Sustainable transport and travel:
Policy position statement

Community Rail Network

Community Rail Network is a not-for-profit organisation working across Britain to support communities to get involved with rail, widen access to and derive greater value from railways and stations, have a voice on rail's development, and spearhead community-led, rail-related initiatives. We represent and support the 75 community rail partnerships and 1,200 station friends' groups that make up the community rail movement.

This paper sets out our position and key recommendations for encouraging and enabling sustainable travel. It draws on community rail's experiences and insights to show how rail and the transport sector can be developed to combat the climate emergency and achieve Net Zero, while improving people's lives and localities, and building a fairer society.

1. Why are we passionate about sustainable travel?

1.1 Empowering communities to travel through sustainable means – especially via rail as the lowest carbon mode for longer journeys – is critical to safeguarding our climate and our shared future, while bringing profound benefits for local people and places.[1]

1.2 Improving sustainable transport and reducing car dependency is not just about protecting our environment, it is also key to social inclusion and widening access to opportunity, particularly benefitting people on low incomes and marginalised groups.[2]

2. Background

2.1 Transport is the biggest contributor to UK carbon dioxide emissions. In 2022, surface transport accounted for over a third (34%) of emissions, most from cars and vans.[3]

2.2 This proportion has grown and so far transport emissions are yet to fall, with a long-term trend of increasing vehicle mileage and increasingly large cars cancelling out gains from EVs and improved engine efficiency.[4]

2.3 A 2023 Climate Change Committee progress report to Parliament[5] made clear that more action is required, at a faster pace, on transport and transport behaviours, if the UK is to meet its Net Zero target.[6]

2.4 Even with the roll-out of EVs, significant and rapid reduction is still needed in private car use, by an estimated 20-27% at least by 2030 (and more beyond) to meet Net Zero.[7]

1   https://communityrail.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/Community-rail-encouraging-and-enabling-modal-shift.pdf
2   https://communityrail.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/The-value-of-community-rail.pdf
3   https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1147372/2022_Provisional_emissions_statistics_report.pdf
4   See p14, Department for Transport, 2021, Transport Decarbonisation Plan,
    https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/610d63ffe90e0706d92fa282/decarbonising-transport-a-better-greener-britain.pdf
5   https://www.theccc.org.uk/publication/2023-progress-report-to-parliament/
6   https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/6194dfa4d3bf7f0555071b1b/net-zero-strategy-beis.pdf
7   https://communityrail.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/Accelerating-modal-shift-STA-Aug-23.pdf

2.5 The UK and devolved governments, and some city regions, have objectives to accelerate modal shift and encourage greater use of active travel, public transport, and community and shared mobility.[8, 9, 10, 11]

2.6 So far there is no evidence of modal shift being achieved at scale, with public transport losing patronage and modal share since the start of the pandemic.[12]

2.7 The railway has a critical role to play in achieving Net Zero, as the backbone of a sustainable transport system. For longer journeys it offers 90% carbon savings compared to driving[13] and produces the lowest emissions by transport type except for active travel.[14] Just 1.5% of domestic transport emissions in 2021 came from rail, despite accounting for 7% of passenger kilometres.[15]

2.8 If all car drivers in England[16] switched one 30-mile car journey a month to rail, we calculate it would cut CO2 by 4.4 MtCO2e per year, 6.5% of total car emissions.[17]

3. Core recommendations

To achieve sustainable, climate-safe, Net Zero transport while delivering socio-economic benefit and a just transition, we recommend that policymakers at all levels should:

A Prioritise and ramp up measures that: support modal shift onto public transport combined with active travel and community and shared mobility; benefit those people already using these modes; and reduce car dependency;

B Build coherence, quality and resilience across rail, bus and tram combined with active travel and community and shared mobility;

C Engage and empower communities on the development of sustainable and inclusive travel networks and behaviours.

8   https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1009448/decarbonising-transport-a-better-greener-britain.pdf
9   For Scotland, see https://www.transport.gov.scot/our-approach/environment/20-reduction-in-car-km-by-2030/
10 For Wales, see https://www.gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2019-06/transport-sector-emission-pathway-factsheet.pdf
11 For the example of the Leeds City Region, see https://democracy.leeds.gov.uk/documents/s226223/Connecting%20Leeds%20Report%20Appendix%201A%20111021.pdf
12 https://committees.parliament.uk/publications/31499/documents/176997/default/
13 See Rail Delivery Group https://www.raildeliverygroup.com/uk-rail-industry/green-travel-pledge.html
14 https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/energy-and-environment-data-tables-env#greenhouse-gas-emissions-env02
15 https://dataportal.orr.gov.uk/media/1dzb2awz/rail-emissions-2022-23.pdf
16 Based on NTS0205 2021 statistics stating 72% of adults are main/other drivers in households with a car/van
     https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/nts02-driving-licence-holders; and ONS 2021 data showing there are 45,850,300 people in England & Wales age 20 and over
     https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/populationestimates/bulletins/populationandhouseholdestimatesenglandandwales/census2021#age-and-sex-of-the-population.
17 Analysis from Community Rail Network's 2021 report on Modal Shift, https://communityrail.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/Community-rail-encouraging-and-enabling-modal-shift.pdf, using statistics from https://ourworldindata.org/travel-carbon-footprint#licence, and total emissions from cars shown in the DfT's TDP for 2019

4. Policy insights and proposals

A Prioritise and ramp up measures that: support modal shift onto public transport combined with active travel and community and shared mobility; benefit those people already using these modes;and reduce car dependency.

Our insights:

A 4.1 Shifting longer journeys from car to rail can reduce emissions by 90%,[18] with even shorter journeys of 30 miles bringing reductions of up to 86%.[19] Reductions are greatest if rail is combined with active travel, buses, or trams. Supporting and enabling modal shift is therefore highly effective for decarbonisation.[20]

A 4.2 Increasing the modal share of public transport also delivers profound benefits in terms of social mobility and access to opportunity, improved health and wellbeing and reduced health inequalities, due to more active lifestyles, decreased air pollution, more liveable, pleasant, and cohesive communities, reduced social isolation, and giving everyone the chance to prosper.[21]

A 4.3 Measures to support modal shift tend to benefit those who do not have access to a car and therefore already use low carbon transport modes. This is nearly three in ten UK adults overall, and nearly half of adults on low-incomes, disabled people, and ethnic minority groups, who currently experience disproportionate levels of transport-related social exclusion and transport poverty.[22]

A 4.4 Across Britain, there is evidence of sustainable transport being eroded and car dependency further locked in. This includes reports of major reductions in bus services (also restricting access to rail),[23] cuts in active travel funding,[24] new developments lacking non-car-based connections,[25] and on the railways (despite some promising developments) reduced patronage post-pandemic,[26] industrial action, performance and reliability concerns in various localities, and annual ticket price rises.[27]

A 4.5 Community rail's experience is that public transport has become another world for many, if not most, people. Many young people we work with have never or rarely been on a train and many older people haven't for years. There is a widespread need to build awareness, skills, confidence with rail and break down perceived and practical barriers.[28]

A 4.6 Progress on sustainable travel at a local and strategic level can be hindered by the false assumptions that everyone can drive, must drive, and wants to drive, and (in more rural locations especially) that ongoing mass car use is a given. Yet research shows strong support for action on sustainable travel: for example, in the National Travel Attitudes Survey, 76% say we should reduce the amount we drive to protect the environment,[29] and 41% say they are willing to use their cars less.[30]

18 https://communityrail.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/Accelerating-modal-shift-STA-Aug-23.pdf

19 https://communityrail.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/Community-rail-encouraging-and-enabling-modal-shift.pdf

20 See pages 2-3 of https://communityrail.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/Accelerating-modal-shift-STA-Aug-23.pdf for data on comparative carbon savings in relation to modal shift from car to other modes, e.g. bus, active travel

21 See https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1009448/decarbonising-transport-a-better-greener-britain.pdf and for wider sources and examples pages 3-6 of https://communityrail.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/Accelerating-modal-shift-STA-Aug-23.pdf

22 NatCen, Access to Transport and Life Opportunities, https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/831766/access_to_transport_report.pdf; also see Transport for the North, 2022, https://transportforthenorth.com/blogs/the-causes-consequences-and-extent-of-transport-related-social-exclusion-in-the-north/

23 https://policy.friendsoftheearth.uk/insight/how-britains-bus-services-have-drastically-declined#:~:text=According%20to%20the%20National%20Audit,was%20excluded%20from%20this%20experiment.

24 https://committees.parliament.uk/committee/127/public-accounts-committee/news/198260/active-travel-government-programme-offtrack-as-funding-reductions-hold-back-pro-gress/#:~:text=In%20March%202023%2C%20DfT%20announced,its%20failure%20to%20achieve%20targets.

25 https://www.rtpi.org.uk/news/2022/february/report-highlights-role-of-car-dependency-in-new-housing-developments/

26 See https://dataportal.orr.gov.uk/statistics/usage/passenger-rail-usage/ - for example, the most recent data, from July to September 2023, shows that overall passenger journeys were 89% of the equivalent quarter pre-pandemic

27 See https://dataportal.orr.gov.uk/statistics/finance/rail-fares/. However there has been a recent far cap introduced: https://www.gov.uk/government/news/significant-intervention-to-cap-rail-fares-comes-as-government-delivers-target-to-halve-inflation

28 See https://communityrail.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/Inclusive-and-accessible-travel.pdf

29 DfT, 2019, National Travel Attitudes Survey (wave 1), https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/810908/national-travel-attitudes-study-2019-wave-1.pdf

30 https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1165693/our-changing-travel-how-people_s-travel-choices-are-changing.pdf
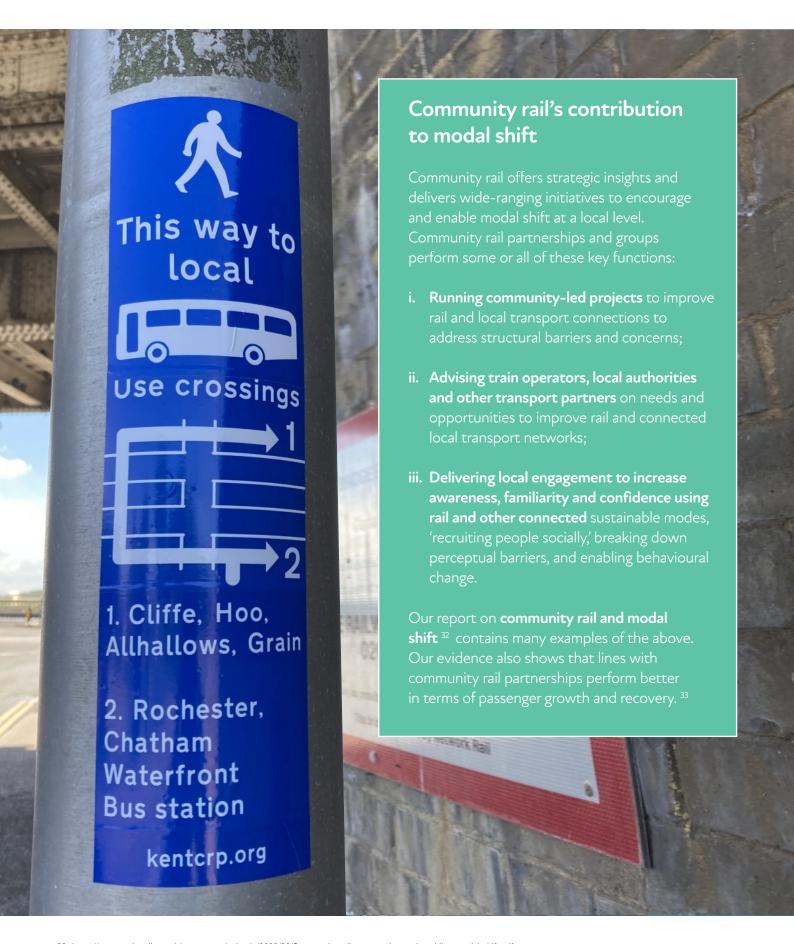
Our proposals:

A 4.7   Put the importance of public transport, including rail specifically, and the need to shift towards more sustainable, inclusive mobility, at the forefront of policy frameworks, strategies, and decision-making on transport, planning, climate, and economic development.

A 4.8   Implement ambitious targets and clear pathways for increasing the modal share of rail, bus and tram, active travel, and community and shared mobility, to enable decarbonisation, tackle transport poverty, and widen access to opportunity.

A 4.9   Apply the sustainable transport hierarchy[31] in planning and development policy to ensure that appropriate investment is directed to support greater use of public transport, active travel, and community and shared mobility, rather than responding to projected demand levels and assumptions that driving is a necessity and the norm.

A 4.10   Show positive leadership and be honest about the evidenced need to reduce private car use to tackle the climate crisis, and the socio-economic benefits of more journeys being made by public transport, active travel, and community and shared mobility.

A 4.11   Recognise the myriad of practical and perceptual barriers to increasing use of public transport, active travel, and community and shared mobility; bring together transport, government and community partners, and support locally led initiatives (see details in proposal C below), to break these down and reduce car dependency as a key strand of Net Zero, transport and development policy.

31   https://waytoworkscot.org/climate-emergency/scotland-sustainable-travel-plan/

Community rail's contribution to modal shift

Community rail offers strategic insights and delivers wide-ranging initiatives to encourage and enable modal shift at a local level. Community rail partnerships and groups perform some or all of these key functions:

i. **Running community-led projects** to improve rail and local transport connections to address structural barriers and concerns;

ii. **Advising train operators, local authorities and other transport partners** on needs and opportunities to improve rail and connected local transport networks;

iii. **Delivering local engagement to increase awareness, familiarity and confidence using rail and other connected** sustainable modes, 'recruiting people socially,' breaking down perceptual barriers, and enabling behavioural change.

Our report on **community rail and modal shift** [32] contains many examples of the above. Our evidence also shows that lines with community rail partnerships perform better in terms of passenger growth and recovery. [33]

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32 https://communityrail.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/Community-rail-encouraging-and-enabling-modal-shift.pdf

33 https://communityrail.org.uk/community-rail-supporting-rail-passenger-numbers-to-bounce-back/

> **B** Build coherence, quality and resilience across rail, bus and tram combined with active travel and community and shared mobility.

Our insights:

B 5.1 Integration and coordination between sustainable modes and their development is greatly lacking in communities almost everywhere across the UK, contributing to socio-economic exclusion, preventing people from getting value from existing transport assets and services, and forming a major barrier to modal shift.[34]

B 5.2 Bus and rail operators often don't work together and can treat each other as competition, creating a lack of timetabling alignment and suitable interchange. It is often hard for communities to address this, with structural and regulatory barriers in the way.[35]

B 5.3 Many, if not most, railway stations have poor, unsafe or unsuitable active travel routes and access. Greater attention is needed as to how local active travel investment and development joins up with public transport stops and stations.[36]

B 5.4 Ensuring people can get to and from railway stations using buses, trams, active travel and community and shared mobility is key to opening up rail to more people and facilitating longer and more regular rail-based journeys. There is a need for the rail sector to work with other operators and communities on 'first and last mile' connections, in line with the sustainable transport hierarchy, with private car parking given less priority.[37]

B 5.5 Encouraging and enabling greater use of public transport, active travel, and community and shared mobility depends on making these modes more joined-up, and reliable, convenient, and affordable in combination, so they compete with the private car.

34 https://communityrail.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/Connected-stations-a-guide-to-community-led-station-travel-planning.pdf

35 Community Rail Network can offer more detailed analysis and examples on this topic.

36 See our Connected Stations resource for ways in which this could take shape, and examples of community rail improving active travel access to stations, e.g. via community walking/cycling audits - https://communityrail.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/Connected-stations-a-guide-to-community-led-station-travel-planning.pdf

37 See page 8 of our response to the Great British Railways call for evidence – Whole Industry Strategic Plan - https://communityrail.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/CRN-responds-to-Great-British-Railways-Whole-Industry-Strategic-Plan.pdf

Our proposals:

B 5.6   Use policy, regulation, devolution deals and contracting/franchising systems to mandate and ensure strong collaboration and coherence across rail and bus operators and other local public, community and shared transport providers. This would help to integrate timetabling, ticketing, and development planning, and ensure good interchange and good support for passengers across modes if there are disruptions.

B 5.7   Deliver strong strategic and operational focus on improving integration and coherence across sustainable transport modes, with attention to the sustainable transport hierarchy, towards a coherent alternative to the private car.

B 5.8   Direct investment to modal integration, including enabling multi-modal journey planning and smart/combined ticketing and pricing,[38,39] and safe, good quality active travel infrastructure effectively integrated with public transport stations and stops.[40]

Community rail's contribution to modal integration

Community rail is an effective vehicle for delivering small-scale improvements to modal integration locally, responding to hyper-local needs that may not be clear at a wider scale, and involving communities in these changes, raising awareness simultaneously. These schemes include active travel improvements, cycle hubs, wayfinding, and waiting shelters at and around stations. In some cases, there are bigger projects to plug gaps and enable onward connections, such as e-bike hire, seasonal bus services or demand-responsive mini-buses run with local authorities or bus companies. See our **Connected Stations** guide [41] and p12-16 of our **community rail and modal shift** report.[42]

Community rail also acts as a conduit bringing transport providers together to identify shared solutions, such as combined ticketing offers or improved interchange. However, this type of work can meet with difficulties, highlighting the need for strategic and structural change.

38   https://communityrail.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/Community-rail-encouraging-and-enabling-modal-shift.pdf
39   https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1165693/our-changing-travel-how-people_s-travel-choices-are-changing.pdf
40   See page 21 of IPPR | Stride and ride England's path from laggard to leader in walking, wheeling, and cycling - https://ippr-org.files.svdcdn.com/production/Downloads/Stride_and_ride_Feb24_2024-02-05-162030_godi.pdf
41   https://communityrail.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/Connected-stations-a-guide-to-community-led-station-travel-planning.pdf
42   https://communityrail.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/Community-rail-encouraging-and-enabling-modal-shift.pdf

C **Engage and empower communities on the development of sustainable and inclusive travel networks and behaviours.**

Our insights:

C 6.1 Communities are passionate about public transport, fair access to opportunity, and improving local environments. There are many local groups working on these issues, with knowledge of what is needed to improve sustainable mobility. Policymakers can harness and encourage this passion and knowledge to unleash locally led change.

C 6.2 Empowering communities and local groups to influence and drive infrastructure and service improvements helps to get transport working better for local people, while enabling resources to be pooled and used efficiently, and building local awareness and ownership. This helps measures to be well-received and better used and reduces risk of backlash.[43]

C 6.3 Effective community engagement (going beyond consultation) enables policymakers and transport providers/planners to properly understand practical barriers and misgivings local people have, and work across modes, sectors, and scales to break these down.[44]

C 6.4 It is essential that community members with diverse needs and lived experience, and local groups and partners can come together and feed in ideas, needs and opportunities for sustainable transport to be inclusive and accessible for all, and to spur innovation.[45]

C 6.5 Community groups and organisations like community rail partnerships, station friends, active travel groups and social inclusion charities can spearhead and deliver positive change, such as: projects building confidence with public transport and active travel; engagement with diverse groups to understand local needs; and managing local enhancements and schemes, e.g. community transport, car share, bike hire and station improvements.

43 This is explored in our report, with reference to a range of academic sources: ACoRP, Communicating Community Rail, 2017, https://communityrail.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/Communicating-community-rail.pdf

44 https://communityrail.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/Community-rail-encouraging-and-enabling-modal-shift.pdf

45 https://communityrail.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/Decarbonising-Transport-setting-the-challenge-response-from-CRN.pdf

Our proposals:

C 6.6 Draw on the knowledge and input of local groups and organisations and their beneficiaries – including through transport policymaking, planning and regeneration/development processes – seeking to understand and address local needs and barriers, to at once support modal shift and tackle transport-related social exclusion.

C 6.7 Use meaningful, empowering community engagement to identify and overcome barriers to sustainable transport use and break down car dependency. Use a range of methods, and as much as possible empower local agents to lead engagement, including interactive workshops, participatory mapping, creative projects, youth/citizen-led campaigns, community-led audits, and meetings and events. Enable people to come together, deliberate and feed in views, to create momentum and positivity about change.

C 6.8 Use policy, regulation, devolution deals and contracting/franchising systems to mandate and ensure a place-based, engaging, and empowering approach on the part of transport operators and developments, with communities treated as partners.

46 https://communityrail.org.uk/resources/case-studies/

Community rail's contribution to community engagement on sustainable travel

Community rail has a powerful role to play in community engagement and empowerment locally, and is uniquely placed to share strategic insights, as the only grassroots movement spanning Britain involving local people with public transport.

It shows how locally led initiatives and engagement with diverse groups simultaneously helps to normalise sustainable travel, recruiting people socially to more sustainable habits, while breaking down perceived and practical barriers.

Engagement activities in community rail are greatly varied, informed by local needs and contexts. Some are overtly focused on encouraging and enabling rail travel, such as rail confidence programmes, 'try the train' trips, and green tourism campaigns highlighting local attractions accessible by rail. Other activities build positivity and familiarity with rail indirectly, such as arts projects, community gardening and history events at stations. See our **case studies** [46] for a cross-section of such activities.

7. Community Rail Network's role

7.1   Community Rail Network is ready to work with government at all levels, partners, policy advisers and thought leaders to encourage and enable sustainable transport. We regularly feed into national and sub-national consultations, panels, and debates, and can offer case studies and further details on advancing sustainable travel.

7.2   As well as advising on community rail's experiences and insights, we can work together to ensure community rail continues to make a growing, positive contribution. We are happy to meet, provide further information and practical examples, and facilitate connections to our members who can bring our ideas and proposals to life.

7.3   We offer a unique perspective orientated around the wellbeing and empowerment of communities and can show what locally led and place-based change looks like in practice, considering the need for behavioural and structural change in transport to achieve Net Zero and more inclusive, healthy mobility.

7.4   Our chief executive chairs the Sustainable Transport Alliance, a grouping of eight national charities/not-for-profit organisations working on different aspects of sustainable, inclusive transport and travel.[47] The Alliance aids holistic thinking and knowledge-sharing across our organisations and can be drawn on for collective input and expertise spanning the full sustainable transport mix. We are happy to arrange joint conversations via our regular online meetings.

7.5   For more information on community rail and its work and insights on sustainable travel, see our reports and resources on topics including: **modal shift**,[48] **Connected Stations (locally-led modal integration)**,[49] and **sustainable development**,[50] or visit **www.communityrail.org.uk**

For further information, please contact **rob@communityrail.org.uk**

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47   https://communityrail.org.uk/partners-and-supporters/sustainable-transport-alliance/
48   https://communityrail.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/Community-rail-encouraging-and-enabling-modal-shift.pdf
49   https://communityrail.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/Connected-stations-a-guide-to-community-led-station-travel-planning.pdf
50   https://communityrail.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/Community-rail-and-sustainable-development.pdf