

## **Written evidence submitted by the Community Rail Network (RRB0040)**

Community Rail Network is a national not-for-profit organisation supporting communities to get involved with their railways and stations, and to get maximum value from rail. We represent and support a grassroots movement made up of 77 community rail partnerships and c.1,200 station volunteer groups, and we are the lead delivery partner for the DfT's Community Rail Development Strategy. See [communityrail.org.uk](https://communityrail.org.uk).

We welcome the draft bill, which we hope represents the start of a new era for rail, with it playing a more central role within our communities and helping us to create a sustainable transport future.

Commitments to ensuring community needs are at the heart of rail decision-making will be crucial in delivering a railway that works for everyone, and enabling the modal shift we need, towards far more journeys made by rail, alongside buses, active travel, and community and shared mobility.

At Community Rail Network, we are engaged in active dialogue with partners in government and the rail industry, including GBRTT, to support the development of a more community-focused railway that delivers maximum social, environmental, and economic value, now and for generations to come.

We have no detailed comment to make on the technicalities of the legislation, but support, in principle, the role of the IRB as a guiding mind for the railway, the bringing together of track and train, and the need for coherence across the network. We look forward to seeing, and commenting on as appropriate, details of the draft licence and operating plan for the IRB once these documents are proposed and published.

We are supportive of the fact that the legislation requires the IRB's licence to include specific conditions in relation to freight, accessibility, the environment, and maximising the social and economic benefits of the railway. The community rail movement looks forward to working with the IRB and wider railway industry to advise on and contribute to maximising this value.

In Schedule 1 of the Bill, relating to Licensing of the IRB, point 4 cites proposed changes to section 9 of The Railways Act 1993. Subsection 3B, points c&d, require the IRB:

(c) to have regard to the effect on the environment of activities connected with the provision of railway services, and;

(d) to maximise, so far as practicable within the resources available to the IRB, the social and economic benefits resulting from the operation of the railway network in Great Britain.

In our response to The Plan for Rail: A Consultation on Legislation to Implement Rail Transformation (<https://communityrail.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/The-Williams-Shapps-Plan-for-Rail-a-consultation-on-legislation-to-implement-rail-transform.pdf>), we stated that in order to maximise social and economic value from the railway, there was a need to be mindful of (and responsive to) communities as a whole and how the railway can meet their needs and serve these better, and how occasional or non-passengers can be supported/enabled to make good use of the network.

We are already seeing many of our railway industry partners recognising this and going beyond a customer service approach, working with community rail, such as by reaching out to and engaging non-passengers, breaking down barriers to travel, improving multi-modal connectivity, and making stations into thriving community hubs. This delivers environmental value (especially from encouraging and enabling lower-carbon travel, reducing car traffic) as well as social and economic value, and we recommended that the legislation should specifically recognise these three types of value and give them equal consideration and weighting, as per sustainable development good practice.

For the IRB's core purposes to be suitably future-focused and all-embracing of what is needed, we suggested that they should be broadened to refer specifically to social, environmental, and economic value, and to communities and their needs.

While the environment is the focus of point c in the Licensing Schedule above, its primary concern is having due regard for potential negative environmental effects, as opposed to considering potential benefits. It is therefore framed negatively compared to social and economic benefits, suggesting a focus on minimising environmental damage rather than recognition of the great environmental benefits the railways can deliver, at local, national, and global level.

This not only includes the vast array of benefits linked to modal shift, but also biodiversity net gain, and use of stations to encourage sustainable businesses and development. We would therefore recommend again that maximising environmental benefits is added to the wording of point d in schedule 1,

alongside social and economic benefits and value, to broaden the scope of what the IRB's licence could, and should, cover.

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