in the Forest of Bowland AONB
A dementia-friendly walk from the Bentham Line

D

Saltaire UNESCO World Heritage Site
A dementia-friendly walk from the Bentham Line

In 2016/17, the Leeds-Morecambe Community Rail Partnership set out to create Britain’s first dementia-friendly railway. They wanted to raise awareness of dementia with staff, volunteers, and passengers, to support the journeys of those living with dementia, and create dementia-friendly station environments and activities.

Partnership staff and volunteers became Dementia Friends Champions via the Alzheimer’s Society, and have since delivered workshops to hundreds of people, including groups across community rail and the rail industry. The partnership carried out audits of the line’s stations looking for ways to make them dementia-friendly, such as simplifying displays and making it easier to find the right platform.

Dementia-friendly walks were created at Morecambe, Bentham, Forest of Bowland and Saltaire to help recall memories of the seaside, countryside, and industrial heritage. The partnership also assisted in the founding of Dementia Friendly

Bentham, and continues to receive enquiries from other community rail partnerships and rail partners interested in replicating elements of the project in their own areas.

The partnership also continues to add to the hundreds of people it has taken out on day trips, to the seaside at Morecambe for example, including some who have not used rail, or even left a care environment, for many years.

The project was highlighted in the government’s Plan for Rail, which identified it as best practice to be supported across the rail network.

“People living with dementia want to do the things that everyone else around them is doing, and what they used to do. It’s about helping them to regain the confidence, and making the rail journey accessible and an important part of it, not a challenge.”

Gerald Townson, chair of the Leeds-Morecambe Community Rail Partnership

II. Autism and community rail

More than one in 100 people are autistic: over 700,000 people in the UK.³³ Travelling can be a challenge for those on the spectrum and their families, with changes in routine, unpredictability, crowds and new noises and sights.³⁴ This can make rail travel seem insurmountable to some people with autism and other non-visible disabilities: research shows that feeling overwhelmed is one of the most common reasons disabled people give for not using public transport.³⁵

However, studies have also found that rail travel can be well-suited to people with autism as it has characteristics to which they can relate. These include:

- Trains are predictable in that they are scheduled to run to a specific timetable and follow a predesignated route;
- Trains can offer a quieter and safer environment than other forms of public transport;
- Trains provide visual stimulation, e.g. the scenery out of a train window, which can contribute to a less stressful, more soothing experience than other forms of travel.³⁶

Within community rail, initiatives have included working with young people on the spectrum and their families to give them the chance to experience public transport in a positive and guided context. A great example of this is the development of the UK's first autism-friendly railway line on the Todmorden Curve Line, a project between Community Rail Lancashire, Northern, and the National Autistic Society. Alongside specialist training for frontline rail staff, innovations included specialist resources such as sunglasses and ear defenders to assist passengers who may have sensory needs, and detailed line guides for families to download and help them fully prepare for their journey. Every attendee who took part in the rail journey said the resources would help to increase their confidence accessing rail, and influence their future plans to travel by rail.³⁷

Community rail initiatives also include awareness-raising, offering people an insight into how autism affects travel and how others can help and empathise. Rail 74 Community Rail Partnership in Lanarkshire is embarking on a 'Travelling Classroom' project with autism as its focus. The scheme will involve immersive family-friendly rail trips where attendees learn about autism and are encouraged to offer positive support in their everyday lives to help people and challenge negative perceptions.

Travelling on the autism-friendly line in Lancashire



CASE STUDY: Community Rail Lancashire – Promoting autism-friendly journeys



Community Rail Lancashire has been involved in pioneering work to open up rail travel to people with autism, including developing the UK's first **autism-friendly line**, working with rail partners such as Northern, and specialist autism charities. This includes:

- Working with Northern's Accessibility Team, using 360-degree camera footage to develop immersive resources for Blackburn and Manchester Victoria Stations, at each end of the autism-friendly line. They added a layer of information to support people with conditions such as autism, including videos explaining how to read departure boards, book onward travel, and walk-through films of other stations along the line;
- Supporting the development of the '**Serious Game**' project, a first-of-a-kind use of gaming technology and virtual reality simulation to create virtual station and train environments, allowing people to build rail confidence before attempting physical journeys. The partnership led a focus group of people with autism to inform the process of designing and testing the simulation, offering a broad range of travel, technology and accessibility lived experience and insights;

- Working with autistic young adults to do supported station audits, creating case studies and maps. Feedback suggested people with autism struggle to comprehend National Rail station maps so they are building more accessible, printed maps. As autistic project partners said they would appreciate something they could physically take with them to navigate stations, the autistic young adults created cue cards and photographic tours of stations entitled 'station social stories;'
- Developing 'Adventures for All,' funded by Northern's Accessibility Fund, for autistic passengers, with a focus on the social aspect of rail while increasing rail confidence. Autistic young people aged 13-23 and their families and friends will be able to explore the autism-friendly line and enjoy guided adventures. These will involve geocache treasure hunting using QR codes and interactive videos.

The partnership directly engaged with people with autism to develop the full suite of resources and projects, and all those involved endorsed the primary objective of promoting familiarity with rail and increasing travel confidence in the face of potentially stressful journeys, praising the innovation and detail involved.

“We inevitably find that the reach is far more than the demographic we are looking to support. So when we're looking to create resources for autistic people, we find that a lot of other people find them really helpful as well, so those benefits filter out.

The resources are very helpful in allowing people to familiarise themselves with stations and rail before getting out, particularly for people with high anxiety, for whatever reason, including autism. There are lots of reasons why people can be anxious and the familiarisation resources we use are a toolkit to combat that.”

Katie Douglas, accessibility and inclusion officer, Community Rail Lancashire

III. Mental health conditions and community rail

Approximately one in four people in the UK will experience a mental health problem, such as anxiety or depression, each year.³⁸ Anxiety is a feeling of unease, which can be mild or severe, and can manifest itself in a rail setting and lead to a loss of feeling of control.³⁹ Conditions like this can prove a significant barrier to accessing public transport,⁴⁰ or compound other barriers; with studies suggesting that four-fifths of disabled people feel some level of anxiety or stress when they travel by public transport.⁴¹

The pandemic increased the prevalence of conditions such as anxiety and depression, by as much as 25% worldwide, leading to concerns about returning to previous routines, including travel.

Yet it is widely acknowledged that travel can have a positive effect on mental health, as it can: lead to feelings of happiness; lower risk of depression; broaden perspectives and stimulate creativity; help to relieve stress; and enable the strengthening of social relationships and bonds.⁴² Research has suggested that travelling by train in particular can offer psychological benefits for wellbeing and brain function.⁴³

Many community rail partnerships and groups run activities to develop rail confidence and encourage independent travel among those who may feel anxious. This involves interactions with groups and individuals of all demographics, showing how rail is inclusive and can positively impact wellbeing.

Since the pandemic, community rail has led on and supported projects to promote rail as safe and accessible, particularly for those with heightened anxieties. For example, the New River Line Community Rail Partnership teamed up with local charities during Mental Health Awareness Week to support the rail industry's 'Brighter Journeys' campaign. The aim was to make stations brighter and happier for passengers returning to the railway following the lifting of COVID restrictions, bringing the outdoors inside with bursts of colourful flowers and sensory installations to lift moods.⁴⁴

Mental health support at Buxton Station



Community rail has also led on tailored, supported journeys for groups with additional travel needs, particularly since the pandemic, using day trips to local attractions and wellbeing walks from the railway as part of a pleasurable experience to lower anxiety, promote wellbeing and bring people together again. Community Rail Cumbria's new 'Soulful Days Out' project will work with local elderly people, responding to evidence of heightened anxiety among older groups. Working with Age UK, they will be engaging older adults in supported days out on the train, easing worries about social isolation and about getting back out and accessing local services.

CASE STUDY: Conwy Valley and North West Wales Coast Community Rail Partnership – Walking for Wellbeing



Conwy Valley and North West Wales Coast Community Rail Partnership recognised that the pandemic exacerbated personal challenges for people, including those facing social isolation, loneliness, anxiety, and depression. As restrictions eased and more people were allowed to meet, they partnered with the Carneddau Landscape partnership and Conwy MIND to offer guided recreational wellbeing walks. The main aims were to: reduce isolation; improve mental health and wellbeing; and improve day-to-day functionality in people relying on support services.

More than 80 people took part, including clients of local housing associations, many with learning difficulties, people being supported by MIND for mental health issues, and individuals involved with military veterans’ charity, Boots on The Ground. Walks started and finished at a railway station or bus stop, and participants used public transport to attend, many for the first time during COVID-19.

The project raised awareness of the mental health challenges people face, and 90% said taking part made them feel more connected with people and better able to get things done. Participants also reported an increase in confidence using public transport independently. The partnership also created social networks and relationships by introducing like-minded individuals and engaging them in positive activity, all linked by rail.



IV. Marginalised groups and community rail

There are other groups who experience exclusion and have limited access to rail for a variety of different reasons. Our previous research has shown many community rail partnerships and groups partnering with organisations to improve wellbeing, access to rail travel, and social connections among some of the most vulnerable and marginalised members of society.⁴⁵

Recent projects include:

- Gloucestershire Community Rail Partnership using rail to engage young people from ethnic minority backgrounds who were unable to access, and enjoy the benefits of, the county's rural spaces. Via the 'Getaway' project, they have delivered 20 trips to 360 young people, offering inspiring experiences via 40 different activities to encourage them to expand their horizons, learn skills, and gain confidence and independence;⁴⁶
- Severnside Community Rail Partnership introducing people from deprived communities in Bristol to local rail travel, working to create cohesive neighbourhoods around stations. Focusing on people at risk of isolation, they have used supported activities such as 'chatty trains' and 'games on a train' services, encouraging social interactions and fostering connections while encouraging future rail use. The partnership also continues to develop its 'Days Out by Train' initiative, offering taster trips for community groups who face barriers to rail travel.
- Community Rail Cumbria's 'Rail Journey to Recovery'⁴⁷, which highlights how rail travel and station volunteering can be included within programmes of rehabilitation for people recovering from substance abuse. By enhancing participants' self-esteem, social interactions, and confidence, it encourages

Community Rail Cumbria's 'Rail Journey to Recovery' project



CASE STUDY: Essex and South Suffolk Community Rail Partnership – Working with refugees and asylum seekers



Essex and South Suffolk Community Rail Partnership has been working with Refugee, Asylum Seeker, and Migrant Action (RAMA) since 2021. RAMA provides services to vulnerable people from over 100 countries, with recent support given to families and individuals evacuated from Afghanistan and displaced by conflict in Ukraine.

The project began with the offer of supported, inclusive access to rail travel, to allow people to leave their base in Colchester and explore and learn about the area. At that time, many individuals and families were in temporary accommodation and faced barriers to settling into UK life.

The partnership has now run eight trips with RAMA, including family-friendly days out to the coast, and trips for young adults to promote independent travel. While on the train, the groups are instructed on rail safety and practical journey planning skills such as buying tickets, navigating stations, accessing help points, and planning routes and changing trains. The social aspect of the trips is vital, and those within the groups often form friendships while visiting attractions or taking part in arts and crafts.

For the majority, the trips are the first time they travel by train in the UK and have the opportunity to access the countryside and coast.

The partnership's relationship with RAMA is just one strand of the work it does to engage marginalised and vulnerable groups. Other trips include special services for those living with dementia and families supported by Barnardo's.

“ I would say it has been an absolutely massive success. The joy on their faces is amazing to see, and at the end of each trip people always ask, ‘when can we do this again?’ The social aspect of it is huge. When you first meet the groups, they often don't know each other, but to see them on the train chatting or skimming stones in the sea, you see them making their own social links.

This project allows them to forget their troubles, even if just for a day. They'll tell us they were able to have a few hours not thinking about how they got here, where they're living, or where their families are. It gives them a bit of faith, hope, and peace. The idea is for it to be a fun day out, but it can have lasting effects. Some of them when you're saying cheerio they're holding your hand, and they get quite tearful and say you don't know what a difference this day has made, I can live now. ”

Terri Rylance, Essex and South Suffolk Community Rail Partnership

Accessible and inclusive stations – the role of community rail

Community rail, working with rail partners, has helped to empower many community groups and organisations to access, utilise, lease, and transform station spaces and land for social, environmental, and economic good, strengthening the railway’s place within our communities.

In our previous reports, we have explored various aspects of how community rail has developed stations as sites for fostering social and community cohesion, alongside their role as transport interchanges. For example:

- **Community stations: innovative community uses for railway stations and land** – looks at how community rail initiatives had given unused station buildings a new lease of life, delivering economic, social, health and wellbeing benefits to communities;⁴⁸

- **Connected Stations** – this toolkit shows how community-led station travel planning puts stations at the heart of communities and sustainable transport networks;⁴⁹
- **Community rail and biodiversity** – highlights how community rail is enhancing biodiversity, and in the process people’s wellbeing, via gardening and wildlife projects, developing stations as green spaces offering multiple benefits.⁵⁰

For this report, we are considering how community rail partnerships and groups are helping to make stations physically accessible to those with a disability or impairment; making stations more inclusive and welcoming environments that encourage social interactions; and using stations as bases for inclusive volunteering.

Community Rail Lancashire’s ‘On Track to Train’ project



I. Community rail and accessibility infrastructure

“

Design standards for stations will be updated by an expert working group, including community rail partners, to bring new ideas and make best practice standard. This will include setting out how to make stations more accessible and inclusive, and integrate them more effectively with wider developments and transport services so people can access rail and other services more easily.”

Plan for Rail⁵¹

Research has shown that some of the most prevalent barriers to disabled people accessing rail are associated with travel to and from stations, and being able to navigate stations.^{52,53} While major infrastructure projects are led by the rail industry, community rail is ideally placed to bring local knowledge and the voices of people with different lived experiences, as well as leading on smaller scale improvements.

The current physical accessibility audit of all British stations aims to direct decisions on investment, including funding from the Access for All programme. There are many examples of community rail partnerships and station groups seeking, spearheading, and managing bids for funding of this nature, working with rail partners. For example, Community Rail Lancashire worked with Northern, Network Rail, and Lancashire County Council on a host of Access for All bids, including multi-million-pound schemes. They applied for an accessibility design study for Accrington Station, and drew up a successful bid to make the station fully accessible, with lifts, ramps, and a new footbridge, from Levelling Up funding. They achieved similar success for Burnley Manchester Road Station.

Accessible travel on the Settle-Carlisle Line



Community rail also plays a role in applying local knowledge to audits and surveys. Tyne Valley Community Rail Partnership has been involved with many small-scale projects, including enabling accessible platform access at Riding Mill Station and Blaydon Station, using their knowledge of the environs of the latter to connect the platform with an adjoining cycle path. The partnership is currently undertaking an accessibility survey of all the stations along its line, using local people with knowledge of stations and common travel patterns to ensure they are accessible and inclusive in terms of issues such as signage and surfaces. Accessibility is also central to the concept of Gloucestershire Community Rail Partnership's 'Let's Talk Travel' project and its new Access and Active Travel Maps, which identify accessible routes to and from local stations, highlighting facilities for disabled people and extra details such as pavement access, gradients, and pinch points for overcrowding.

Another developing area is that of enhancing station facilities to widen rail access and assist those with non-visible disabilities. On the Bentham Line, the community rail partnership adapted features such as signage and timetables to make them easier to use for people with conditions such as dementia, making things clearer and simpler to reduce anxieties and promote a feeling of ease. As issues with wayfinding have been identified as a specific barrier among disabled people,⁵⁴ improved signage and other cues is greatly important, and something where community rail can play a significant role.

CASE STUDY: Friends of Buxton Station – Dementia-friendly station signage

The Friends of Buxton Station recognised that station signs were not particularly helpful to people living with dementia. They invited those with experience of the condition to visit and highlight issues they faced.

The group took a pan-disability approach, aiming to create signage that would be easily understandable not just for those with dementia, but other conditions such as autism and visual acuity issues. As part of the design process, they involved relevant local community groups and engaged directly with 45 local people living with dementia. Feedback included problems with black on white signage, too many words, and certain shapes, so the group created a set of simple yellow and black signs that used symbols from the rail alphabet instead, for things like trains and toilets.

The project was supported by Northern’s Accessibility User Group, and received funding as a pilot from the operator’s Accessibility Fund. Northern paid for the new signs to be produced and installed.

The friends’ group have been gathering informal feedback on the impact of the new signage, which has been very positive so far. This includes from macular groups and groups of young people with mental health issues, who were invited to visit and review the changes.

Formal feedback is set to take place over the coming year, via a simple questionnaire with a QR code on a station poster. The friends’ group will also periodically be meeting people arriving to catch trains to get direct, qualitative feedback as they travel through. If the pilot is a success, it might be trialled elsewhere on the Northern network.

“ We haven’t got definitive data as yet, but the feedback we’ve had has been overwhelmingly positive. If the anecdotal comments turn into hard data, we would hope that Northern might say, well we’ll try this somewhere else on our patch. If it makes things easier for people who have got problems using the trains, then it is something we should go for to encourage modal shift.

Social inclusion in rail travel is a key objective of ours. To open up opportunities for people who don’t use the train because they feel excluded in some way, community rail is in a brilliant place to do that.”

Derek Bodey, Friends of Buxton Station



II. Community rail and inclusive and welcoming station environments

We estimate there are now around 1,200 community groups across the rail network helping communities get the most from their stations, turning those sites and their surroundings into thriving and celebratory gateways and hubs.⁵⁵

The accessibility and inclusion agenda is gaining prominence in this work, as groups look to enhance stations so they are more than just places to catch a train, they are places that encourage social interactions. Making a station somewhere a community can feel proud of and ownership towards in turn may widen access to rail travel by encouraging people to see rail as a part of their lives.

Projects that help stations to be welcoming places, where everyone can feel at ease and connected with the people and places around them, include:

- Wildlife and sensory gardens – many stations boast wildlife and community gardens used to promote the wellbeing of individuals and communities. At Westerfield in Suffolk, the station wildlife garden contains more than 200 species of plants and animals, and is a regular visiting spot for residents and carers from a nearby home for adults with learning disabilities to stimulate wellbeing.⁵⁶ At Largs in Scotland, the objective of the station garden was to engage people of all ages and abilities in a community project, particularly those with health issues, to enhance social inclusion. The group created accessible paths and used whisky barrels as raised beds to allow people to grow flowers, vegetables, herbs, fruit bushes and trees, and membership increased to over 40 people, including members of a local stroke support group, gardening, and rotary clubs;

- Talking benches – Essex and South Suffolk Community Rail Partnership installed talking benches at a number of stations in Essex, which give people information about the local area as they wait. Manningtree was the first, followed by Braintree and Alresford, and they are proving very popular. The solar-powered benches feature a button which, when pressed, tells the story of the area using the voices of local people and/or station staff. The benches not only add to the character of stations and offer a window into the communities they serve, but also provide a place for people to connect and chat and feel connected with the area;⁵⁷
- Accessible station displays – an increasing number of stations are being enhanced with art displays that promote inclusivity, reinforcing the notion that stations and rail travel are open to everyone. For example, Action Stations Bingley and Crossflatts in West Yorkshire have created a Finger Spelling project to aid communication and inclusion of the deaf community, and numerous stations are incorporating British Sign Language artwork and name boards.



CASE STUDY: Severnside Community Rail Partnership - ‘In Our Hands’ - British Sign Language Artwork at Patchway Station



‘In Our Hands’ is a photography project borne out of the refurbishments at Patchway Station. After feedback that the station appeared too functional and desolate, Severnside Community Rail Partnership worked with Great Western Railway to create a more welcoming station environment .

Of the 11 local artists who applied, Bath Spa University student Katie Hanning was selected for her concepts based on the theme of ‘bringing communities together and supporting diversity and inclusion’. Her idea was to create a photography piece in British Sign Language (BSL) using the hands of members attending the Memory Café in Patchway, spelling out the powerful messages

‘Together We Are Stronger’ and ‘The Future is in our Hands.’

The project allowed participants to share their experiences of hearing loss, opening up a wider dialogue about representation of the D/deaf community. The launch event involved a performance in BSL from young people at Yate School’s Hearing Resource Base, the first time these students had performed in public.

Contacts gained through the project are being used to continue to develop the relationship, with more local D/deaf groups being offered a ‘**Day Out by Train**’ experience.

III. Community rail and accessible and inclusive volunteering

Research suggests that volunteering, and perhaps particularly in an environment such as community rail, can have profound positive effects on the individuals involved. There is evidence that volunteering provides social relationships that help people feel connected to their communities, encouraging people to get involved in other local activities, further increasing interaction and active citizenship.^{58,59} Studies also show that volunteering improves physical and mental health, supporting happier, healthier lives.⁶⁰ These feelings can be magnified by involvement in gardening or biodiversity projects typically associated with station adoption, as people feel better from being outside, being in touch with nature, and socialising outdoors.⁶¹



Community rail volunteering in numbers

As the station adoption movement grows, stations are being adopted by a more diverse range of groups, including schools, colleges, charities, and other community groups, with gardening and arts and heritage projects bringing different elements of the community together, strengthening bonds. In many cases, this fosters an inclusive environment, supportive of those with a disability or condition becoming involved, which in turn, widens access to rail by offering a positive experience of rail and stations.

Holmes Chapel Station



St Vincent de Paul Society members



Some station groups, such as those at Driffield and Holmes Chapel, have made alterations such as the installation of accessible planters to ensure that volunteering is open to all. Other stations have been adopted by charities and organisations working with people with disabilities, using them as sites to expand and diversify their work and deliver social value. Recent examples include:

- New River Line Community Rail Partnership working with Mudlarks, a local charity supporting adults with learning disabilities, to adopt Hertford East Station. This project aimed to further the charity’s goals of helping its members to learn skills and find routes into sustainable employment through community gardening;
- Tyne Valley Community Rail Partnership is supporting the Newcastle branch of charity St Vincent de Paul Society as they start work as adopters of Manors Station. The charity is part of an international Christian voluntary network dedicated to tackling poverty by providing practical assistance to people in need. Its station adopters consist of migrants, former homeless people, students, deaf people, and other members of the community, who will be supported to develop creative and sustainability-related projects;
- Southeast Communities Rail Partnership works with a number of voluntary organisations supporting groups with additional needs and learning disabilities who engage regularly with station activities. These include County Care, who are involved with station gardening, try the train trips, and other accessibility-related projects, and the Aldingbourne Trust, a charity supporting people with learning disabilities and autism whose members travel independently by train to support station projects.

CASE STUDY: Kent Community Rail Partnership and the Five Acre Wood Special School – Snodland Station



The **Five Acre Wood** and Grow19 Project empowers students aged 16 to 25 with additional needs to feel valued in their community and develop skills through practical experiences.

Kent Community Rail Partnership initially worked with the group to transform an unsightly grassed area outside Snodland Station, plus the station's booking hall, with activities linked to their coursework and portfolios. The partnership organised rail confidence and independent travel training to allow the students to visit the station and develop their ideas. They formulated project plans and budgets, prepared the ground, built planters, researched flowers and plants to include, and designed and created artwork to enhance the station interior.

The SEN school has now adopted the station and become an active member of the Medway Valley Line group, offering a youth voice on projects and events. The students continue to maintain the site, which gives them an enormous sense of pride and achievement, and their efforts have helped to

reduce litter and anti-social behaviour. In addition to improving their teamwork and practical skills, the students have vastly improved the appearance of the station, its standing within the community, and its contribution to biodiversity.

In 2022, all 160 students at the school, many of whom have non-visible disabilities or motor control difficulties, took part in the Sunflower Mural art project, designed to raise awareness of non-visible disabilities and celebrate people's individuality and differences. Working in partnership with Southeastern, the school linked the project with the train operator's 'Just A Minute' scheme, which recognises that some passengers may have non-visible disabilities and require additional support.

All students worked on sunflower designs during art and wellbeing lessons, before members of the local community helped to decide on the final images for the mural, which has now been installed at the station to universally positive feedback.

Emerging lessons: key principles of success

For the purposes of this report, we spoke to a small group of Community Rail Network members in detail about accessibility and inclusion-related projects, about why they had taken the approaches they had, and what they felt contributed to achieving success.

I. Designing projects with those with lived experience

This came up repeatedly in our discussions: a strong sense that it's vital that projects to support disabled people are co-designed with them, in a 'nothing about us, without us' approach. There was agreement that accessibility-related schemes that are imposed on groups without their input were wholly inappropriate, and that initiatives had to be put together with these groups not for them. This chimes with research asserting that representation and engagement should be at the core of transport solutions to ensure disabled people are understood and their needs are met,⁶² and that disabled people must have a voice in decision-making from the outset of transport projects.⁶³ It also echoes the approach being taken by Rail Delivery Group to position the rail industry as a leader in terms of equality, diversity, and inclusion, with the empowerment of those with diverse lived experiences recognised as key to promoting social mobility and driving positive change.

The community rail officers and volunteers we spoke to emphasised the importance of genuine, not tokenistic, engagement with disabled people. Where those with disabilities have been supported to shape, or in some cases lead, projects, this was said to have led to better outcomes and empower those involved.

“ There's a big noise in the learning disability community about co-production and learning through lived experiences, and we're moving away from somebody who professes to be an expert but hasn't walked in those shoes. The stuff that our guys come up with, some of it is obvious, but some is, 'wow, I would never have got there, but I totally get it.' I think the authenticity of having it peer-to-peer is vitally important, and I think that makes everything more accessible.

It's not just about our groups with learning disabilities. I think people who struggle with mental health issues are much more likely to find confidence from somebody who has had a similar experience, because there is empathy and they won't feel ostracised. Rather than being talked at, you're having an experience, and being shown a way through that. ”

Betty Chadwick, CEO of Winchester Go LD, whose members are delivering travel training to other learning disability organisations in partnership with Hampshire CRP

“ Working with advisory groups is completely crucial. I sit on Northern's accessibility user group, which is a fantastic body of people, pan-disability, and it's great that Northern has that. Working with people who have that lived experience of what you're trying to create support for, it is nonsensical to try to create a fix for something you don't understand from the inside. You're actually creating far more work, because you'll produce something that is not as helpful as it could be. ”

Katie Douglas, accessibility and inclusion officer, Community Rail Lancashire

CASE STUDY: Hampshire Community Rail Partnership and Winchester Go LD – Travel with Confidence



Hampshire Community Rail Partnership and South Western Railway developed the ‘Travel with Confidence’ project to support adults with non-visible disabilities, those with anxieties about travelling post-pandemic, and those without confident access to rail. The scheme involved try the train trips, and a resource, ‘Help is at Hand,’ to increase travel confidence by rail and bus.

One of the groups involved is Winchester Go LD, a charity that supports adults with learning disabilities to live full and independent lives. The project developed to enable Winchester Go LD to deliver a mentoring programme for other local organisations, charities, and day care centres. Since January 2023, 14 Go LD members have been skilled up as expert ‘travel trainers’, and supported by staff and volunteers, have led on delivery to more than 50 people from eight groups of their peers. Overall, 110 people took part in the project, which involved more than 30 trips by train.

The training consists of try the train trips, station visits and classroom sessions. Having been involved in the first stage of the programme, Go LD members benefitted from a supported, positive experience of rail travel and station environments, allowing them to become confident in the help that is available. Using their experiences of common travel barriers and ways they can be overcome, they use cue cards with simple visuals to talk groups through the

processes of buying tickets, using station help points, using ramps to board and alight trains, and what to do in the events of delays or cancellations.

The project is the first time Winchester Go LD has been involved in a scheme shaped and led by participants, and the growth in confidence of its members has been “immeasurable.” Acting as travel trainers has not only allowed members to pass on vital travel knowledge to support groups with similar needs, it has also developed vital professional and life skills including communication, leadership and social skills.

“It empowers the trainers to show the way to others and share good practice. So rather than me saying this is what you do, it is them mentoring their peers. I would say that is where our project is pretty unique and stands out. This is not talking to people about what we think they need, this is what they actually need.

Those people would never get the opportunity to showcase their skills and gain that sense of pride. We felt it was really important to try it, and we are completely blown away with how it has taken off. I think this is the tip of the iceberg. The dream would be that we’ve got the bones of it, but it’s something that could be rolled out far more widely.”

Lucy Lomax, Hampshire Community Rail Partnership

II. Engaging people via creative means

Another theme that emerged from our research was the importance of using creative means to engage people with disabilities and/or marginalised from rail. This complements research reinforcing the notion that enjoyable creative activities give people with disabilities opportunities to express themselves and have a meaningful focus.⁶⁴

Many projects use creative means to engage groups about travel barriers they face, and provide a creative

outlet and opportunity to interact with others who have shared experiences. Others use arts projects to raise awareness of disability and mental health, or promote rail and stations as inclusive and supportive environments.

There was also recognition that thinking creatively ‘outside the box’ was vital in encouraging marginalised groups to consider rail travel and/or the use of stations as bases for creative activity.

CASE STUDY: Tyne Valley Community Rail Partnership – Lyric and Line

Tyne Valley Community Rail Partnership had been exploring different ways of identifying and understanding barriers to rail, particularly among groups with additional needs. Using the concept that music has the power to engage, they developed a proposal with musician Gareth Davies-Jones to use songs to gather views of rail travel.

The pilot initially focused on three groups who did not habitually use the train. Over three months, Gareth built relationships with Gibside SEND School in Gateshead, who regularly took part in partnership’s education programme, Journey Enterprises, a charity for adults with learning difficulties who run the coffee kiosk at Hexham Station, and Zig Zag, a group for adults experiencing isolation.

They ran sessions with the groups to bring out their views on rail travel through music. Each group wrote and recorded a song, identifying challenges in using the train and the joys of rail travel. The findings allowed the partnership to set objectives to reduce barriers to travel and continue to support the groups, encouraging independent travel.

Since the pilot, the partnership has extended the project to include other groups, including online sessions for commuters to see what their concerns were about returning to rail post-COVID, so insights could be passed to Northern. They have branched out to a number of groups marginalised from rail, including the St Vincent

De Paul charity, which works with men at risk of becoming homeless, and a refugee service. Alongside musical sessions, the partnership took the groups by train to Chesters Roman Fort and museum at Hadrian’s Wall, demonstrating how local attractions could be easily accessed by rail.



The partnership has engaged 120 people in Lyric and Line, and is producing promotional videos to capture the essence of the project and communicate it to a wider audience.

“It was a novel approach, and it worked spectacularly well, far better than we imagined. The groups were thrilled; it made a really positive contribution to their wellbeing. I think they felt for the first time that someone was really listening to them; they’d never been invited to a forum like that before.

The songs were developed in real time, and they could see and hear the finished result that they knew other people were going to listen to, which is very different to someone just writing something down that might never be seen. If it’s a song, with your words, that you’ve sung, that’s a potent sign that something is happening. They left with a real sense of achievement, and we were left with lots of useful insights.”

Malcolm Chainey, chair, Tyne Valley Community Rail Partnership

III. Embracing access for all

Another recurring theme from our research was the feeling that accessibility and inclusion should not be too narrowly defined, and should genuinely mean access for all.

Those involved in the design of projects stated that while initiatives might be targeted towards groups facing a particular barrier to rail travel, there would be pan-disability benefits that would assist others.

For example, it was felt that adaptations such as clear, easy-to-follow signage and wayfinding would not only benefit those with non-visible disabilities, but anyone unfamiliar with rail. Those behind projects highlighted the risk of focusing too narrowly, and not considering how such work could impact on, and benefit, everybody.

It was also recognised that risk of social isolation and exclusion has increased since the pandemic, and that community rail had a responsibility to support anyone who faced challenges in accessing rail, and the multitude of opportunities this offers.

CASE STUDY: Leeds-Morecambe Community Rail Partnership and the 2021/22 Year in Industry Students at Northern – Access for All

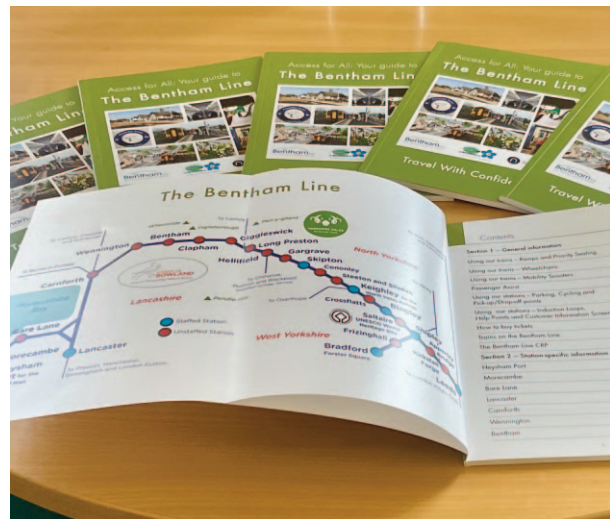
Students involved in Northern’s year in industry scheme worked with the Leeds-Morecambe Community Rail Partnership to enhance accessibility and inclusion on the Bentham Line.

The students took the theme of ‘Access for All’ and looked at multi-faceted accessibility improvements at stations, accompanied by a booklet and poster campaign. This included:

- A booklet giving information about arrangements at stations and on trains on the Bentham Line, such as ramps, priority seating, and buying tickets (3,000 hard copies produced and distributed);
- Detailed accessibility information for each station on the Bentham Line from Heysham Port to Leeds, listing facilities available, to help people in planning journeys, including those with mobility problems and non-visible disabilities;
- QR codes for each station, allowing rail users to link to a three-minute, 360-degree interactive video of each station’s layout and facilities.

This was supported by a grant from Northern, and it is thought to be the first line-specific accessibility guide to be produced, and a model that could be replicated.

The partnership said the students’ approach was refreshing as they didn’t just focus on bigger stations and didn’t limit their plans to any particular group: they took the view that whatever they did should have potential benefits for any user of the line.



“ They were determined not to leave anybody out, whether it was somebody who just needed to see what a station looked like before they arrived, or somebody with some form of disability. It truly was access for all, and I think we’ve got to think in those terms.

One of the key things for the Bentham Line is that we’re out there to help everybody, and I think community rail needs to remember that we can help every kind of traveller and we need to meet their needs, whatever they may be. We’ve got to think wider and encompass as many people as we can. If access is there, it’s access for everybody. ”

Gerald Townson, chair, Leeds-Morecambe Community Rail Partnership

Conclusions and recommendations:

The Government's Plan for Rail⁶⁵ asserts that the railways must become more inclusive, accessible, sustainable, and responsive to local needs, as part of a fully inclusive transport system. Our growing evidence base outlines the numerous ways that community rail provides an ideal vehicle for this. Putting accessibility and inclusion at the forefront of rail industry thinking, and supporting this through the local engagement typified by community rail, will ensure our railways play a growing, powerful role at the heart of our communities into the future.

Through the many examples in this report, we have highlighted how community rail is playing a leading role in enabling accessible journeys and preventing isolation, opening up rail travel to those with a wide range of physical and non-visible disabilities and other support needs, and consequently, also their families and friends. We have also considered stations, where community rail is helping to create inclusive and welcoming environments that cater for, appeal to and involve everyone.

From our research, we have found that community rail's local knowledge, and relationships with local groups, is vital in making accessibility-related projects a success. Impact is enhanced when projects:

- a) are built on genuine involvement with those with lived experience, with projects shaped by these groups;
- b) utilise creative, holistic approaches that bring people together, provide a voice and empower people who may otherwise be marginalised;
- c) consider and maximise access and inclusion benefits for as diverse an audience as possible, perhaps going beyond initial target groups.

Alongside these three core principles, we hope the specific recommendations that follow are useful for increasing impact on accessibility and inclusion for those within community rail and the rail industry.

For community rail:

- Develop your links with community partners by getting to know their interests and priorities, and showing the unique benefits you can bring to them and their members/beneficiaries, such as helping them to access confident mobility and make their views and voices heard within the rail industry;
- Work with community groups to share learning, resources, and expertise, and to amplify the views of those with lived experience, and promote accessibility and inclusion on a wider scale. For example, a BSL art project at a station could be used to increase awareness of BSL in the community, while showing the station and railway to be an inclusive space;
- Be up front with community partners about project scope, timescales, and your aims, to manage expectations and build trust. As projects progress, regularly communicate and show the results of their involvement;
- Always engage those with relevant lived experience in the project design process, and consider using creative means to draw on their views throughout delivery;
- Work with your train operator's accessibility/inclusion group or panel. An effective relationship with this group can help build support for new projects and provide a vehicle for feeding views and ideas in to railway partners;
- Actively seek disabled representation on your steering groups and committees to tap into the expertise and experience this will bring to your wider projects and activities;
- Value the time and input of advisors from any disability or marginalised groups. Consider whether this should be formally recognised, such as through funding support for groups or appropriate payments to individuals for their time;

- Incorporate monitoring and evaluation to capture the impact and social value you deliver, so you can use the results for communications, partner and funder reporting, and fundraising for ongoing projects, e.g. has travel confidence increased, have projects led to more independent travel and repeat rail use, have those engaged reported enhanced wellbeing and reduced loneliness;
- Look for funding from beyond the rail industry, e.g. funding linked to wellbeing or social mobility. Many sources will pay core costs, i.e. staff time, in addition to project costs. Consider external accreditation, e.g. from a charity such as the National Autistic Society, that may offer validation for external funders;
- Think creatively – with groups you’re engaging – about how you can widen access to rail while empowering people and helping them articulate their views, e.g. via special themed trains or days out, or arts-based activities;
- Consider how station environments can be more inclusive, pleasant, and welcoming, and create and instil community pride;
- Do not work in silos and define accessibility too narrowly: take a pan-disability approach and consider how benefits can be spread out;
- Use ideas from across the community rail movement, ensuring you’re signed up to Community Rail Network’s bulletin and following on social media (see communityrail.org.uk) for ongoing access to stories and examples.

For the rail industry:

- Consider ways to improve consistency and standardisation within the rail industry, to make the promotion of travel confidence easier and reduce anxieties for marginalised groups;
- Encourage others in the rail industry, from frontline staff to decision makers and strategic planners, to understand accessibility and inclusion work within community rail, and be responsive to the insights these projects offer, such as building information into staff training and internal communications;
- Ensure a community rail presence on accessibility and inclusion panels, and generally ensure that community rail-led accessibility and inclusion projects can feed through to you on their insights, experience, and expertise;
- Draw on community rail for their support and expertise with industry-led accessibility and inclusion projects, particularly for direct engagement with those with lived experience, and feeding in local knowledge;
- Consider the content of station and on-train messaging, and the impacts this has on those facing barriers to travel. Work with community rail partners to help get positive travel messages out locally, show how inclusive rail is, and raise awareness of the practical support available, e.g. Passenger Assist;
- Engage with Community Rail Network for further advice on working with community rail and drawing on its insights at a strategic level, and sign up to our bulletin and follow us on social media (see communityrail.org.uk) for access to ongoing insights and good practice examples.

End notes:

1. <https://osr.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/publication/review-of-transport-accessibility-statistics/pages/1/>
2. <https://www.liftango.com/resources/why-access-to-transport-is-important>
3. Kenyon, S., Lyons, G., & Rafferty, J. (2002). Transport and social exclusion: Investigating the possibility of promoting inclusion through virtual mobility. *Journal of Transport Geography*, 10(3), 207-219.
4. <https://transportforthenorth.com/wp-content/uploads/Transport-related-social-exclusion-in-the-North-of-England.pdf>
5. <https://www.ons.gov.uk/economy/environmentalaccounts/articles/roadtransportandairmissions/2019-09-16>
6. <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/national-travel-survey-2021/national-travel-survey-2021-household-car-availability-and-trends-in-car-trips>
7. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/831766/access_to_transport_report.pdf
8. *ibid*
9. <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/transport-disability-and-accessibility-data-tables-dis04>
10. https://www.motability.org.uk/media/iwaidhxx/motability_transport-accessibility-gap-report_march-2022_final.pdf
11. https://www.motability.org.uk/media/iwaidhxx/motability_transport-accessibility-gap-report_march-2022_final.pdf
12. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/814862/experiences-of-disabled-rail-passengers.pdf
13. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1082490/research-on-experiences-of-disabled-non-users-of-rail.pdf
14. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/728547/inclusive-transport-strategy.pdf
15. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/inclusive-transport-strategy/the-inclusive-transport-strategy-summary-of-progress#progress-in-2019-to-2020>
16. <https://everyonesjourney.campaign.gov.uk/>
17. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/994603/gbr-williams-shapps-plan-for-rail.pdf pp 74
18. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1006098/National-Disability-Strategy_web-accessible-pdf.pdf pp 42
19. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/community-rail-development-strategy/connecting-communities-with-the-railways-the-community-rail-development-strategy>
20. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/community-rail-development-strategy/connecting-communities-with-the-railways-the-community-rail-development-strategy>
21. <https://communityrail.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/Modal-shift-report-FINAL-FOR-WEB.pdf>
22. <https://communityrail.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Youth-engagement-report-final.pdf>
23. <https://communityrail.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/ACoRP-CRSI2018.pdf>
24. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/community-rail-development-strategy/connecting-communities-with-the-railways-the-community-rail-development-strategy>
25. <https://dementiastatistics.org/statistics-about-dementia/prevalence-2/>
26. <https://theknowledgeexchangeblog.com/2017/10/11/a-new-journey-creating-a-dementia-friendly-public-transport-system/>
27. <https://www.sensory-challenges-and-dementia-awareness.co.uk/travel>
28. <https://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/health/conditionsandtreatments/dementia-activities-and-exercise#bhc-content>
29. <https://settle-carlisle.co.uk/making-memories-along-the-settle-carlisle-railway/>
30. <https://www.dementiauk.org/get-support/living-with-dementia/music/>
31. <https://www.eskvalleyrailway.co.uk/forget-me-not-train/>
32. <https://communityrail.org.uk/east-anglia-to-host-its-first-dementia-friendly-music-train/>
33. <https://www.autism.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/what-is-autism#:~:text=More%20than%20one%20in%20100,and%20children%20in%20the%20UK.>
34. <https://www.autismspeaks.org/traveling-autism>
35. https://iuk.ktn-uk.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/InnovateUK_Accessible-and-Inclusive-Transport-Report_Screen_9-3-23.pdf
36. <https://www.crossrivertherapy.com/autism/why-do-autistic-people-like-trains>
37. <https://communityrail.org.uk/cr1-autism-friendly-sept19/>
38. <https://www.mind.org.uk/media-a/2958/statistics-facts-2017.pdf>
39. Cheng, YH. Exploring passenger anxiety associated with train travel. *Transportation* 37, 875–896 (2010).
40. https://iuk.ktn-uk.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/InnovateUK_Accessible-and-Inclusive-Transport-Report_Screen_9-3-23.pdf
41. <https://www.who.int/news/item/02-03-2022-covid-19-pandemic-triggers-25-increase-in-prevalence-of-anxiety-and-depression-worldwide>
42. <https://www.everydayhealth.com/emotional-health/ways-travel-is-good-for-your-mental-health/>
43. <https://media.raildeliverygroup.com/news/train-is-good-for-the-brain-academic-research-reveals-that-commuting-by-rail-helps-set-you-up-for-the-workday-by-cutting-through-brain-fog>
44. <https://communityrail.org.uk/new-river-line-offers-warm-welcome-during-mental-health-awareness-week/>
45. <https://communityrail.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/ACoRP-CRSI2018.pdf>
46. <https://communityrail.org.uk/resources-ideas/case-studies/gloucestershire-community-rail-partnership-getaway/>
47. <https://communityrail.org.uk/resources-ideas/case-studies/rail-journey-recovery/>
48. <https://communityrail.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/ACoRP-Community-Stations-Document-web.pdf>
49. <https://communityrail.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/ACoRP-STP-toolkit-final-version.pdf>
50. <https://communityrail.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/Community-rail-and-biodiversity-FINAL-FOR-WEB.pdf>
51. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/994603/gbr-williams-shapps-plan-for-rail.pdf pp75
52. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1082490/research-on-experiences-of-disabled-non-users-of-rail.pdf
53. https://iuk.ktn-uk.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/InnovateUK_Accessible-and-Inclusive-Transport-Report_Screen_9-3-23.pdf
54. <https://www.sustrans.org.uk/media/11708/sustrans-disabled-citizens-inquiry-full-report.pdf>
55. <https://communityrail.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/ACoRP-Station-Adoption-Booklet-050719.pdf>
56. <https://communityrail.org.uk/westerfield-station-wildlife/>
57. <https://communityrail.org.uk/essex-talking-benches/>
58. Ockenden, N. (2007) Volunteering in the natural outdoors in the UK and Ireland
59. Institute for Volunteering Research, Pathways through participation: What creates and sustains active citizenship? (2011)
60. <https://bmcpublihealth.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s12889-017-4561-8>
61. <https://disability-equality.org.uk/gardening-and-wellbeing/>
62. <https://www.sustrans.org.uk/media/11708/sustrans-disabled-citizens-inquiry-full-report.pdf>

Acknowledgments:

Particular thanks go to long-standing Community Rail Network partners the Rail Delivery Group for their sponsorship of this report and ongoing support of community rail.

Thanks also go to the following organisations and individuals for their contributions as research participants and expert consultees: Community Rail Lancashire; Tyne Valley Community Rail Partnership; the Leeds – Morecambe Community Rail Partnership; Hampshire Community Rail Partnership; Essex and South Suffolk Community Rail Partnership; Friends of Buxton Station; Sustrans; David Mapp (DPTAC); Mark Wilson (Northern); and Betty Chadwick (Winchester Go LD). Credit must also be given to the other Community Rail Network members and partners who contributed to the report through case studies and examples.

About Community Rail Network:

Community Rail Network is dedicated to supporting community-based groups and partnerships that connect their community with their railway and deliver social benefit. Members can access operational support, training and development, written resources, networking opportunities, and advice on good practice within all aspects of community rail.



For further information, visit communityrail.org.uk.

About Rail Delivery Group:

Rail Delivery Group



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

For information, see raildeliverygroup.com.



The Old Water Tower,
Huddersfield Railway Station,
St George's Square,
Huddersfield HD1 1JF

E info@communityrail.org.uk
W communityrail.org.uk