**COMMUNITY RAIL NETWORK**

**2022 ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING**

**VIA ZOOM**

**Tuesday 1 November 2022**

1. **Welcome and apologies for absence**

The Chair (Richard Burningham, Chair, Community Rail Network Board and Devon & Cornwall Rail Partnership) welcomed everyone to the AGM.

Apologies had been received from Philip Ayers and Tim Sparrow (Southeast Communities Rail Partnership).

The Chair advised that the AGM was being recorded for the purposes of minute-taking.

1. **Minutes of the AGM held on 2 November 2021**

The Minutes of last year’s AGM had been made available when joining the AGM via Eventbrite and had also been emailed to registered delegates.

The Minutes were unanimously adopted on the proposal of Garfield Southall (Community Rail Network Board), seconded by Ian Dinmore (Community Rail Network Board).

1. **Community Rail Network annual report 2021-22 and discussion on future plans for 2023-24 – Jools Townsend, Chief Executive**

Jools Townsend, Chief Executive, Community Rail Network, presented the latest Annual Report with a slide presentation. The report had been made available with the AGM papers and had been circulated with the Bulletin. The presentation highlighted some of the achievements of 2021-22, provided a summary of the results of the member survey, and set out the initial thoughts on the focus for 2023-24. The CEO’s comments included:

2021-22 had been another challenging year with ongoing and/or changing restrictions for volunteers, community rail and the wider network which only began to be relaxed towards the end of the financial year. During this time Community Rail Network had been thinking about the future and how rail recovery could be supported; about the longer term changes under Rail Transformation; and how communities could ‘build back better’ and the role for community rail in that. There was much to look forward to positively, including, potentially, a growing role for community rail. Community Rail Network was at the table for some key national strategic discussions, representing community rail and relaying its insights.

Despite the challenges, community rail continued to deliver by adapting and responding to circumstances – as evidenced by the 2022 Community Rail Awards. The CEO hoped that the positive leadership in supporting members to be flexible and to adapt had been helpful.

Over this period the movement had also continued to grow both in terms of Community Rail Network membership and activity:

* There were 73 community rail partnership (CRP) members and work was undertaken which enabled three new CRPs to be set up at the beginning of the current financial year
* There was a significant increase in the number of station group members (from 258 up to 291)
* There had been a huge array of events and training courses (25) providing learning opportunities on all sorts of different topics – delivered via a mix of on-line and face-to-face events. Although, inevitably, there had been some decline in the numbers entering and attending the Awards, these numbers had bounced back in the 2022 Awards which had just taken place
* There had been impressive engagement in the first-ever Community Rail Week
* Another significant increase in the number of Community Rail Network's social media followers
* There had been an increase in annual turnover (following a drop the previous year)
* A slight drop in the sum provided in grants on the previous year, but well over the amount awarded in 2019-20 – so overall a positive upward trajectory
* The number of staff remained at 17, but a couple of new staff had joined early in the current year. Staff were listed on the ‘Meet the Team’ page on the website

A large part of Community Rail Network’s role is to support the growth and development of the community rail movement. The Support & Development Team continued to work hard to spread community rail successfully to new areas, ensuring that new CRPs and groups are well rooted in the communities they serve; the Team was also busy helping existing members to respond to change and to further develop their work and impact. Community Rail Network always had an eye on the future to enable it (and its members) to get in the best possible position to support rail’s recovery following the pandemic.

The training and development programme continued to be very well received. In 2021-22, new sessions had been introduced specifically for CRP chairs, which was a helpful addition to the training for officers.

In 2021-22, Community Rail Network received a grant from Paths For All which had enabled recruitment of a dedicated staff member to support CRPs in Scotland to promote rail and sustainable travel.

Part of CRN’s role is to facilitate sharing across the community rail movement and to spread the message of community rail more widely: the Awards are a major vehicle for this, and showcase good practice in community rail. In 2021 the Awards were held in a hybrid format to make it as inclusive as possible – a total of 300 guests attended either in person or online.

120 delegates attended the Community Rail Conference run jointly with DfT specifically for CRPs.

Across all events, time was built in to allow for exchange and networking as well as bringing in external expertise and sharing members’ experience and case studies. A wide range of topics was covered but with a strong focus on sustainability and some activity around engaging communities to bring people together using creative projects. There was a growing library of case studies and this continued to be a useful resource (these could be found online or via the team).

Community Rail Network continued to add to its resource library including a suite of reports on different aspects of sustainability: sustainable development, modal shift and biodiversity. There was also guidance on running artistic projects which gave advice on creative rights. All resources are available on the website.

In 2021-22 Community Rail Network introduced a more structured calendar of communications campaigns, providing a platform for Community Rail Network and its members to get community rail’s messages out. All campaigns were backed by support from the comms & policy team and toolkits to help members get involved in ways that suited them. 30 CRPs/groups were involved with the new Days Out by Rail campaign (which replaced Community Rail in the City). The Scenic Rail Britain site was further developed as a year round tool for promoting rail-based tourism and leisure. Community Rail Network also ran a project with the tech start up firm Window Seater to create audio guides for lines on the GWR network – this drew on local stories, working with CRPs. Community Rail Network was interested in exploring how this type of project might be expanded.

October 2021 also saw Community Rail Network's first Community Rail Week. (The second Community Rail Week ran in May 2022 – and it was envisaged that going forward this event would be held in May). The 2021 Community Rail Week was timed to coincide with the run-up to COP26, the growing awareness around the climate emergency and the importance of encouraging more sustainable forms of transport. Community Rail Network was thrilled so many members got involved: 35 local initiatives were delivered across Britain; and there was fantastic engagement on social media. Numbers increased dramatically for the second Community Rail Week (eg 55 member groups ran initiatives; there was five times the reach on social media, and more than double the media coverage).

During the year Community Rail Network had also been busy engaging with Rail Transformation and strengthening its public affairs activity, drawing on members’ views and experiences and representing the diverse work and insights that emerged from community rail. Community rail had received strong recognition in the government’s Plan for Rail, reflecting the different ways community rail adds value and giving a strong commitment to further empowering the movement to do more. Community Rail Network is building on this by talking to DfT, the GBR Transition Team and industry colleagues to make sure community rail is contributing to the debate about how the aspirations of the Plan for Rail could be realised.

Community Rail Network was delighted to take community rail to COP26. A joint event was held with third sector partners working in other aspects of sustainable travel with a strong focus on what communities could do to lead the way.

Community Rail Network had carried out a review of public affairs and policy and this was leading to a more structured and proactive approach to regional engagement and working with sub-national transport bodies and combined authorities. The sustainability reports were drawn on a lot and disseminated through this engagement.

Community Rail Network engaged with the government’s Levelling Up team, making the link between community rail and levelling up aspirations. Community Rail Network also kept talking to the DfT about community rail’s role in tackling loneliness and this led to a successful bid, submitted jointly with a number of members and partners, to the DfT’s Tackling Loneliness with Transport Fund. This project is now underway, looking at how engaging young people with community rail can reduce risk of loneliness.

The Annual Report gave much more detail to this brief overview of the year’s activities.

Turning to the 2022 Members’ Survey, the CEO shared some of the headline results. (The next e-bulletin would provide more detail). Overall, it was pleasing that satisfaction levels were increasing across the board: nearly 9 in 10 members feel Community Rail Network offers good value for membership; 9 in 10 say Community Rail Network communicates well. There was also increasing levels of engagement with events / training and increasing numbers who had received direct support from Community Rail Network. The survey not only sought confirmation that members were happy with the services on offer but also sought to understand members’ priorities and focus so that these could shape Community Rail Network’s future plans. There were lots of qualitative comments within the responses which pointed to ways Community Rail Network could keep developing its work.

Arising from early discussions about next year’s work plan within the team, board and with funders, potential priorities for 2023-24 were:

* To continue informing rail transformation, and working closely with members to support them through the changes and ensure that opportunities were seized
* Social value is of growing importance – many rail industry partners were having to do more to demonstrate the social value that they were delivering: how could this be linked to the good work going on in community rail to benefit communities and society at large? Community Rail Network would also continue to encourage the monitoring of social value as a way to promote community rail and bring in funding from different sources
* Community Rail Network would continue to step up regional PR and policy work, including using the campaigns and growing links being made with media and decision-makers at a regional level
* Community Rail Network placed great importance on working with members to promote rail to contribute to rail recovery and to position rail as a green, healthy, community-friendly way to travel
* There would be an ongoing focus on supporting inclusive engagement with communities – including families and young people, taking a steer from the findings of the Tackling Loneliness project
* Community Rail Network would continue to think about how to work in more efficient, effective ways: a new contact management system was about to be introduced to help Community Rail Network support the growing number of members more efficiently without any diminution in the quality of that support

The Chair thanked the CEO for her report and thanked the team generally for all their hard work as illustrated by the solid record of achievement set out in the report.

In response to a question as to whether printed copies of the Annual Report would be made available, the CEO said that the Annual Report was available to download (from the website) and could be printed if required. Community Rail Network rarely printed material now: it tended to lead to wastage and printing incurred a cost that could be used to better advantage elsewhere. Nevertheless, Sarah Morgan requested that a small number of printed copies of Community Rail Network publications were made available.

Stephen Rolph asked if Community Rail Network had a position on the possibility that HM Treasury might advise the DfT that ticket offices should be shut to save money: *The Daily Mail* (in June 2022) suggested this would save £500M. The CEO said she was aware that this worry had arisen among a number of members and Community Rail Network had raised it with DfT. The line provided was that there were no plans to shut lots of ticket offices, but, as part of reforming the rail workforce, there were proposals to change arrangements to provide greater flexibility in the deployment of station staff. Bearing in mind the small proportion of tickets now bought in ticket offices, staff might not be sitting in an office, but roaming the station to support passengers in different ways. This was the current stance of industry and government colleagues. Community Rail Network would continue to keep a watching brief given that many members had concerns.

Steve Forde said that at a Northern Rail Stakeholders’ Event, their commercial manager was talking about plans for ‘Stations as Places’. This was partly based on the expectation that there would be many empty ticket offices in future years and so they were exploring alternative uses. It therefore seemed that this was the direction of travel as far as Northern was concerned. The CEO said that Community Rail Network was involved in the conversations around ‘Stations as Places’. Whilst being aware of worries about station ticket offices, it was important to also be alert to the opportunities for community rail to help station spaces be better used by communities.

Carol Evans said that to get the public on the trains there had to be an efficient service and at a price that people could afford. She believed the UK had the most expensive rail travel in Europe. She wondered if there was a role for lobbying to make rail more accessible in terms of ticket price. The CEO said that the DfT remained Community Rail Network’s biggest funder and there were rules in place which prevented government funding being used to lobby the government: Community Rail Network therefore had to be careful about ‘lobbying’. However, it was in Community Rail Network’s remit to relay to the DfT the insights that community rail had to offer, including about common barriers to rail travel, such as affordability. Community Rail Network took note when members raised issues and accompanying examples were helpful.

Commenting further on Carol Evan’s point, Steve Forde said that Northern was expecting to receive a subsidy of 40p per passenger mile. Northern also calculated that for every £1 invested in Northern Rail, the region saw a £5 return in terms of social value. He said that a few years ago the Treasury Green Book had been modified to take into account the social value of investment. He suggested that the thrust of any ticket price argument should be couched in terms of the social value/return. The CEO said the point about the wider social, environmental and economic benefit of the railways was critical and that community rail had a lot to contribute to this. At the GWR Conference recently, a senior DfT representative had talked about the need to recognise the railway as an economic resource delivering wider benefit rather than to look simply at the revenue from ticket sales. He saw the evidence produced by community rail as helpful in supporting that view.

Anne Ridley wondered if the level of support given by Community Rail Network to small independent CRPs was appropriate when compared to that received by larger organisations often supported by local authorities (eg support around corporate governance, HR issues, insurance etc). The CEO hoped so. Community Rail Network was mindful of the huge diversity across the community rail movement which required different types of support. Community Rail Network was constantly thinking about how to develop the ways in which support was provided and making sure to be proactive in providing needs-orientated support right across the movement and not just waiting for CRPs/Groups to seek support. Community Rail Network would keep striving to ensure that all members had access to the support they needed.

1. **Adoption of Community Rail Network annual Report and Accounts 2021-22**

The Annual Report and the Financial Statements for the year ended 31 March 2022 had been made available to members and the Management Accountant was on hand to answer queries.

The Annual Report was unanimously adopted on the proposal of Ben Walsh (Hereward CRP), seconded by Garfield Southall (Community Rail Network Board).

The Financial Statements were unanimously adopted on the proposal of Ian Dinmore (Community Rail Network Board), seconded by Marion Atkinson (Community Rail Network Board).

1. **New Board Members**

Members had received a written personal statement from each of the nominees standing for election.

The Chair said that at the close of nominations there were four nominations for five places on the Board (2 vacancies and 3 re-elections). Therefore no election would be necessary. The nominees were: Garfield Southall, Roy Chapman, Karen Hornby and Caroline Pearce.

Garfield Southall and Roy Chapman addressed the AGM to introduce themselves and to supplement their written personal statements previously circulated.

The AGM appointed the four candidates to the Board on the proposal of Richard Watts (Community Rail Lancashire Ltd), seconded by Ben Walsh (Hereward CRP).

The Chair took the opportunity to thank for their services: Tim Sparrow, who had stood down from the Board during the year having served for many years; and, Daisy Chapman-Chamberlain who had completed her term on Board at this AGM.

The CEO thanked everyone who served on the Board – the time they devoted to supporting and steering Community Rail Network was greatly appreciated.

The Chair closed the meeting thanking Sarah Fatica, Hannah Cottrill and Hazel Lavery for the organisation and smooth running of the AGM.

In attendance: Zoe Antrobus (4theRegion); Marion Atkinson (CRN Board); Brian Barnsley (Community Rail Network); Karen Bennett (CRL); Dawn Bigland (Community Rail Network); Paul Bromley (South East CRP); Andy Buckley (Bedford - St Albans City CRP); Richard Burningham (CRN Board); Roy Chapman (CRN Board); Daisy Chapman-Chamberlain (CRN Board); Sarah Chilton (Community Rail Network); Martin Clarke (Community Rail Network); Judie Collins (Altrincham and Bowdon Civic Society); Hannah Cottrill (Community Rail Network); Heather Cullimore (Severnside CRP); Ian Davis (Community Rail Network); Ian Dinmore (CRN Board; Wherry Lines CRP); John Ellis (Cotswold Line Promotion Group); Carol Evans (High Peak & Hope Valley CRP); Beryl Ezzard (Friends of Wareham Station); Sarah Fatica (Community Rail Network); Steve Forde (Mid Cheshire CRP); Dennis Gilbey (Friends of Yetminster Station); Sarah Grove (Meldreth, Shepreth & Foxton CRP); John Harrison (Friends of Narborough Station); Erin Kelly (Community Rail Network); John Kenny (Crewe to Mcr & SE Mcr CRPs); Hazel Lavery (Community Rail Network); David Littlefair (Community Rail Network); Rob Lowson (Community Rail Network); Margaret Mackintosh (Friends of Silverdale Station); Justyna Majer (East Midlands Railway); Alice Mannion (Community Rail Network); Sarah Morgan (Crewe to Mcr & SE Mcr CRPs); Emma Morris (Great Western Railway); Graham North (North Yorkshire County Council); Gary Outram (Sustrans); Alex Peel (Community Rail Network); Tony Reese (Friends of Crewkerne Station); Anne Ridley (Tyne Valley CRP); Peter Roberts (Individual Honorary Member); Stephen Rolph (Salfords & Sidlow Parish Council); Alan Shields (Friends of Ince Station); Julia Singleton-Tasker (CRN Board); Stephen Sleight (Marston Vale CRP); Garfield Southall (CRN Board); Patrick Southern (Community Rail Network); Mick Stone (CRN Board); Caroline Thompson-Noble (Community Rail Network); Jools Townsend (CEO, Community Rail Network); Ben Walsh (Hereward CRP); Richard Watts (Community Rail Lancashire); Paul Webster (Community Rail Network); Sarah Wells (Penistone Line Partnership) Jeremy Whitaker (CRN Board); and Daniel Wright (Community Rail Network).