

Williams Rail Review

Evidence from the Association of Community Rail Partnerships, January 2019

For all queries on this submission, please contact us on info@acorp.uk.com.

About ACoRP

The Association of Community Rail Partnerships (ACoRP) is a national, not-for-profit organisation working across Britain to support, advocate for and represent community rail – a growing, thriving grassroots movement that works to engage communities in their railways, and ensure communities can get the most from local lines and stations.

ACoRP's burgeoning membership includes 61 community rail partnerships (CRPs) and nearly 150 station adoption groups and other local groups, spread across Britain. We share good practice, connect those working in community rail, and help our members to develop, improve and overcome challenges, drawing on experience from across the movement and insights from the wider voluntary sector, rail industry and beyond. Our [membership services](#) include support and advice on planning and project delivery, communications, resources, seminars, training, an annual conference (delivered with the DfT) and national Community Rail Awards. We also strive to raise wider awareness about community rail and ensure the movement has a voice, to promote collaboration and develop opportunities at a strategic level.

Our mission sums up both our role and the role of community rail. It is to empower, support and champion the community rail movement, helping community rail partnerships and groups to:

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

ACoRP is funded by the Department for Transport (DfT) – our biggest funder – to support and enhance community rail in England. We also receive funding from the Welsh Government and a range of other authorities, agencies and industry partners. ACoRP remains a small organisation, but having undergone significant expansion, we are stepping up our work to support members and promote community rail, working collaboratively with the DfT to help community rail to realise its potential. This includes having recently inputted into, and supported the launch of, the DfT's [Community Rail Development Strategy](#), and we are excited to be playing a pivotal role in the strategy's delivery.

Find out more about our work, and our members, at communityrail.org.uk.

About this submission

This submission draws on our extensive experience of supporting and championing community rail over two decades, and our wide-ranging understanding of activities, opinions, opportunities and challenges within community rail. **This enables us to provide a unique viewpoint into the Williams Rail Review – based on grassroots, community engagement with our railways taking place across the country.** We therefore aim to share, in this response, a broad sense of the views, challenges and aspirations of community groups engaging with railways around Britain, based on the conversations we have, support we offer, and what we see and hear from our members on a daily basis.

We cannot, within the constraints of this response, provide specifics on the views of our members, only an overview, hence **we are also encouraging community rail partnerships and groups to input into the Review with their locally/regionally-based views, and we urge close attention to these.**

We are also pleased to have offered our assistance to the Rail Review team in drawing on the community rail network to support the team's tour of the country. Community rail partnerships and station-based groups can provide their own valuable insights to the team on their tour, and also may be able to facilitate wider engagement and conversations with other local community groups, businesses and service providers, who can themselves contribute useful and wide-ranging perspectives on the relationships they have with local railways, and how this interacts with local needs and aspirations.

Given the wide-ranging nature of this Review, and our work and position, we have selected five key topics, which we regard as critical for the Review to consider and make central to its recommendations:

- Putting communities at the forefront;
- Integrating rail with wider (transport) systems and strategies;
- Combining responsiveness with long-term thinking;
- Offering good value through affordability and accessibility;
- Maximising the social value of rail.

We provide broad views and insights under each theme, rather than making detailed, specific or technical recommendations about precisely how the railways are organised. However, we provide comments throughout on issues that arise within community rail linked to the present structure and set-up of our railways, and insights on how the structure and set-up might be made more conducive towards these five themes. We include below a summary of our main points, and suggestions of what this might mean in terms of rethinking the organisation of our railways.

We would be pleased to input into the Review further, assist with deeper engagement of community rail, provide supplementary evidence, or further expand on any of the points below, as needed.

Summary of our views and recommendations

Although we mostly offer broad views and considerations in this submission, rather than making detailed or technical recommendations about the precise changes that are needed, we would emphasise that we greatly welcome this Review, and hope that it will lead to positive progress in making our railways more central to and supportive of community wellbeing, cohesion, sustainability and development – and ensuring they make the greatest possible contribution to society.

In summary, we recommend that the Rail Review's outputs, and changes that ensue – whether they involve complete rethinking or smaller-scale reform of the present system – must ensure that our railways are structured and run in a way that enables and ensures adherence to the following five principles (in line with the sections below, which explore these principles in detail).

1. Putting communities at the forefront – There is much value in putting communities' needs at the forefront of the way our railways are run, thinking beyond existing passengers, and engaging proactively with those who could benefit from rail travel in the future. This is crucial in achieving modal shift, promoting mobility and access to opportunity, and reducing social isolation. The railways should be structured and run in a way that not only facilitates community engagement locally, and makes local investment and development as smooth as possible, but ensures communities' voices are heard and made a priority at a structural and strategic level. Demonstrating that this is happening could be a powerful way to rebuild trust and positivity surrounding our railways.

2. Integrating rail with wider (transport) systems and strategies – There is an opportunity and a need to use the outcomes of this Review to better integrate and align rail with other sustainable and active travel modes. We believe that strong leadership is needed, to prioritise the linking of rail with sustainable and active travel networks, and that the way our railways are organised and managed should ensure inter-modal connectivity on the ground. In addition, opportunities to align strategic planning of rail development with wider development and social change, particularly to do with new housing, should be scrutinised and realised.

3. Combining responsiveness and long-term thinking – The way that our railways are currently structured and run, with track and train operations separated, and the present franchising system, appears to stymie both nimbleness as well as long-term strategic thinking. While the franchising system includes critical support for community rail, which must be continued, there are also challenges and issues experienced within community rail related to the present system. This includes, through the refranchising process, uncertainty, upheaval, and often lost opportunities, as well as the prescriptive nature of franchising stifling ability to seize new opportunities.

4. Offering good value through affordability and accessibility – The concept of good value is central to the Rail Review and *Strategic Vision for Rail*, but we believe closer attention is needed to how this is tied to the accessibility and affordability of rail travel. Only by ensuring that rail is accessible can it truly offer good

value to taxpayers, and affordability is a fundamental part of this. Through our work, we can see that making fares fairer and simpler is of critical importance, to enabling more people to access rail and enabling rail to deliver maximum value to society. This should be a key consideration of the Rail Review, with its outcomes geared at improving rail's affordability and accessibility for all.

5. Maximising rail's social value – Recent research has shown that the rail industry lacks maturity, compared to other sectors, in terms of being able to assess and demonstrate its social value. Developing this is key: only by getting a good understanding of the range of ways, and extent to which, rail delivers social value, can we hope to maximise this. Putting social, as well as economic value, at the forefront of rail leadership, policy and management, could pave the way to a structure and system that is more conducive to rail delivering on its full potential, and better inform investment decisions. This would also be valuable to building stronger relationships and greater positivity within our railways, their local communities, and to better connect the two.

We are not in a position to comment extensively and definitively on whether an amended franchising system, with ongoing track and train separation, or a more radically different alternative, akin to systems used in other countries, is the best course of action. However, we are clear that the current structure does throw up difficulties in terms of communities being able to engage with the railway, and the development and implementation of local and regional projects geared at better meeting local needs, and that a more integrated system might help to address this. We and our members recognise that there are some evident issues at the moment in the way our railways are organised, impacting on local service provision, and in some cases creating significant concerns for our members, and impacting on public perceptions and local relationships. We hope that the experiences and views shared in this submission will help to shed light on some of the structural issues that appear to be hindering progress at present, and which need to be addressed if we are to achieve the aspirations of this Review's terms. We hope that the outcomes of this Review will resolve these issues, and are happy to facilitate and organise local conversations, visits and examples that might further reveal the nature of reform needed to put communities firmly at the forefront of rail development and delivery.

i) Putting communities at the forefront

There is great value in engaging communities in their local railways and stations, as is acknowledged in the DfT's new *Community Rail Development Strategy*.¹ This was evidenced through Transport Regeneration's 2015 report,² which found that community railway lines saw significantly higher passenger growth than comparable lines, and estimated the economic value to the rail industry of community rail volunteering. More recently, ACoRP has drawn on case study evidence combined with academic research to explore the social value of community rail, showing profound, life-changing effects that can be delivered for individuals and communities.³ In particular, our 2018 report on *Community Rail and Social Inclusion* shows how volunteering, arts projects, station regeneration, rail accessibility and sustainable travel initiatives are supporting a broad range of public policy goals: wellbeing, health, community cohesion, skills development, access to employment, and sustainability.⁴ Indeed, the power of community rail – and access to rail travel generally – to help address social isolation and its associated problems is also underscored in the new cross-government strategy on tackling loneliness.⁵

More broadly, a swathe of academic research reinforces the idea that locally-based action, dialogue, communications and engagement is a powerful way to support and spur attitudinal and behavioural shift towards more sustainable transport and lifestyle choices, as well as greater levels of civic involvement and responsibility⁶. This is to do with the way that local engagement and communications can create a sense of efficacy, pride and connection with one's local area, and help to overcome practical and perceptual barriers to change.

¹ Department for Transport, 2018, *Community Rail Development Strategy*, <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/community-rail-development-strategy>

² Transport Regeneration for the National Community Rail Steering Group, 2015, *Value of Community Rail Partnerships and Volunteering*, <https://communityrail.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/ACoRP-Value-of-CRPs-and-Volunteering-28.1.15.pdf>

³ For an overview, see ACoRP, 2018, *What's been achieved in community rail?*, <https://communityrail.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/ACoRP-Whats-been-achieved-in-community-rail.pdf>

⁴ ACoRP, 2018, *Community Rail and Social Inclusion*, <https://communityrail.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/ACoRP-CRSI2018.pdf>

⁵ See p39 and 41 of DCMS, 2018, *A connected society: a strategy for tackling loneliness*, <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/a-connected-society-a-strategy-for-tackling-loneliness>

⁶ A range of academic research is discussed and referenced in ACoRP / J. Townsend, 2017, *Communicating Community Rail*, <https://communityrail.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/CommunicatingCommunityRail-researchreport-2017.pdf>

In this way, the community rail movement is already playing a crucial role in the development and promotion of rail travel, and helping more people to access, use and gain value from their railways. This is recognised in the four pillars of the DfT's *Community Rail Development Strategy*, which summarise the ways that community rail can deliver positive outcomes as:

- providing a voice for the community;
- promoting sustainable and healthy travel;
- bringing communities together and supporting diversity and inclusion;
- supporting social and economic development.

However, while community rail activity is growing in spread and scope across Britain, with the support of the rail industry, DfT and ACoRP, there seems to be great potential to put the principles of localised engagement and communications much more at the heart of the way our railways are run, to positive effect. This could have a transformative effect on the way railways are perceived, used and integrated into people's lifestyles, and the ability of the rail industry to understand people's views and needs and "respond to future challenges and opportunities" – a critical need, as is underscored in the Rail Review's terms⁷.

Some welcome progress has been made, in recent years, in ensuring that passengers' needs are central to railway-decision making, strategy and leadership. This is evident from the DfT's *Strategic Vision for Rail*, which takes as one of its main objectives delivering a "better deal for passengers",⁸ and the Rail Review's terms, and is clearly being supported by the important work of Transport Focus to ensure passengers' voices are heard. As an industry that exists to serve people and enable them to get around, putting passengers at the forefront seems fundamental to the success of our railways: only by listening to people travelling by train, and developing a rounded understanding of their behaviours, frustrations, wishes and needs, can the railways serve these people well. However, our experience in supporting community rail, which reaches out beyond existing rail users, shows why putting passengers at the forefront is critical, but not entirely enough, for our railways to play a maximum role in social and economic development.

There are, of course, many people who do not (ever or usually) use rail, for various reasons, whose needs, views and aspirations must also be central to the way our railways are developed and run. This is especially important to achieving a shift towards more sustainable and healthy travel, and to increasing mobility and access to opportunity, thus tackling social isolation and exclusion. Such groups include:

- children and young people who have not started to travel independently;
- people who face physical and perceptual mobility barriers, including to do with physical accessibility, transport links to stations, affordability, skills and confidence;
- those who live car-dependent lifestyles rather than using public transport, walking or cycling.

In all cases, there are major benefits, aligning with public policy goals, of enabling and encouraging these people to use trains as a part of sustainable travel, ranging from increased access to employment and training, to tackling loneliness, to improved health and wellbeing from more active lifestyles, to tackling pollution from traffic. Delivering these benefits is at the heart of community rail partnerships' work, many of which have a strong focus on rail accessibility (in the broadest sense), and their work demonstrates the profound effect this can have on people's lives, as well as challenges and barriers that need to be overcome. Our members' experiences show that many of these non-rail users have never set foot on a train, many would be nervous about doing so, and that many are of the view that train travel is 'not for them', or the preserve of other, more well-off, people. These are views that many of our members (and charity partners we are working with) describe being expressed by young people, people with disabilities and learning difficulties, and socially disadvantaged groups, in relation to rail travel.

In this way, engaging with non-rail users, understanding the barriers they face to rail travel, and working with them and their communities to overcome such barriers, should be central to the organisation, running and strategic direction of our railways. This will enable our railways to:

- develop in ways that enable and encourage more people to use rail as a part of sustainable travel, helping to address the myriad social and environmental problems associated with car dependency, such as towns and villages clogged with traffic, the health problems and premature deaths associated with air pollution and sedentary lifestyles, and climate change;⁹

⁷ Williams Rail Review call for evidence, 2018, https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/williams-rail-review?utm_source=2333e29e-e6df-4f03-bb1a-b25311cd37e6&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=govuk-notifications&utm_content=weekly

⁸ Department for Transport, 2018, *Strategic Vision for Rail* https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/663124/rail-vision-web.pdf

⁹ For example, see Flint Ellen, Cummins Steven, Sacker Amanda, 2014, '[Associations between active commuting, body fat, and body mass index: population based, cross sectional study in the United Kingdom](#)', *BMJ* 349:4887; and House of Commons Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee, 2016, '[Air Quality: Fourth Report of Session](#)'

- play a greater part in tackling loneliness, promoting social inclusion, and building more cohesive, strong, happy communities, by ensuring everyone can access opportunities they want to pursue;
- ‘respond to future challenges and opportunities’, by considering not only what current passengers need now, but how communities are evolving and what future passengers may need, including engaging with people early in their lives, as they are forming travel and lifestyle habits and establishing their mobility horizons;
- visibly demonstrate that the industry cares about, listens to, and is focused on serving and benefitting *people*, helping to build trust, understanding, positivity, openness and accountability, which are shown to be lacking at present.¹⁰

It is important to note that each of these positive outcomes carries significant economic, as well as social and environmental, benefits, and this stretches far beyond the railways themselves and their levels of use and profitability. For example, the drain on the NHS of health problems associated with sedentary lifestyles and air pollution is enormous,¹¹ while the government’s new strategy on tackling loneliness suggests the costs of loneliness to the private sector alone runs to billions.¹² We suggest further below how recognising the social value of rail might be central to rethinking the way our railways are organised.

Community rail can, and already does, play a crucial role in helping the rail industry to put communities more at the forefront of operations, and better understand local needs and views, including among those not already using rail. This ranges from highlighting accessibility barriers at stations, to making the case for major service improvements such as new Sunday or early morning services that open up new opportunities for local people and businesses. Often, community rail not only throws a spotlight on such opportunities, but proactively engages the community in taking forward improvements and promoting them. This role is recognised in the DfT’s *Community Rail Development Strategy*, which has as a pillar, “Providing a voice for the community”. As the strategy acknowledges, there is scope for developing this further, with one of the strategy’s key actions being for “train operating companies and Network Rail to ensure they have mechanisms in place for community rail organisations to communicate...with them, and for their ideas and suggestions to be considered and acted upon”.¹³ We very much welcome this sentiment, and are working with our rail industry partners and members to support and encourage this.

However, we suggest that there are structural factors, to do with the way our railways are organised, that may be inhibiting community rail, and communities generally, being able to have a greater voice and play a greater role in the development of rail. Although we have many examples of community rail influencing change, mainly at a local level, sometimes regionally, with the enthusiastic support of rail industry and other partners, we are also conscious of the frustrations commonly experienced by our members. This often relates to the time it takes for discussions to get underway and decisions to be made, difficulties understanding who makes decisions and the process for change to happen, and the amount of bureaucracy that even small, sensible, low-cost changes entail. We are aware of cases where communities have been determined to bring about improvements, built up support, researched what was needed and made a case, but then their enthusiasm and efforts have fizzled out due to red tape, complexity and slowness, often despite the best efforts of rail industry staff. Equally, we are aware of many community-driven initiatives that might be made more of, with greater structural and strategic focus and incentive in place. For example, a community rail project to make the Bentham Line dementia-friendly¹⁴ could be drawn on and evaluated to assess how to make all our railways dementia-friendly. Youth engagement initiatives across the community rail movement from Sussex to Glasgow might be used to harness young people’s views in strategic decision making about rail development. We therefore urge that the Rail Review considers how the organisation of rail might be made more conducive to community engagement and action, and to community voices and innovation being heard and drawn on, at local, regional, structural and strategic levels. This might involve the franchising system, or any new or reformed system, putting greater emphasis on community engagement and social value (discussed further below), and clear direction on the importance of not only passengers, but wider communities, being central to decision-making.

¹⁰ See Glaister Inquiry, 2018, Department for Transport, p21, http://orr.gov.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0010/39916/inquiry-into-may-2018-timetable-disruption-december-2018-report.pdf and Department for Transport, 2018, ‘Strategic Vision for Rail’, p5, https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/663124/rail-vision-web.pdf

¹¹ See NICE, 2018, ‘Physical activity and the environment’, <https://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/ng90/chapter/Context>; and House of Commons Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee, 2016, ‘Air Quality: Fourth Report of Session’

¹² Department for Culture, Media and Sport, 2018, *A connected society: a strategy for tackling loneliness*, p19, <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/a-connected-society-a-strategy-for-tackling-loneliness>

¹³ Department for Transport, 2018, *Community Rail Development Strategy*, p21, <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/community-rail-development-strategy>

¹⁴ See ACoRP, 2018, ‘Bentham Line’s community rail initiative...’, <https://communityrail.org.uk/bentham-dementia/>

In addition, it should be made easier for community groups, local authorities and others to engage with the railway, to influence and invest in railway improvements. A particularly important aspect is engagement with Network Rail. Although the present method of planning and funding infrastructure maintenance and renewal (through five-year Control Periods and High Level Output Statement and Statement of Funds Available processes) has given a security of railway investment not available before, there remain significant challenges in relation to communities' ability to engage with Network Rail. Despite enthusiasm and some progress in many quarters, community groups can still find it hard to engage with Network Rail, and many obstacles to do with costs and processes can be thrown in the way of making improvements happen. To help address this, Network Rail could be directed by government to act as a body that must work with others to improve and develop the railway and that, while covering necessary costs, will do everything in their power to achieve value for both outside investment and the communities that railways serve. In this way, they would act as a true "not-for-profit", encouraging everyone to get involved in their railway and making it as seamless as possible for bodies to invest. The situation is far from this at present.

In terms of Network Rail licence, our members are often told that enhancements cannot be funded by Network Rail because the licence is only to operate and maintain the railway and that all projects, however small, have to go through the Governance for Railway Investment Projects (GRIP) process, with the added expense this involves. This may work well for larger projects, but adds unnecessary time, expense and complexity to smaller ones. There is an issue too about it making schemes where options are limited, and the funder knows what they want, more complicated and expensive. Network Rail should encourage flexibility within its routes on when and to what extent it has to be followed. Most disappointingly, the licence wording also leads to examples where there is a refusal to add small but worthwhile improvements to planned maintenance, which could greatly reduce the cost of improvements, compared to it being done as a stand-alone project, because it is seen as an 'enhancement'. Going hand in hand with this is the need for a greater readiness by Network Rail (and the rail industry generally) to simply say "no", politely, and explain the reasons why a scheme is not viable, instead of encouraging time and money to be spent on going through the GRIP process and building up a case when there is very little chance of success. It would be better for Network Rail to be straight with proposers at the beginning, and encourage them to instead get involved in projects that are more viable and achievable. In our experience, this is especially important for local authorities who now have fewer members of staff and funding than in the past, meaning that resources must be even more carefully used. If councillors and council officers feel that there are major risks involved in working with the railways, to do with wasted resources, they are likely to be put off engaging with and investing in the railway. For these reasons, we would urge that the Rail Review takes into account and addresses the need for Network Rail to engage with communities, and local authorities and partners in an effective, transparent, accessible and straightforward manner.

Finally, in this section about putting communities at the forefront, we would also stress the need for government and the rail industry to work together, *within and with communities*, to communicate the importance they place on our railways working for ordinary people, everyday, and that they are open and willing to listen and talk about what this means, on an ongoing basis. We welcome the emphasis on 'listening', and hearing people's perspectives at a grassroots level, within the Rail Review itself, but suggest that this might also emerge as a key feature of its recommendations. At present, much political and industry discourse about rail is commercially- and technically-orientated and does not always demonstrate thinking beyond the railway or an understanding ordinary people's everyday realities. Common phrases include a 'better deal' for passengers/customers, 'customer experience', 'track and train integration', and 'asset/operator performance'. There is often, in communications, a focus on either large-scale projects and the investment going into them, or retrospective views on what's going wrong, rather than showing how the industry is working with and listening to communities to make things better at a local, everyday level. This, along with the complexity and bureaucracy involved in making changes, is likely to reinforce, rather than break down perceptual barriers, including the lack of trust and patchy passenger satisfaction referenced in the Glaister Review, and the sense of our railways being bewildering, foreign, remote and 'for others', which we regularly hear about. This is backed up by a range of communications research, as shown in our report, *Communicating Community Rail*.¹⁵ Again, community rail offers valuable opportunities for not only localised communications, but genuine dialogue, with communities – to build understanding around rail development (also lacking at present, in our experience), break down barriers, and ensure that people's needs and voices are understood and responded to. But the principle of putting communities and people's everyday lives first, listening, and working together to make things better, needs to be more at the heart of

¹⁵ For an analysis of academic research, showing that localised, practical, positive and two-way communications are important to engaging people in their railways, see ACoRP / J. Townsend, 2017, *Communicating Community Rail*, <https://communityrail.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/CommunicatingCommunityRail-researchreport-2017.pdf>

the way our railways are run, and reinforced structurally and strategically, for such communications to be truly meaningful and effective.

ii) Integrating rail with wider (transport) systems and strategies

As we have emphasised, we and our members strongly believe in developing the accessibility of rail, to ensure that everyone can benefit from the opportunities that our railways open up, and so that rail plays the maximum possible role in social and economic development. As we have argued, critical to this is attention to communities' needs, views and aspirations, thinking beyond existing passengers. Another crucial element of this, we believe, is the way in which rail integrates with wider transport and travel networks, people's lifestyles, and society generally. In other words, rail should not be seen in isolation, and we urge that the Rail Review considers how rail can be better integrated, with particular attention to the need to promote and enable healthier, more sustainable travel and lifestyles, and how rail can adapt to and anticipate rapidly shifting societal, work and travel trends.

Clearly, rail travel cannot be a stand-alone system, very rarely offering an end-to-end journey because of the need to travel to and from stations. The importance of connecting rail effectively (and better) with other transport and travel modes, particularly sustainable and healthy modes, is a key aspect of community rail. Our members' activities in this field range from achieving funding for and managing development of improved walking and cycling routes to stations, to working in close partnership with local bus operators and authorities to aid cross-modal strategic planning, to running minibuses connecting local festivals with the nearest railway stations.¹⁶ There are also growing examples of our members working in partnership with other community-based organisations, charities, educational institutions and service providers, to promote rail as an integral part of active, sustainable travel. For example, Kent CRP and the Poacher Line both work with Sustrans to engage local schools in sustainable travel awareness and bike-to-train skills. In the latter case, this is dovetailing with East Midlands Trains' infrastructure development work to improve pedestrian and cyclist facilities at stations. The importance of this area of work is again underscored in the DfT's *Community Rail Development Strategy*, which has as one of its pillars 'Promoting sustainable, healthy travel', highlighting how community rail is facilitating healthier, more sustainable end-to-end journeys for more people. It should be noted that efforts to help disadvantaged groups feel confident using rail to access employment, training or social opportunities – such as that highlighted in the government's tackling loneliness strategy – is of little value if those individuals (many unable to drive) are unable to walk, cycle or catch a bus to the station. It is important to note, too, that rail travel delivers greater social value, and plays a heightened role in building sustainable, healthy, happy and inclusive communities, if people access it via less polluting, more affordable and more active means.

We therefore believe that our railways should be run in a way that maximises (or, better, requires) comprehensive integration with sustainable and active travel networks. Yet, at present, there are often barriers to improvements being made to integrate rail with active travel and public transport. At a local level, we are aware of common frustrations amongst our members in their attempts to connect rail with other sustainable transport modes, including related to regulatory factors. For more detail on this, see our response to Q1 of the DfT's Community Rail Strategy consultation (p3-5 [here](#)).¹⁷ We also believe stronger leadership at a strategic level and a more systematic, embedded approach on this issue, would be valuable. The *Strategic Vision for Rail* contains no mention of integration with other transport modes, aside from in reference to multi-modal ticketing (an important part of integration, but only one element). We are conscious that franchise commitments in many areas include increasing car parking at stations, rather than clear priority being given to developing and encouraging sustainable and healthy alternatives to getting to and from stations, such as safe walking and cycling routes, ensuring trains and bus timetables coincide as much as possible, and collaborating with community transport providers. Often, work on active travel seems concentrated on increasing cycle parking at stations, an important component in many places, but a long way from a complete solution, especially where there is a lack of safe routes that might enable more people to feel confident enough to cycle in the first place. We recommend, therefore, that greater leadership, incentive, and an appropriate policy framework, is put in place to ensure our rail network can be accessed via sustainable and healthy means.

¹⁶ For examples, see ACoRP, 2017 and 2018, Community Rail Awards winners brochures, <https://communityrail.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/ACoRP-CRA18-Winners-Brochure.pdf> and

¹⁷ ACoRP, 2018, 'Response to Department for Transport's Community Rail Consultation', p3-5, <https://communityrail.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/CRDS-ACoRPconsultationresponse-Jan18.pdf>

More generally, we recommend that rail should always be seen as closely bound up with wider social and economic contexts, in terms of influencing as well as responding to change. Rail travel and rail development is able to spur, support and influence wider development, as well as needing to anticipate and react to it. We suggest that opportunities to support wider development should be clearly recognised, and reflected within the rail policy framework, to ensure opportunities are maximised. At a local level, within community rail, we are increasingly supporting and advising community-driven projects to bring disused station buildings back into community use and community hubs. Some of the successful projects that have come to fruition appear to have stimulated and inspired wider redevelopment.¹⁸ There are also, as mentioned above, numerous examples of community rail partnerships working with train operators and Network Rail to make the case for service improvements, such as increased frequencies or new Sunday or early morning services, with a view to the opportunities this opens up for local people and businesses¹⁹.

While it is pleasing that there are a growing number of these projects and improvements championed or spearheaded by local communities coming into effect, there are also frustrations about the time it takes, and a sense that such issues and opportunities, to do with boosting employment, spurring regeneration, and connecting rail with new housing, should already be a more central feature of rail development plans. In regards to housing, there seems to be a particular opportunity over the coming years to connect our railways with new housing and cater to new residents' needs (and site new housing in locations where this is more easily achieved), yet a recent *Transport for New Homes* report shows this is not happening at present,²⁰ and that much closer alignment is needed between strategic planning on our railways and urban planning and housebuilding. We therefore recommend that the changes brought about by the Rail Review should seek to better integrate rail, not only with other sustainable transport modes, but wider development, particularly new housing. We would suggest that this carries great potential, more so than is explicitly recognised in the *Strategic Vision for Rail*. It can not only enable "more housing" and a "better passenger experience", as the Vision says,²¹ but housing that better serves the needs of its new residents, and creates benefit rather than disadvantages for existing surrounding communities, by building better transport connections, and enabling healthier, more sustainable lifestyles for all, rather than simply generating more road traffic and isolating those who don't drive.

iii) Combining responsiveness and long-term thinking

As we have touched upon, there appears, from a community rail perspective, to be much scope for improving rail's ability to respond and adapt to changing needs and new opportunities. The importance of this is acknowledged in the Rail Review's terms, which refer to "a rail sector with the agility to respond to future challenges and opportunities". As we describe above, if the sector lacks nimbleness and flexibility, it stymies its ability to engage communities effectively, and to listen and respond to their needs and emerging opportunities, at a local and regional level. However, it also inhibits the scope for interacting and supporting wider social and economic development on a wider scale too, especially given the present pace of social change. At the same time, there is evidently a need for rail's organisation and strategic planning to be delivered with a long sight-line and strong leadership giving clarity about the long-term outcomes that are being pursued. As the *Strategic Vision for Rail* acknowledges in its timeline,²² it is important that we look decades and generations into the future. This ties in with our arguments in section V below, about better understanding rail's capacity to deliver positive social value and support wider development, which would help to eke out the longer-term potential and objectives of rail development, and create greater positivity within the industry and outside it, about achieving these.

From our experience supporting community rail, the manner in which rail is currently structured and organised, through the franchising system as it is set up at present, and the separation of track and train operations, appears to create some constraints in relation to both responsiveness, and long-term strategic thinking. The ways in which this manifests itself in relation to community rail can be summed up as follows (overlapping with comments made in the sections above):

¹⁸ ACoRP, 2017, *Community stations*, <https://communityrail.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/ACoRP-Community-Stations-Document-web.pdf>

¹⁹ See examples in ACoRP, 2018, 'What's been achieved in community rail?', <https://communityrail.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/ACoRP-Whats-been-achieved-in-community-rail.pdf> ; ACoRP, 2018, 'Seize the Sunday', <https://communityrail.org.uk/resources-ideas/case-studies/avocet-line/>; and ACoRP, 2017, *Community Rail Awards winners brochure*, <https://communityrail.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/ACoRP-CRA17-Winners-Booklet.pdf>

²⁰ Transport for New Homes, 2018, *Transport for New Homes: project summary and recommendations*, <http://www.transportfornewhomes.org.uk/resources/>

²¹ Department for Transport, 2018, *Strategic Vision for Rail*, p22, https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/663124/rail-vision-web.pdf

²² Department for Transport, 2018, *Strategic Vision for Rail*, p10, https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/663124/rail-vision-web.pdf

- the complexity and bureaucracy involved in approaching and working with the rail industry can be off-putting and deflating for community groups, who can find it hard to work out who to talk to, who makes decisions, how processes work, and where responsibilities lie (e.g. for different parts of station property);
- there is a sense that achieving improvements on our railways, or making decisions, often takes an unreasonably long time, and is pitted against disproportionate barriers, even when the work is relatively straightforward and small-scale, and there is local support within the industry and community; this can be off-putting for communities, local authorities and potential investors in local improvements;
- when new opportunities arise within or related to community rail, such as the emergence of new community rail partnerships (the timing of which cannot always be accurately anticipated due to the community-based nature of these organisations), the prescriptive nature of franchises tends to mean that it is a difficult to respond appropriately, such as by providing appropriate support;
- changeovers between franchises present a great deal of uncertainty and disruption for community rail partnerships. The secrecy surrounding the contents of bids and franchise agreement itself, during the assessment and then mobilisation period, plus staff changeovers, means there can be a period of a year before community rail partnerships (and ACoRP) are clear about where they stand in relation to a new franchise, the support available to them, and what the franchise contains in terms of development to their lines and stations. This is on top of the need to get to grips with new teams, procedures and approaches, and build relationships with the new operator. If more franchises fail, the uncertainty and disruption to community rail activity will be magnified and made more regular, so this creates a particular risk to community rail;
- issues can sometimes arise due to the short-term nature of franchises, such as investment being front-loaded and tapering off towards the end, or not aligning fully with Network Rail investment plans, meaning there can at times be less opportunity to get things done at a community level;
- opportunities to develop and make more of community rail can be lost or obscured through the refranchising process. Even though there is now engagement of ACoRP and community rail partnerships across practically all franchise bidders, and stipulation within ITTs to support and collaborate with community rail, bid teams are not always familiar with community rail and its potential within that area, and it can be challenging to convey the full scope of its needs and potential for further development during these conversations, given the pressures on bid teams and relatively light weighting given to community rail, so opportunities may be lost. Equally, there are sometimes great ideas and principles contained within bids, which are lost if those bids are unsuccessful, or which may be reinterpreted once a franchise goes live. An additional factor is that community rail tends to be treated within bids and franchise agreements (following the structure of ITTs) as a separate, stand-alone area, rather than integrated across the full range of rail development work.²³
- overambitious franchise bids can create problems within community rail, by raising hopes and expectations unduly (among community rail groups and the wider public) or, worse still, meaning that changes that are forced through can lead to negative effects on service delivery (e.g. commitments to transfer out rolling stock seeing train service capacity reduced).

These concerns and scenarios, which we commonly hear about from our members, and invest much time supporting them through, may be connected with the complex relationships and bureaucracy entailed in separation of track and train operations, and the prescriptive and time-limited nature of franchises within the current system. We deduce this because, as noted above, there is often enthusiasm and determination on the part of rail industry managers and station staff to help community rail initiatives to succeed, but often their efforts appear constrained by wider structural factors. It seems possible that such issues could be addressed within the current system, and indeed ACoRP works proactively with train operators, Network Rail, the DfT and other partners to try to resolve challenges. However, we recognise that they may be symptomatic of deeper problems with the nature of the system as it stands. We urge, therefore, that whatever reforms may result from the Rail Review, they seek to ensure these issues are properly resolved, so that the rail industry is better set up to respond to community needs, and collaborate and communicate effectively at a grassroots level, whilst maintaining a strategic focus on a long-term basis on serving communities effectively.

Nevertheless, it is important to emphasise that franchising has also worked extremely well for community

²³ For further description and examples of these sorts of issues, see also ACoRP's response to the DfT's Community Rail Consultation, 2018, <http://communityrail.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/CRDS-ACoRPconsultationresponse-Jan18.pdf>.

rail in many ways, and we urge that these benefits are protected, whatever changes may result from the Review, and assurances provided to those working in community rail during any transition, which we would be pleased to assist with. We have seen a significant increase in financial support for community rail through rail franchises in recent years, which has been not only welcome, but vital, as local authority funding for community rail partnerships has largely dried up. As we stated in our response to the DfT's community rail consultation, having funds specified in support of community rail, for core and project costs, over the lifetime of franchises, is invaluable. This funding is crucial to community in the way it:

- provides security to existing community rail partnerships, enabling them to recruit and retain professional officers to deliver community engagement and partnership activity (critical to their effectiveness, in our experience), and to plan and operate effectively towards long-term goals, aligning with rail development plans and the DfT's *Community Rail Development Strategy*;
- provides biddable project funds to support particular projects, activities and developmental work, enabling effective community engagement and response to emerging opportunities;
- opens up new opportunities for community rail's growth and development.

It is therefore vital to the community rail movement that funding of this kind continues. We provide more detail on the importance and nature of community rail funding in our response to the DfT's community rail consultation.²⁴

We would welcome the chance to further advise on how the benefits of present funding arrangements can be maintained and developed through whatever changes take place as a result of the Rail Review, once these changes start to take shape. Currently, the franchise model is fundamental to community rail's sustainability and success, but that is not to say that community rail could not succeed and be sustainable (perhaps to a greater degree) with an alternative model, so long as community rail was properly considered and respected in its development. We would therefore urge that if the Rail Review leads to the development of new structures, ACoRP and its members should be further consulted and involved in creating a positive environment for community rail, and community engagement generally, to flourish.

Equally important to the funding provided to community rail through franchising, is the collaboration and consultation with community rail which is required of train operators. This is, again, fundamental to community rail being able to play its role properly, and deliver on the themes identified in the new DfT community rail strategy. However, the way in which franchising stipulates support of community rail could be refined further, even within the current model. For example, the way that franchising assessments are weighted might be addressed to give greater priority to community engagement, and/or the award system might be restructured so that community engagement is expected across rail development work, rather than treated as a separate piece of work to be done 'on the side'. As noted above, while consultation with ACoRP and its members by franchise bidders has developed significantly, such conversations are subject to significant time pressures, and focus on the parts of bids that must demonstrate support for community rail. Therefore, what goes into bids tends to be more based on the question 'what does community rail need from us to keep going over the next few years' (an important question nevertheless), rather than more broadly discussing longer-term aspirations, drawing on community rail's unique understanding of the relationships between the public and the railways and local opportunities, and considering how communities can be put at the forefront and derive maximum benefit from their railways. A reformed system might make much more of community insights and ideas, not just at the point of franchise renewal, but on an ongoing basis throughout, and ensure that this is integrated across rail development plans. In addition, it should be ensured that comprehensive consultation with community rail (ACoRP and its members) is an essential part of direct awards, as well as full refranchising.

As noted above, franchise changeovers themselves also create significant challenges within community rail, hindering progress. Through and following refranchising, linked to confidentiality issues, communications with community rail partnerships and groups, and ACoRP, can be disjointed, limited or patchy, creating uncertainty and making planning difficult. Community rail partnerships and groups will not know, for a considerable time, what went into bids (relating to community rail support or wider service changes), and will have to grapple with changes between staff, and those staff often being unable to disclose anything that might give reassurance and enable future planning. Sometimes community rail partnerships will not know what funding they can expect until they are about to get it, hindering their ability to plan, in advance, how to make the most of this funding and ensure continuity in their work.

²⁴ ACoRP, 2018, Response to the DfT's Community Rail Consultation, <http://communityrail.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/CRDS-ACoRPconsultationresponse-Jan18.pdf>

We suggest that the system might be adjusted so that, while maintaining confidentiality when needed, community groups receive earlier, clearer communications and points of contacts. For example, once bids are in, bidders could have to disclose ACoRP and its members what they have included relating community rail, so there is at least awareness of the possible outcomes, depending on who wins. Better funding arrangements could be put in place, and transfer of community rail contacts and records between franchises, to aid transition and ensure funding is provided in line with corporate/third sector best practice. Community rail funding might be weighted to increase in the final year of a franchise, to aid continuity through the transition; or when a franchise is due to end part-way through a financial year, community rail funding for that year could be equivalent to the whole year and not pro-rata. We also recommend that funding from the rail industry should always be provided in a way that offers the chance for prior clarity and agreement on how that funding can be used and expectations, without placing unrealistic demands, bureaucracy or control on community rail groups. There is clearly a balance to be struck, to ensure that arrangements are transparent, and there is coordination with rail industry plans, but that community rail partnerships are able to set their own priorities and plans, and clear about reporting arrangements, lines of communication and expectations. Within the current system, or under an alternative model, much can be learnt from wider third sector funding practices, to ensure funding is provided in a way that is clear, supportive and aids effectiveness.

Finally, in this section about responsiveness and long-term thinking, we want to highlight the opportunities to encourage and enable communities to feed into the ambitions set out in section two of the *Strategic Vision for Rail*, 'An expanded network', and recommend that the *Rail Review* considers how this can be made a reality. Related to our arguments above in section I, we believe that community rail, working collaboratively with rail user groups and other local partners, can play an important role in the expansion of the rail network, and ensuring communities' needs and aspirations are central to this. It is worth noting that in some cases, we have seen groups that have successfully campaigned for railway or station (re)openings, bringing partners, funders and local groups together behind the endeavour, then morphing into community rail partnerships and groups,²⁵ which work with the rail industry on an ongoing basis to promote and enhance the line or station. Happily, this means that community involvement – surely of particular importance where the railway is expanding – is integral throughout. There seems scope for this type of approach to be supported elsewhere.

The groups we have supported on rail (re-)openings, and others that have approached us for advice on where to start, demonstrate on the one hand the important role that community groups can play in coordinating, motivating, communicating, developing a case for change, and bringing interested parties and local communities together. However, they also demonstrate the significant challenges and barriers that such groups face, from how to start building a case and engaging with industry, through to bringing such projects to fruition. From the numerous groups that have approached us unsure where to start, there seems a need for government and industry to make clear to communities the role they can potentially play in the expansion of our railways. Even where communities put forward opportunities that may not be viable in terms of rail expansion, this is a signal of a need and aspiration within that community to develop their transport links generally, and they should therefore be supported to explore and take forward alternatives. We would relish the chance to work with the DfT, industry and third sector partners to: provide clear advice to communities on how best to engage with such processes; support community-driven projects that are under consideration or underway; and also to explore where and how community rail activity might be nurtured in areas where opportunities for rail expansion have been identified.

iv) Offering good value through affordability and accessibility

The concept of 'good value' is central to the Rail Review's terms and the *Strategic Vision for Rail*. In this section, we wish to focus on how this relates to the closely-intertwined issues of affordability and accessibility. We note that one of the Review's key principles is the need for "a railway that is able to offer good value fares for passengers, while keeping costs down for taxpayers", and one of the Strategic Vision's main objectives is achieving a "better deal for passengers". The Vision's section on this objective covers smart ticketing, simplifying fares, extending young person's discount schemes, improving compensation arrangements and improving wifi connectivity, all of which we fully support as crucial steps forward. Importantly, this section also discusses the need for our railways to be accessible for those with physical and hidden disabilities. Again, we (and our members) are wholeheartedly supportive of this goal, and we would draw attention to the role that community rail plays in highlighting accessibility barriers, spearheading improvements, and helping those with physical and hidden disabilities to develop their skills and confidence

²⁵ For example, Transwilt CRP, Purbeck CRP, Blackmore Vale, and Friends of Low Moor Station

using rail (recognised in the DfT's new *Community Rail Development Strategy*²⁶). However, we would also point out that for the railways to deliver great value to taxpayers, and both current and potential passengers, it is crucial to ensure that it is fully accessible to everyone, in the broadest sense, and this includes being affordable.

It seems logical that, only if the taxpaying public can universally access the railway should they wish to, then can the railway offer them good value. Addressing the ongoing issue of people with physical and hidden disabilities facing physical and perceived barriers to rail travel (as covered in the DfT's *Inclusive Transport Strategy*²⁷) is clearly fundamental – but it is not everything, in ensuring that the railway is truly accessible, inclusive and welcoming for everyone. As our members' work demonstrates, there are a great many other barriers faced by different groups that prevent (or make people feel unable to access) rail travel, which community rail initiatives seek to overcome, often with profound implications for people's health, wellbeing and prosperity. These barriers range from: a lack of safe and convenient walking/cycling/bus routes to stations; to never having used rail before and being fearful about navigating the station/ticket buying/wider network; to parents with pushchairs being worried about getting over footbridges and on and off of trains; to simply thinking (perhaps justifiably) that rail is not 'for' you, and out of reach in terms of costs. In this way, accessibility relates to many of the issues we have covered above, to do with: rail's connectivity with other sustainable and active modes (which may be the only option for many people, including many of the most vulnerable in society); perceptions, familiarity with and understanding of rail (a sense that the railway is part of and 'for' the community is important here); plus people's ability to voice concerns and for the rail industry to listen and respond to these. However, another extremely common factor is affordability. ACoRP has recently been consulting its members on how we can engage more young people in community rail, and a concern that has been highlighted by many as standing in the way is young people's perceptions that rail is unaffordable. This has, anecdotally, been echoed by some national charities we have been engaging who work with young people and vulnerable groups. While we strongly welcome the extension of child fares and Young Person's Railcard, we suggest that more needs to be done, in regards to the affordability of rail for this group and others.

We are fully in support of the review and simplification of fares referenced in the *Strategic Vision for Rail*. As we outlined in our recent response to Rail Delivery Group's *Easier Fares* consultation, the complexity of the present system is without doubt a major hindrance. Experience within community rail shows that this creates anxiety, not only about buying tickets and getting the best fare, but also about making a mistake and being humiliated and penalised on a train. This is, one suspects, exacerbated by threatening messages conveyed at stations and on trains about having the right ticket or facing a fine, something with serious consequences for someone on a low income, suffering mental health problems, or who is otherwise vulnerable. We would like to see fares not only simplified, but made fairer, and as affordable as possible for everyone, especially disadvantaged groups. In particular, we believe that everyone should automatically get the cheapest possible ticket, unless they opt to go for some kind of upgrade. We would also like to see peak time discounts available for young people and other groups likely to face affordability issues, such as job seekers, to aid access to education and employment. We appreciate that this must be balanced with financial sustainability, as per the Review's terms, but we believe that a range of improvements are possible, and of critical importance, for the railways to be truly accessible and inclusive, and for them to deliver maximum value to society. We discuss this in much more detail, and make specific recommendations, in our response to RDG's *Easier Fares* consultation, [which can be read here](#).²⁸

We also believe that the principle of maximising affordability, intertwined with accessibility, should be a key consideration in the Rail Review, including whether structural reform of the industry might unlock greater efficiencies that would permit more radical fare reform and greatly improved affordability of rail travel. We would point out that, although we know that affordability is a very real issue, throwing up barriers for many people to rail use and mobility, there does not seem to be a clear grasp of what 'affordability' means in the rail or public transport context, including how, all things considered, rail use (in combination with walking/cycling/bus use) typically compares with running a car. This appears, therefore, to be an area where research is needed to establish informed benchmarks, actions and objectives. In addition, we would highlight that the distribution of spending between rail and road is also very relevant to this topic of rail's value, affordability and accessibility. We noted above that our railways can only provide good value to all

²⁶ Department for Transport, 2018, *Community Rail Development Strategy*, <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/community-rail-development-strategy>

²⁷ Department for Transport, 2018, *Inclusive Transport Strategy*, <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/inclusive-transport-strategy/the-inclusive-transport-strategy-achieving-equal-access-for-disabled-people>

²⁸ ACoRP, 2018, 'Easier Fares consultation response', <https://communityrail.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/RDG-Fares-Consultation-ACoRP-response-0918.pdf>

taxpayers if they are accessible to all taxpayers. It might similarly be noted that public money invested in roads, unless specifically benefitting buses/pedestrians/cyclists, does not offer value to the one in five households that don't own a car (and rising numbers of young people in particular who don't drive)²⁹, but generally presents major dis-benefits in the form of air pollution, noise, danger and congestion. Given this, and the well-established need to encourage and enable more sustainable and healthy forms of travel over driving, we would suggest that the distribution of investment across transport modes might also be brought into consideration here.

v) Maximising the social value of rail

As we have discussed, there appear to be many opportunities for our railways to be more responsive to community needs and voices, and better aligned and connected with wider transport systems and development. This would no doubt enable our railways to better serve, and deliver greater benefit, not only to existing rail users, but society as a whole. We have already touched upon the idea that focusing on how railways can deliver maximum social and economic value to communities, or society, in a holistic manner, rather than purely responding to current passengers, may be a more constructive way forward. To take this point further, we also believe it is important that the full range of ways, and extent to which, rail delivers social value is better accounted for in the rail policy framework and organisation of our railways.

In 2018, ACoRP joined the steering group for a research project by RSSB to develop a framework for assessing the social value of rail. One of the main findings of this project was that the rail industry lags far behind many other sectors when it comes to understanding, measuring and developing its social value³⁰. In our experience, this is reflected, to an extent, in the ways that many community rail partnerships have in the past attempted to evidence the value they deliver with reference only to passenger data and volunteering hours on stations, rather than evidencing the many positive outcomes being delivered for individuals and communities through qualitative data. ACoRP is working to address this: our recent report on *Community Rail and Social Inclusion* uses community rail case studies alongside wider research to show the profound effects that community rail activities (and rail travel) can have on people's lives³¹. Our forthcoming report on the *Value of Community Rail* (due for publication April 2018) will seek to provide an overview of the value the community rail movement delivers, and on an ongoing basis we will be working with our members to help them plan and monitor their work to maximise positive outcomes. We suggest that this is also a topic the rail industry, and government, should be scrutinising, including as part of the Rail Review and on an ongoing basis. If we do not have a good handle on the full range of ways that our railways deliver value, and extent to which they are doing so, then we cannot hope to develop this value to its greatest potential. This clearly undermines the basic aims of the Rail Review and the *Strategic Vision for Rail* of delivering 'good value' for passengers and taxpayers.

The RSSB project has concluded and an initial 'Common Social Impact Framework' has been produced³². However, there is much more to be done to develop this work further, to expand the contents of the framework, ensure it works in practice and, moreover, to embed across the rail industry and rail policy the principle of assessing social value and using this to inform decision-making and strategic planning. We suggest that this needs to be led at the highest level, this might be a key action resulting from the Rail Review. We also suggest that it would send a powerful signal if the principle of delivering maximum *social and economic value* were put at the forefront of the Rail Review's recommendations. In other words, whatever system, structures and policies should result from the Review, they should be designed with social value, as much as economic value, as the core desired outcome. At present, the view presented by senior politicians and industry leaders of the value of rail, and how it is being developed, tends to be framed in quite narrow economic terms, to do with the amount of money the industry costs and makes, levels of investment, and how this supports business and economic development. From our experience supporting community rail, and as the RSSB research project explored, our railways mean much more than this. At a personal, everyday level, they can mean someone finally getting a decent job, a family being able to have healthy, fun holidays in a national park, someone being empowered to continue living an active, fulfilling life

²⁹ See ONS, 2018, 'Percentage of households with cars by income group, tenure and household composition', <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/personalandhouseholdfinances/expenditure/datasets/percentageofhouseholdswithcarsbyincomegroupandhouseholdcompositionuktablea47>; and BBC, 2017, '10 charts that tell the story of Britain's roads', <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-42182497>

³⁰ Reported to the project steering group by research agency Action Sustainability, commissioned by RSSB to deliver the project, 2018.

³¹ ACoRP, 2018, *Community Rail and Social Inclusion*, <https://communityrail.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/ACoRP-CRSI2018.pdf>

³² RSSB, 2018, 'Creating a social value measurement framework for rail' <https://www.rssb.co.uk/research-development-and-innovation/research-project-catalogue/t1127>

after an accident or bereavement, a small business staying afloat, or a teenager realising they can get to college or university independently. Capturing these sorts of impacts is a huge challenge, but there is much scope to draw on the community rail network to better understand this at a local level, and much that can be learnt from other sectors about assessing and monitoring social impact on a wider scale.

We propose that only by better understanding and accounting for the social value of our railways, will we know whether rail is delivering 'good value', as the Rail Review and *Strategic Vision for Rail* aspire. We also recommend that social value – and especially that which can be accrued over longer time periods, such as through modal shift supporting healthier lifestyles – should be considered when looking at financial sustainability. For example, if we can see clearly how railways can help to deliver huge benefits to health and wellbeing over time, such as through modal shift and reducing social isolation, reducing strain on the NHS and private sector costs, then this may justify greater investment now, perhaps over roads investment, which may counter such benefits.

Building on our points above about developing communications about rail, to rebuild trust and positivity, there seems to be much scope for using a growing understanding of social impact in this way. If we better understand the difference that rail makes to communities and individuals' lives, then we can articulate this better, and engage the public in rail more effectively. This idea is reinforced by academic research suggesting what is likely to be most effective in spurring more social change, and more sustainable living specifically.³³ Through a renewed focus on social value, industry, government and communities can come together in a positive feedback loop, where:

- people become more aware of the benefits and opportunities that rail offers, and what service improvements mean for them, so that they also...
- have greater interest, and therefore more of a stake and a voice in rail development, so that...
- industry and government continue to gain an increasing appreciation of the difference that rail travel and transport makes to people's lives, meaning they become...
- more able to articulate the importance of rail, and thus better able to engage the public in the future.

This greater attention to social value should also, we suggest, be heavily factored into the Rail Review's consideration of the franchising model, or potential alternatives. If franchising is to continue, social value might be given much greater weighting in competitions, or better integrated across the scoring system, with incentives and controls built in to ensure opportunities to impact positively on society, aligning with other public policy goals, are maximised throughout each franchise. Or, this more holistic approach to assessing value might pave the way to an alternative to the current system with its basis on the ability of railway lines to generate profit. Clearly, some lines will always be more profitable than others in terms of ticket revenue versus operating costs, and there may always be some lines where the books don't balance in these terms alone. However, these lines will, inevitably in our experience, provide a lifeline, in some cases for otherwise isolated and deprived communities, and they may therefore produce disproportionately high social value that, alongside their ability to feed into the rest of the network, justifies cross-subsidy. In addition, community rail activity, and its bearing on passenger numbers³⁴, seems to suggest that, by acknowledging and communicating social value, with a strong local focus, we can create greater awareness, positivity, pride in and use of railway lines, perhaps making the line increasingly more profitable in economic terms. We hope that these factors, to do with understanding and maximising social value, will be given the prominence they deserve within the Rail Review, and that the Review's recommendations will enable rail's full potential to benefit society to be realised.

See p2-3 of this submission for a summary of our conclusions and recommendations.

For all queries on this submission, please contact info@acorp.uk.com

³³ ACoRP / J. Townsend, 2017, *Communicating Community Rail*, <https://communityrail.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/CommunicatingCommunityRail-researchreport-2017.pdf>

³⁴ Transport Regeneration for the National Community Rail Steering Group, 2015, *Value of Community Rail Partnerships and Volunteering*, <https://communityrail.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/ACoRP-Value-of-CRPs-and-Volunteering-28.1.15.pdf>