



# IMPACT REPORT 2022/23



## A note from the chief executive, Jools Townsend

Shortly after 2022-23 ended, we faced one of the biggest challenges we have grappled with for many years: train operators in England were asked to reduce the budgets on which community rail partnerships (CRPs) have grown to depend. This was due to a squeeze on rail industry finances related to depleted rail use post-pandemic. We worked closely with train operators to help them find ways to protect almost all core CRP funding, avoiding, we believe, long-term detriment.

While this was just after the period of this report, it's impossible to look back on 2022-23 without it clouding the view, and in fact we need to be proud of the work we did over the preceding years that enabled us to weather the storm. The solid relationships we have nurtured with industry and government, and our ability to be responsive and proactive in liaising and communicating with our members, got us through.

Nevertheless, we are far from resting on our laurels, and composing this report gives a chance to reflect on the foundations we have laid for taking community rail onwards and upwards, through what continue to be turbulent times.

As community rail faced financial uncertainties, our communities continued to grapple with the stresses, hardships and inequalities of the cost-of-living crisis, and globally the climate crisis continued to worsen, with unprecedented temperatures and the growing threat of tipping points.



Community rail doesn't have all the answers, but we play a crucial role dealing with these inter-linked issues, building resilience and change from the grassroots, and breaking down barriers to sustainable, equitable mobility. In fact, community rail is at a vital, unique confluence of enabling climate-safe travel and creating a fairer, brighter future where communities are empowered.

This report shows how we, as community rail's umbrella body, are ensuring the movement can move forward boldly, together. How we are putting community rail at the forefront of the shift we need toward healthy, inclusive, sustainable travel, sharing members' unique insights, ensuring the voices and experiences of our communities are heard, and local development opportunities nurtured.

Despite the challenging environment, I'm hugely excited about further developing our work, and appreciative of all our members, supporters, partners and staff, for their continuing dedication.

## A note from the chair, Jeremy Whitaker

The community rail movement with Community Rail Network at its heart has demonstrated more than ever its growing diversity and reach of its activity over the last year.

Today we see a movement that has gone beyond its historic roots of campaigning for the survival of rural branch lines.

Community rail partnerships and station adopters still support many of our best loved scenic lines and stations – you only have to go onto our [Scenic Rail Britain website](#) to see that. But, more importantly, these groups are now well established in very many of our towns and city regions and making a real difference to their communities.

CRPs are increasingly formed by individuals from very different backgrounds and hosted by a range of organisations, engaging with their diverse communities in a variety of ways.

I am delighted that at Community Rail Network, we have respected the views of our devolved nations.

Whilst the path has not always been easy, the common goals of engaging the community with its railways remains as strong as ever. We have gone beyond Britain too; I was delighted when the Board awarded honorary membership to one of our supporters from the Netherlands.



Our range of activity is now extensive and significant and recognised as such. Our work in support of the government's loneliness agenda, facing up to the challenges of dementia, engaging a variety of hard-to-reach groups and working with the LGBTQ+ community reflect just some of the power of what we do.

Support of our education network has meant we are engaging with a younger generation, one that is very aware of the climate emergency and is embracing public transport. We are getting the message across too with our social media reach increasing, and the diversity of our corporate sponsors growing.

Our achievements in the last year are down to our members, supporters, and funders. I would like to thank all of you on behalf of the Board for your continued support. I would also like to thank Jools and the team for their dedication to the community rail movement. Finally, on a personal note, I would like to thank my fellow Board members for their support.

# How do we support and empower our members?

Our support and development team provides direct, expert support and advice to new, emerging and established community rail partnerships (CRPs), community stations and station adoption groups.

In line with our mission and the Department for Transport's [Community Rail Development Strategy](#), our team focus on building members' capacity and confidence to deliver positive outcomes.

We run the Department for Transport (DfT) and Welsh Government's accreditation scheme, helping CRPs achieve high standards of governance, financial propriety, planning, engagement and offering a representative community voice.

We provided over 1,100 instances of support to members in 2022-23.

We advised on wide-ranging topics, including:



**Community engagement, volunteering and social inclusion**



**Education and youth engagement**



**Rail travel and tourism promotion**



**Integrated sustainable travel**



**Station buildings development**

We guided CRPs through the accreditation process: out of the 52 CRPs currently accredited, **5 achieved accreditation for the first time in 2022-23** and **24 were reaccredited**.



We delivered a comprehensive programme of webinars, networking, training and events.

These sessions gave our members the opportunity to **connect, collaborate, learn** and **share**, covering:

- Connecting and empowering our diverse communities
- Developing redundant station buildings for community benefit
- Identifying and engaging leisure travel audiences
- Climate resilient gardening
- Demonstrating social value
- Governance and organisational structure
- Applying for small grants



Our 18th Community Rail Awards returned as an in-person event in Manchester in October 2022.

430  
Guests

15  
Winners

200  
Entries



The Community Rail Conference, which we run jointly with the Department for Transport for CRPs, was held in Nottingham in March 2023.

150  
Delegates

13  
Speakers

In 2022-23, we hosted:



4  
webinars



6  
workshops



3  
bespoke  
training  
sessions



5  
networking  
sessions

## Community Rail Education Network

We stepped up activity supporting members on developing educational work with a new education and youth engagement advisor, Karen Bennett, seconded from Community Rail Lancashire.

Karen continued to run, develop and spread the benefits of the Community Rail Education Network, providing a forum to share ideas and advice, and advance projects and campaigns on engaging and educating children and young people, especially to help younger generations feel confident using rail to access the opportunities they want.

We undertook a review to find out what further support our members want to better engage schools, children, and young people, helping us further develop in this area.

### Education Network members:

December 2022

**56**  
MEMBERS



September 2023

**95**  
MEMBERS



The Education Network devised and promoted a host of educational resources and projects:

- Arlo's Adventures There and Back – a 'pick-a-path' rail safety book written and illustrated by female train driver Bessie Matthews
- Backtrack – a creative anti-trespass competition



- Travel with the Green Team – a toolkit of resources to support the national curriculum in teaching Key Stage 2 students about sustainable travel

### Partners worked with:



Rail Safe Friendly



Scouts



Cross Country

## What our members say



**87% said they got value for money from their membership**



**74% had received direct support from us in the past year**



**86% had attended at least one event/ training course/webinar**



**90% said we communicate well with members**

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*“The fantastic promotions, toolkits and advice are the best. This is one area where Community Rail Network really excels as it gives practical help and support in a way in which busy CRP officers can input without spending huge amounts of precious time and effort.”*

.....

*“The valued support of support & development team members has been helpful on several occasions this year.”*

.....

*“I find talking to (Community Rail Network) extremely motivating, they help me regain my focus.”*

.....

*“Our contacts at Community Rail Network have helped us a great deal with queries, concerns, ideas and skillsets. I always feel the organisation is available to help.”*

.....

*“It’s good to feel part of a larger group. We always tell people that station adoption is a national initiative and that we are part of the Community Rail Network.”*

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CASE STUDY

## Supporting new CRPs to flourish

The **Calder Valley Line CRP** became a Community Rail Network member in early 2022/23, following intensive work by our team with local partners and groups to ensure the CRP is well-rooted in the communities it serves. We helped to connect the partnership with established station groups on the line, and further support has resulted in all 13 stations on the route being adopted by community volunteers.

We supported the partnership with a diverse range of projects and will continue to do so as it expands its reach. This includes:

- Developing a community area at Rochdale Station, which has since been adopted by a local group that works with adults with learning difficulties and addiction issues;
- Creating a website, drone footage, maps and a booklet – with support and funding from Community Rail Network – to showcase the beauty and points of interest of the line;
- Working with Network Rail, Metrolink and the Rochdale Hornets Rugby Club to promote health and wellbeing and rail travel and safety skills with school children – the partnership is now working with Rochdale Hornets on a similar project with young people who have dropped out of the education system;
- Partnering with Northern to organise try the train trips with families of refugees, showing how rail travel can be used to access local services, opportunities and attractions.

“The Calder Valley Line CRP has delivered a number of successful projects and we have welcomed the support of Community Rail Network, through joint funding and continued encouragement and advice. Community Rail Network has a wide range of experience and knowledge of community rail and are keen to promote CRPs and help by sharing best practice on how to deliver a really good project that benefits the community.”

– Karen Hornby, CRP Officer



## How do we ensure community rail insights inform policy and decision-making?

In 2022-23 we started engaging more widely with policy and decision-makers at national, devolved and regional level on achieving inclusive, sustainable travel and empowered communities, using community rail's unique insights to support strategies, develop thinking, and influence the debate.

We met transport and rail **ministers within the English, Scottish and Welsh governments**, discussing how the involvement of communities is more important than ever to create a railway that works for everyone and delivers maximum economic, social and environmental value.

Our chief executive Jools Townsend continued to sit on the Department for Transport's **Net Zero Transport Board**, advising government on how we

can 'accelerate modal shift' (a key DfT objective), taking a place-based, inclusive approach. She gave evidence to the **Lords Built Environment Committee on Public Transport in Towns and Cities**, and a cross-party parliamentary committee on heritage railways. Jools continued to chair the **Sustainable Transport Alliance**, a partnership of eight leading organisations empowering communities and advising policymakers, to unlock the great benefits of sustainable and inclusive travel.

We also contributed case studies to the DfT's decarbonisation toolkit for local authorities. At a regional level, we met mayors and transport officials in **West Yorkshire and the West Midlands**, emphasising the benefits of involving communities with transport development.

We responded to **Transport for the North and West Midlands Rail Executive consultations** on transport strategy, transport-related social exclusion and rail investment.

We continued to celebrate stories and good practice from across the community rail movement, building a positive narrative around its social, environmental and economic outcomes via our well-read **Community Rail News bulletin, social media and website**.

Following a review of our social media work, we stepped up content creation and monitoring processes and have seen a record increase in followers and engagement across our channels.

At the end of March 2023, we had:



**3,739**  
Twitter  
followers



**1,023**  
Facebook  
followers



**509**  
Instagram  
followers



**709**  
LinkedIn  
followers



**825**  
subscribers to  
our bulletin



**92**  
pieces of media  
coverage



**55K**  
visitors to  
our website



## CASE STUDY

## Helping station groups to grow

In November 2022, the **Friends of Bishopstone Station** celebrated the opening of their newly refurbished community hub.

Thanks to grant and project support from Community Rail Network and the Railway Heritage Trust, a neglected, unused parcels office was brought back to life.

The space has been transformed, now warm and welcoming, with activity, kitchen, and storage areas, and fully accessible for wheelchair users.

The Friends of Bishopstone Station manage and maintain the hub, which already hosts weekly 'Meet Up Mondays' drop-in sessions, local history talks, arts and crafts classes, French language tuition and yoga practice, while providing a meeting space for other local community organisations, putting the station back into the heart of community life.



Before



After



# How do we put community rail at the forefront of a shift to sustainable, inclusive, active travel?

We enthusiastically supported members and worked with partners to help achieve local and national progress on sustainable, inclusive and healthy travel, involving and empowering local communities.

Building on the success of our inaugural Community Rail Week, the 2022 event ran 23 – 29 May, sponsored again by Rail Delivery Group.

Our members were supported to plan activities around the call to action of 'Give the Train a Try', encouraging people to consider making the switch to greener, healthier forms of travel, and shining a light on typical rail confidence activities in community rail.

Photo courtesy of Alderley Edge Station Volunteer Group.



## Community Rail Week in numbers



**55**  
CRPs and station  
groups involved



**2K**  
unique users  
visited our website



**16M**  
reached through  
#CommunityRailWeek  
posts



**81**  
member-led  
events and activities  
took place



**55**  
pieces of media  
coverage



**2.2K**  
posts with  
#CommunityRailWeek  
or #GiveTheTrainATry



**2.37M**  
estimated views  
of media coverage

## Reports

Our 2022-23 research report, sponsored by Rail Delivery Group, explored [community rail and inclusive, accessible travel](#).

Featuring case studies from CRPs and station groups who, working with rail partners, are creating accessible and inclusive journeys and stations, and opening up rail travel to all, the report was received positively by the Disabled Persons Transport Advisory Committee and railway partners.

The report will serve as best practice and be used to help progress our members' activities and champion this vital area of work.

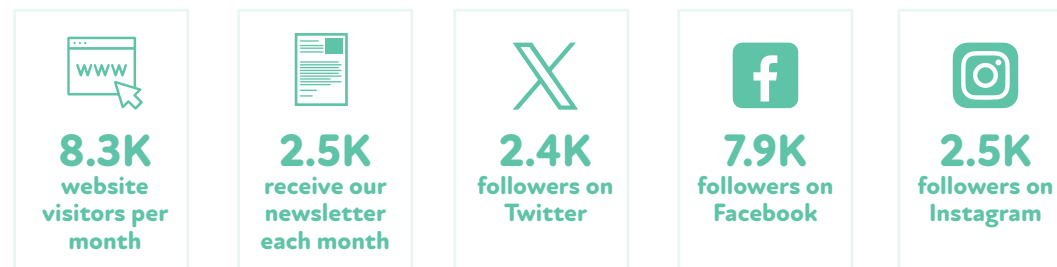
## Scenic Rail Britain

Our tourism and leisure initiative, Scenic Rail Britain, continues to lead the way on green, community-focused tourism promotion with our railways at the heart.

Building on the success of last year's campaign, our Days Out by Rail campaign ran 17 October – 6 November.

It promoted sustainable family days out on lesser-known community rail lines, highlighting the benefits of travelling by train and drawing on local knowledge from our members.

### Our Scenic Rail Britain tourism and leisure campaign:



## Let's go for 1 in 5

Scottish CRPs, supported by Community Rail Network and Paths for All, used the 2023 Rail Scotland Conference to launch a 'Let's go for 1 in 5' campaign, in support of Transport Scotland's commitment to cutting car use by 20% by 2030.

This encouraged communities across Scotland to get involved, and for drivers to consider how they can help Scotland make the '1 in 5' switch to more climate-safe and community-friendly journeys.

It complements the range of local engagement initiatives the CRPs have been developing in their communities, with our support.



## Tackling Loneliness with Transport

In early 2022, we were successful in securing funding from the Department for Transport's Tackling Loneliness with Transport Fund. We worked with three CRPs and the charity Catch22 to coordinate the '[Engaging Young People with Community Rail](#)' project, supported by research partner the University of the West of England.

This explored how rail and public transport can be used to unlock opportunity, boost confidence and forge social bonds, reducing loneliness risk and co-creating positive outcomes with young people.

Each pilot introduced groups of young people, many grappling with different challenges, to their local rail network via journey planning, rail confidence building, and trips to rural, coastal, heritage and cultural locations.

Excursions were combined with creative and social activities, working with community partners, and discussions on the opportunities rail can open up.



**400 young people**  
were engaged through 3  
innovative pilot projects

Impacts recorded among the young people, aged 15-24, included:

- **60%** said they felt more confident to travel by train;
- **65%** said it allowed them to discover places in their areas they didn't know about;
- **80%** were only rare or occasional rail users before, and one in ten had their first ever taste of rail travel;
- After taking part, some enrolled on courses and started new activities, citing improved confidence and self-esteem.

- Gloucestershire and Bristol, run by Gloucestershire CRP and Severnside CRP
- Blackburn with Darwen, run by Community Rail Lancashire
- Newcastle and County Durham, run by youth and family charity Catch22

“

*“It was great to get away from home life and to experience new things. It made me realise there's more out there than we know.”*

*“I was terrified of being on a train platform for ages. And because it was a rational fear, I didn't think I'd get over it, but today I did. Incredible.”*

*“I wanted to join this project because getting back outside post-Covid was extremely difficult. I wanted to push myself out of my comfort zone. I wanted to meet new friends and hopefully push my art skills and meet new people.”*

”

## CASE STUDY

## Supporting integrated, sustainable travel

Having realised that the popular Rivington Country Park and RHS Bridgewater could be better served by public transport, [South East Lancashire CRP](#) set about providing a new bus link to encourage more visitors to choose sustainable travel options when visiting these attractions.

With funding from Community Rail Network's Integrated Sustainable Transport Fund, the partnership established trial bus services to complement the timetables of local stations, making the sites more easily accessible for visitors using public transport.

As a result of the scheme, RHS even decided to continue running the service themselves, maintaining this vital and affordable public transport link and encouraging more sustainable tourism to their sites.



## CASE STUDY

## How our funding makes a difference

In 2022-23, the [Cambrian Railway Partnership](#) received Community Rail Development Funding to produce the first-ever bilingual Window Seater Audio Guide.

The partnership worked with [Window Seater](#) to connect rail travellers to the world outside their window, bringing passengers geolocated, bilingual audio stories as they travel along the route from Shrewsbury to Aberystwyth and along the coast to Pwllheli.

The project is part of the partnership's wider sustainable tourism aims, encouraging those thinking of visiting the area to not only make the shift to a greener form of travel, but to also engage more with local activities once they complete their train journey.



“We hope passengers agree that use of the guide will enhance their train journey in a fun and engaging way, making for a more satisfied and sentimental experience. The guide will be available to listen to in English and Welsh and aims to promote our region's culture and identity.”

– Claire Williams, CRP Officer

# How are we developing broader support for community rail and a strong network of reciprocity?

We continue to manage and promote grant schemes on behalf of government and industry partners, ensuring a robust approach.

This year was not without its challenges, with community rail, like many parts of the third sector, facing a funding squeeze related to tightening train operator budgets, as 2022-23 drew to a close.

We continue to enhance our support to members on fundraising, impact and governance, with our free [Impact reporting tool](#) seeing increasing use and relevance for demonstrating social value and supporting the generation of funding from wider sources.

Photo courtesy of Daniel Graves and the Heart of England CRP.



## Grant schemes we continued to manage in 2022-23:

- Community Rail Development Fund (for accredited CRPs in England and Wales), on behalf of the Department for Transport and Welsh Government awarded **£240,026**
- Small Grants Fund for England on behalf of the Department for Transport awarded **£58,555**
- Integrated Sustainable Transport Fund on behalf of the Department for Transport awarded **£33,393**
- South Western Railway Station Adoption Fund awarded **£11,941**
- Transport for Greater Manchester Small Grants Fund awarded **£43,689**

In total, **£387,604** was awarded to community rail projects and developments in 2022/23.

# How are we developing, as an expert, well-connected, high-performing, dynamic organisation?

We believe in continually developing the skills, awareness and approach of our team, so everyone is supported to reach their full potential and effectively serve the community rail movement.

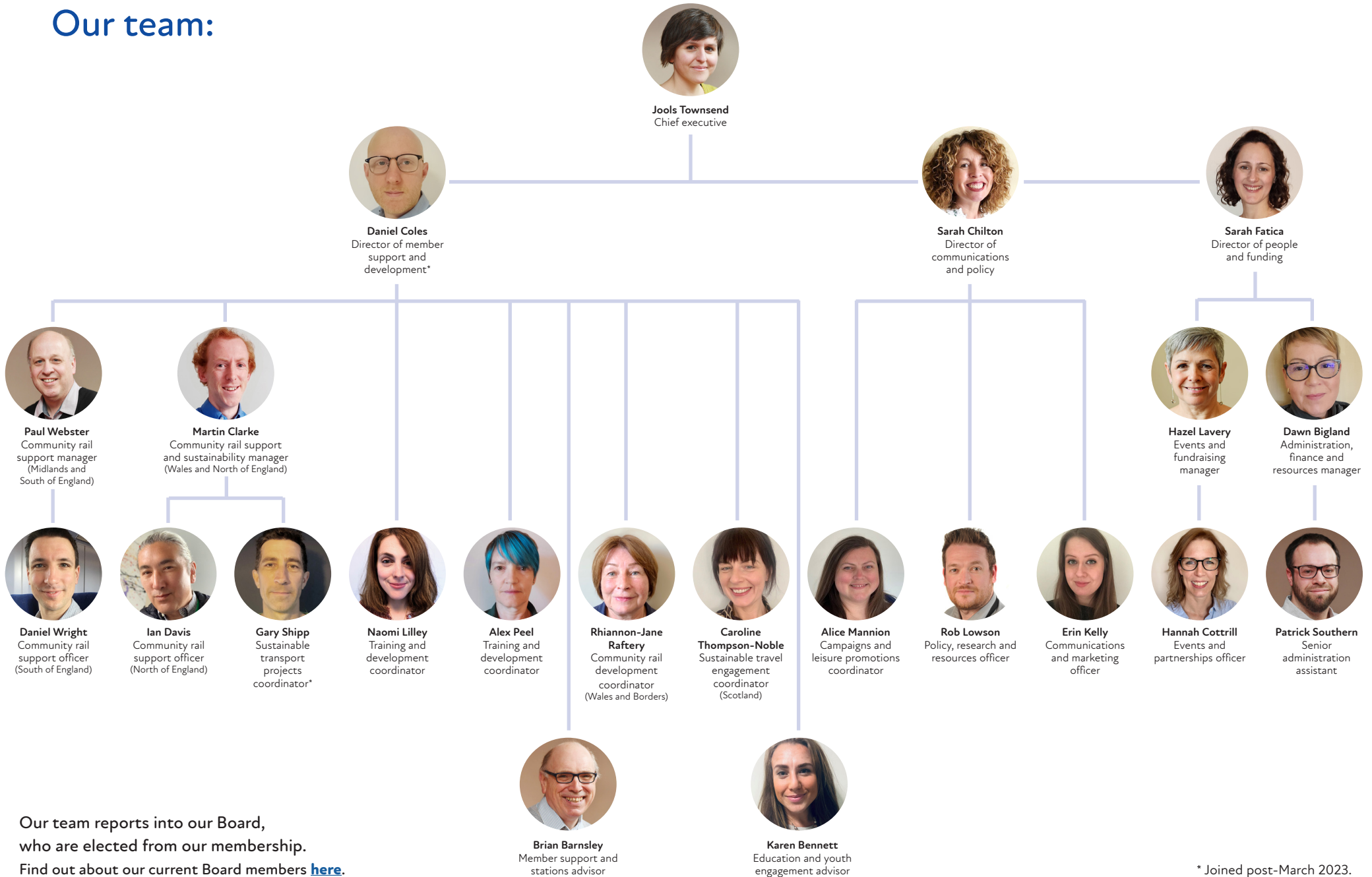
We're a passionate and dynamic team, always spurring ourselves to do more and do better, and we're proud of how we've responded to a challenging operating context this year. We use our regular team meetings, staff review process and engaging planning cycle to support one another and ensure everyone's ideas are heard and experiences drawn on.

All staff maintain a personal development plan and are encouraged to undertake ongoing learning. This year, this included courses on financial management, job shadowing other third-sector communications teams, and a range of rail and sustainable transport conferences.

We continue to use an annual members' survey, plus year-round conversations and events, and the stewardship of our Board, to ensure we're member-led and consistently inspired and driven by the ever-evolving experiences of those working and volunteering across the field.



## Our team:



Our team reports into our Board, who are elected from our membership. Find out about our current Board members [here](#).

\* Joined post-March 2023.



## A look to 2023-24 and beyond

Since the end of 2022-23, we continued to respond to the needs of our growing membership in uncertain times for community rail and the rail industry.

We stepped up engagement with government, industry partners and policy makers to show the value being delivered in community rail, and its growing relevance, as we look ahead to the transformation of the rail sector, and, we hope, our railways carrying far more passenger journeys, as the backbone of a sustainable, climate-safe transport system that works for all.

## Funding pressures

Early in the current year, at a time of heightened financial pressures, we worked closely with train operators to help safeguard community rail funding, especially the core funding on which CRP staffing depends.

We were pleased to see that our representations on behalf of members had a positive effect, with core funding for 2023-24 maintained across all train operators bar one.

At the time of writing, we are turning our attentions to 2024-25 to ensure community rail is protected and can develop longer-term. While aiming to maintain crucial train operator support, we are proactively helping members bring in funding from wider sources and starting to see results.

## Strategic advice on empowering communities on rail

Already in 2023-24, we have been working hard to ensure community rail can share its insights, provide a voice for communities, and help to shape a fairer, greener, better transport future.

This has included closely supporting our members to engage in ticket office consultations, feeding into Network Rail's long-term strategic planning, advising senior civil servants on how we can achieve modal shift to support Net Zero, and engaging across the main political parties to highlight the unique contribution community rail makes and how this can be developed.

We are acutely aware of the environmental and socio-economic crises we must grapple with locally and globally and believe community rail has an important part to play, and much to teach, on how transport, and our communities, can respond and move forward positively together.

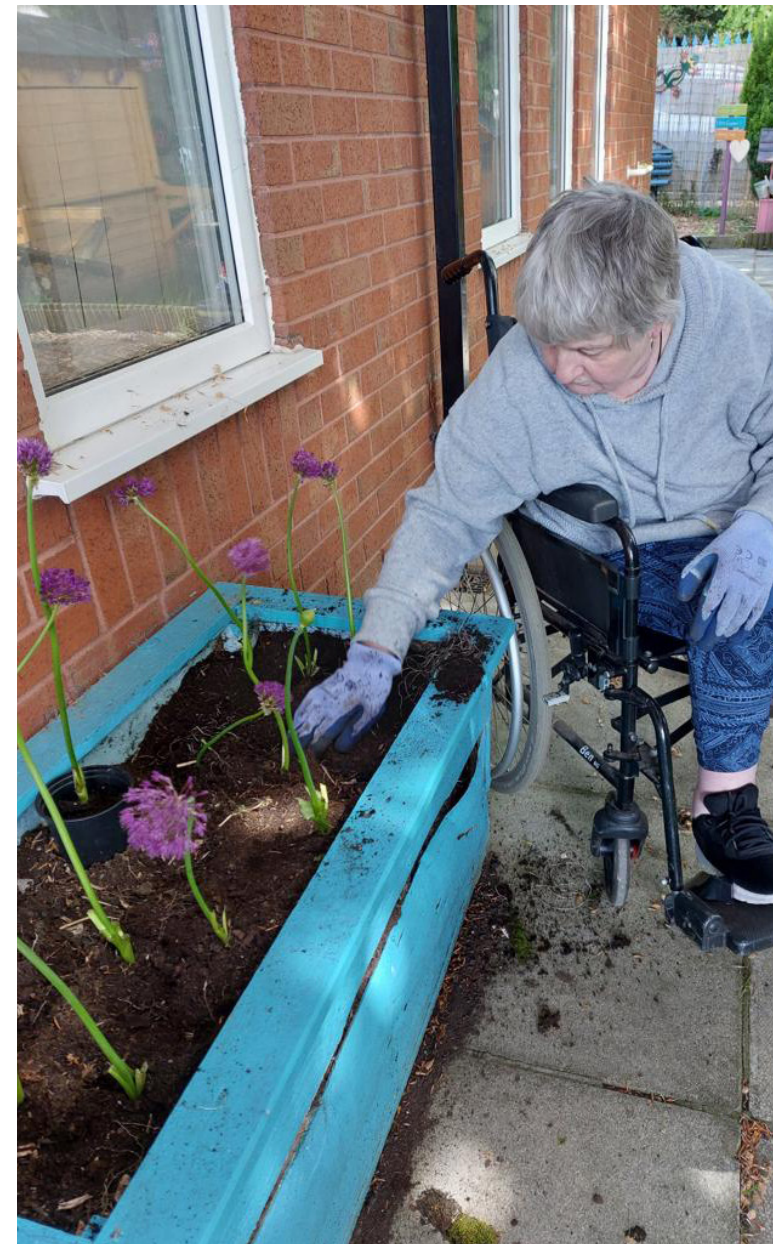


Photo courtesy of the Friends of Hindley Station.

Our core funders and corporate partners:



As a not-for-profit organisation, Community Rail Network is dependent on sponsors and supporters, and we are hugely grateful to our growing list of funders, partners and donors for their support.

This ranges from advising our members on specialist topics, to teaming up corporate and community volunteers, to providing vital grant funds, to providing a platform to share community rail’s insights.

In 2022-23 we welcomed new corporate partners SLC (Rail and Property) and CMAC Group, who have been proactive in empowering community rail, respectively offering expertise on stations development and hosting events during Community Rail Week.

Find out more about partnership opportunities [here](#).

Our corporate donors, project sponsors, and in-kind supporters:



\* Joined post-March 2023.

## OUR VISION



This Community Rail Network Impact Report 2022/23 is a draft, subject to agreement by our members at our November 2023 AGM.

Find out more about community rail and our work supporting community rail partnerships and groups at [communityrail.org.uk](https://communityrail.org.uk), where you can also meet the team.

Find out more about becoming a member or partner at <https://communityrail.org.uk/join-us/>.

Front cover image courtesy of Platform Rail.



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