

## **Rail and Urban Transport Review call for evidence**

Response from Community Rail Network, January 2024

### **Introduction and about us**

**Community Rail Network** is a not-for-profit organisation working across Britain to support, champion and represent community rail: a growing, thriving grassroots movement that works to engage communities with their railways, and ensure local people benefit from railways and stations.

This growing movement now includes 75 community rail partnerships (CRPs) and c. 1,200 station friends' groups and other local groups, spread across Britain. These are community-based and -led groups and organisations, working closely with the rail industry, 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.

Find out more about our work, and our members, at [communityrail.org.uk](https://communityrail.org.uk).

### **Growth opportunity through unlocking planning**

#### **1. What do you view as the current key challenges hindering the delivery of rail and urban transport networks and infrastructure?**

The delivery of major rail and other transport projects is being affected we believe by this period of political uncertainty. It is widely acknowledged that the rail industry is fragmented, and while the ongoing commitment to the formation of Great British Railways (GBR) is welcome, the legislation remains at a draft Bill stage, which does not provide the clarity that many are seeking to ensure future progress. Coupled with this, there seems to be a common political view of the railways as being solely about revenue generation, with an under-appreciation of its wider socio-economic and environmental value and how this can be enhanced. While this wider value (which we bear witness to through our work within communities) has been acknowledged in some policy documents, and by some Ministers and civil servants, it seems to be not fully understood, and under-appreciated and utilised in decision-making and business planning; this is reflected in political/industry narratives referring to rail being 'propped-up' by government or the taxpayer.

From a community rail perspective, there is much scope for the rail industry to better combine responsiveness and long-term thinking to enable communities to get greater value from local rail networks and better influence rail development, and to aid a shift towards more sustainable and inclusive mobility. If the sector lacks nimbleness and flexibility, this impacts its ability to engage communities effectively, and to listen and respond to their needs and emerging opportunities, at a local and regional level. It also inhibits the scope for supporting social, environmental, and economic development on a wider scale too. These

are points we have fed into the development of the Plan for Rail (which acknowledges these issues), through the GBR Transition Team's Call for Evidence, <sup>1</sup> and via our regular liaison with DfT and rail partners, but we are conscious of the present political uncertainty creating doubts about how they will be addressed and progressed.

From our experience supporting the community rail movement (see 'about us' above), the way in which rail has been structured and organised, e.g. through the franchising system and the separation of track and train operations, has created constraints in relation to both responsiveness and long-term strategic thinking. We have been told by our members 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, complexity, and bureaucracy. This is the case even when projects are relatively straightforward and small-scale, and there is local support within the industry and community, and undeniable benefits on offer. This can be off-putting for communities, local authorities, and potential investors in local improvements such as station developments and modal integration projects.

There is evidently a need for rail's organisation and strategic planning to be delivered with a long sightline and strong leadership giving clarity about the long-term objectives and outcomes that are being pursued. This needs to fully recognise and seek to develop the wider socio-economic and environmental value for rail, not purely seeing the railway through a cost versus revenue lens. Crucially, it also needs to focus strongly on the potential for rail to play a far greater role in our transport system and our communities in the future, as it must if we are to decarbonise transport (which requires significant modal shift onto rail) <sup>2</sup> and address transport inequalities, exclusion and poverty (which is shown to be bound up with car dependency and car-orientated development). <sup>3</sup> GBR has the potential to do this, given its description as a 'guiding mind' for the industry and its proposed status as the single point of accountability for the performance of the railway. However, a stronger focus is needed around the greater potential of rail, and how to enable and support modal shift and a more inclusive railway.

We will continue to work with the GBR Transition Team, and government and industry colleagues, to ensure community rail is recognised and supported, and its insights utilised through the process of rail transition and transformation. But we, and others across the industry and beyond, would welcome greater certainty and detail as to how GBR (or an equivalent body) would provide leadership on the future development of the sector to prioritise and facilitate the greater use of rail as the backbone of a sustainable, inclusive transport system, and to maximise its socio-economic and environmental value (see question 2).

## **2. What spatial planning and associated policy and legislative changes would help unlock the delivery of rail and urban transport projects?**

Many of the issues highlighted in the section below are related to the uncertainty and fragmentation described in question 1 and how that is limiting long-term strategic thinking and planning.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://communityrail.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/CRN-responds-to-Great-British-Railways-Whole-Industry-Strategic-Plan.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> <https://communityrail.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/Accelerating-modal-shift-STA-Aug-23.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.smf.co.uk/publications/transport-poverty-hidden-crisis/>

## Transport integration:

A step-change is needed across the transport field to integrate modes, with far greater priority given to joining-up sustainable and inclusive modes (public transport, active travel, and community and shared mobility). This would support modal shift, accelerate decarbonisation, particularly benefit young people, low-income and marginalised groups, reduce car dependency and transport poverty.

In community rail, our experience is that:

- Transport modes are planned and operated in siloes, with modal integration greatly lacking in communities of all types and sizes, just about everywhere outside (some) big city centres. This contributes to socio-economic exclusion, preventing communities from getting value from transport assets and services, and forms a major barrier to low carbon journeys;
- Bus and rail operators generally don't work together, and can treat the other as competition, meaning a lack of timetabling alignment and viable, accessible interchange. This issue is frequently put in the 'too difficult' box and so deprioritised, and it tends to be hard for communities to influence (despite often being acutely aware of specific local shortcomings), suggesting a need for systemic change;
- Many, if not most, railway stations have poor, unsafe or unsuitable active travel routes and access. Greater attention is needed to how local active travel investment and development joins up with public transport stops and stations.

Within the rail sector, we have seen some progress, with attention given to 'end-to-end journeys' and 'the first/last mile,' but this isn't always joined up with thinking about accessibility, inclusion and sustainability and informed by local engagement. There has been a push to get people to stations by any means, with increased car parking usually top of the list in franchise agreements under 'modal integration,' even though this excludes the three in ten adults without a car, <sup>4</sup> and adds to local pollution, traffic, road danger and emissions. There is a worry that installing EV charging at stations is seen as ticking the box of sustainable transport integration, a measure that benefits the wealthiest households and reinforces car dependency. We also believe that just one train operator has a dedicated modal integration lead (GWR).

Ensuring that people can get to and from stations using active travel, buses, trams, and community/shared mobility is key to opening up rail to more people and enabling longer and more regular low-carbon journeys. There is a need for the rail sector to work with communities on 'first and last mile' connections, in line with the sustainable transport hierarchy, so private car parking is de-prioritised, and drawing on local knowledge and ideas (community rail can act as a critical conduit for this <sup>5</sup>).

Community rail experience also shows that when communities try to spearhead improvements on modal integration, a range of barriers commonly arise, related to spatial planning, local authority resourcing, a competitive approach between transport industries/operators, and wider political factors, making progress difficult and patchy. Even

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[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/831766/access\\_to\\_transport\\_report.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/831766/access_to_transport_report.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> See our Connected Stations guidance for detailed advice on how this work can take shape at a local level: <https://communityrail.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/ACoRP-STP-toolkit-final-version.pdf>

small, low-cost, obvious improvements can be drawn out or fall by the wayside, wasting local efforts and enthusiasm. Such community-led improvements have the added benefits of being more likely to align with local need, and being community-owned, have a better chance of pre-securing local support, awareness and being used.

At a strategic level, to facilitate the step-change needed, we recommend:

- Forging a new, whole-systems approach and strategy across the transport field, based on high-level engagement and collaboration across the bus and rail sectors, leaders in active travel, shared and community transport, and different levels of government. This needs to ensure, via legislative changes if necessary, a strong, overt focus on achieving coherent, joined-up development of sustainable and inclusive modes to rapidly accelerate decarbonisation, create fair access to opportunity, and empower communities;
- Putting communities in the lead of change, taking an engaging, empowering approach that draws on local knowledge and insights to improve modal integration and inclusion/ accessibility, supporting structural and behavioural change simultaneously.<sup>6</sup> This includes ensuring that transport operators, planners and developers are engaging effectively with local communities (including via the many community rail, transport user, and active travel groups<sup>7</sup>), and removing the barriers to community-led initiatives;
- Creating regional/local devolution deals (such as the Liverpool City Region/Greater Manchester 'Trailblazer' deals) and transport contracting/franchising agreements that ensure a strong focus on integration prioritised according to the sustainable travel hierarchy, emphasising the role of community engagement and empowerment in achieving structural and behavioural shift. These deals should seek to ensure that rural communities don't get left behind and facilitate joined-up working with local authorities and transport partners on modal integration, aligning with regional/local authority strategic development and investment programmes;
- Adopting a joined-up approach to ticketing across public transport, making the system easier, more accessible, and avoiding unreasonable/unaffordable costs for those combining sustainable modes. Combining buses and trains should not involve buying multiple tickets on multiple systems, and being penalised on one if the other lets you down.<sup>8</sup> The system should be designed to make sustainable travel affordable for marginalised groups, job seekers and young people<sup>9</sup>;
- Developing a mode share pathway, scoping and setting out how each mode in the sustainable transport mix (active travel, public transport, community and shared

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<sup>6</sup> See our [Connected Stations](#) and [Modal Shift](#) reports for specific examples on what this might look like.

<sup>7</sup> We are part of the Sustainable Transport Alliance, a group of eight charities/NGOs working nationally on different aspects of sustainable, inclusive transport. Between us we represent and support more than 3,000 local groups. See <https://communityrail.org.uk/partners-and-supporters/sustainable-transport-alliance/>

<sup>8</sup> For example, if your bus to the station doesn't turn up and you miss your train, it will usually mean having to buy an entirely new train ticket for an on-the-day rate, potentially hundreds of pounds for longer journeys.

<sup>9</sup> We will be pleased to advise in more detail on fares and ticketing, and the common barriers and concerns related to the current system we see through community rail engagement activities.

mobility) can take on a greater share of journeys each decade to 2050, and the measures needed across modes to achieve this. <sup>10</sup>

### **Transport and the planning system:**

We recommend that a joined-up conversation is needed across housing, planning, and development stakeholders, including the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, devolved and sub-regional authorities, and organisations representing town planners, developers, and regeneration specialists, to consider how public transport and the development of housing and urban spaces can be effectively aligned.

The National Policy Planning Framework (NPPF) <sup>11</sup> states that transport should be considered from the earliest stages of development proposals, with opportunities to promote walking, cycling and public transport pursued. The NPPF is clear that significant development of new homes/businesses should be in locations which are or can be made sustainable, by limiting the need to travel and offering choice of modes including rail. It also commits to the sustainable travel hierarchy in stating that priority should be given to walking and cycling, and second to access to high quality public transport and shared travel.

The Transport Decarbonisation Plan <sup>12</sup> (TPD) also includes a commitment to embed transport decarbonisation in spatial planning, with new developments designed to promote sustainable travel.

Despite the above commitments, and welcome additions such as the establishment of Active Travel England as a statutory consultee within the planning system, developments still often do little or nothing meaningful to encourage and enable sustainable transport. <sup>13</sup> Transport options are sometimes not fully considered until the development control stage of planning applications, which is too late.

To better integrate transport into the planning system, we recommend:

- Ensuring that sustainable, inclusive transport (in line with the sustainable transport hierarchy) is prioritised at the outset and throughout the planning and development process, not as an afterthought.
- Embedding meaningful community engagement and a dual commitment to low-carbon and inclusive mobility in the planning process. Local groups, especially those involved in sustainable and inclusive travel and mobility such as community rail partnerships, need to have the opportunity to influence local plans and development proposals from early on, and to ensure those without access to a car are well catered for and their needs understood. See below for more detail from community rail on what this could look like locally.

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<sup>10</sup> As recommended in the Sustainable Transport Alliance's paper on [Accelerating modal shift: evidence on carbon savings and co-benefits](#).

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/national-planning-policy-framework/9-promoting-sustainable-transport>

<sup>12</sup> <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/610d63ffe90e0706d92fa282/decarbonising-transport-a-better-greener-britain.pdf>

<sup>13</sup> See Transport for New Homes' analysis of the issue and the consequences: <https://www.transportfornewhomes.org.uk>

## Sustainable travel and modal shift:

There is a need to 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.

Shifting longer journeys from car to rail can reduce emissions by 90%,<sup>14</sup> with even shorter journeys of 30 miles bringing reductions of up to 86%.<sup>15</sup> Reductions are greatest if rail is combined with active travel, buses, or trams. Supporting and enabling these changes is therefore a highly effective path to decarbonisation.<sup>16</sup>

Increasing the modal share of public transport has wider benefits beyond decarbonisation. These include social mobility, improved health and wellbeing from more active lifestyles, decreased air pollution, more liveable, pleasant, and cohesive communities, reduced social isolation, and giving everyone the chance to prosper.<sup>17</sup>

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, but nearly half of adults on low-incomes, disabled people, and ethnic minority groups, who currently experience disproportionate levels of transport-related social exclusion.<sup>18</sup> Such measures therefore support equal access to opportunity and social inclusion.

Despite this, and the commitment in the Government's Transport Decarbonisation Plan to 'accelerate modal shift,' across much of Britain, there is evidence of sustainable transport being eroded and car dependency further locked in. This includes reports of major reductions in bus services (which also restricts access to rail),<sup>19</sup> recent cuts in active travel funding,<sup>20</sup> new developments lacking non-car-based connections,<sup>21</sup> and on the railways, (despite some promising developments) reduced patronage post-pandemic,<sup>22</sup> industrial

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<sup>14</sup> <https://communityrail.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/Accelerating-modal-shift-STA-Aug-23.pdf>

<sup>15</sup> <https://communityrail.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/Community-rail-encouraging-and-enabling-modal-shift.pdf>

<sup>16</sup> 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

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[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/1009448/decarbonising-transport-a-better-greener-britain.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1009448/decarbonising-transport-a-better-greener-britain.pdf)

<sup>18</sup> 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](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/>

<sup>19</sup> <https://policy.friendsoftheearth.uk/insight/how-britains-bus-services-have-drastically-declined#:~:text=According%20to%20the%20National%20Audit,was%20excluded%20from%20this%20experiment.>

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

<sup>21</sup> <https://www.rtpi.org.uk/news/2022/february/report-highlights-role-of-car-dependency-in-new-housing-developments/>

<sup>22</sup> See <https://dataportal.orr.gov.uk/statistics/usage/passenger-rail-usage/> - for example, data from July to September 2023 shows that overall passenger journeys were 89% of the equivalent quarter pre-pandemic

action, performance issues and reliability concerns in some localities, and annual ticket price rises, albeit now with a lower fare cap.<sup>23</sup>

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 been on a train before, many older people have not travelled on one for years, and there is generally a need to build awareness, skills, confidence and break down perceived and practical barriers to rail travel.

To encourage and enable modal shift, we recommend that policymakers:

- Put the importance of public transport, active travel, and community and shared mobility, 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;
- Implement ambitious targets and clear pathways for increasing the modal share of public transport, active travel, and community and shared mobility, to enable decarbonisation, tackle transport poverty, and widen access to opportunity;
- Apply the sustainable transport hierarchy<sup>24</sup> 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;
- 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;
- Recognise the myriad of barriers, both practical and perceptual, to increasing use of public transport, active travel, and community and shared mobility; bring together transport, government, and community partners to break these down and reduce car dependency as a key strand of Net Zero, transport, and development policy.

### **Community engagement and empowerment:**

Community engagement and empowerment has been identified by many academics across multiple disciplines as fundamental to achieving behavioural and systemic change to tackle the climate crisis and achieve more sustainable, inclusive development. Some research has linked this specifically to the transport field. Yet it appears to be a hugely under-appreciated, poorly-understand aspect of what the transport sector needs to do in order to serve communities and provide for our shared future better.

Community rail experience shows that:

- Communities are passionate about local public transport, fair access to opportunity, and improving local environments. They tend to have a diverse range of local groups working on these issues,<sup>25</sup> and they hold the knowledge on what will and will not

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<sup>23</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/significant-intervention-to-cap-rail-fares-comes-as-government-delivers-target-to-halve-inflation>

<sup>24</sup> <https://waytoworkscot.org/climate-emergency/scotland-sustainable-travel-plan/>

<sup>25</sup> We are part of the Sustainable Transport Alliance, a group of eight charities/NGOs working nationally on different aspects of sustainable, inclusive transport. Between us we represent and support more than 3,000 local groups. See <https://communityrail.org.uk/partners-and-supporters/sustainable-transport-alliance/>

work regarding sustainable mobility. Policymakers can, and should, harness and encourage this passion and knowledge to unleash locally led change;

- 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; <sup>26</sup>
- 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; <sup>27</sup>
- 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; <sup>28</sup>
- 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.

To ensure effective and meaningful community engagement in rail and transport projects, we recommend that policymakers:

- Draw on the knowledge and input of local groups and organisations and their beneficiaries, including through transport policymaking, planning and regeneration/development, seeking to understand and address local needs and barriers, to at once support modal shift and tackle transport-related social exclusion;
- 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, meetings, and events. Enable people to come together, deliberate and feed in views, creating momentum and positivity about change;
- 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.

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<sup>26</sup> 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>

<sup>27</sup> <https://communityrail.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/Community-rail-encouraging-and-enabling-modal-shift.pdf>

<sup>28</sup> <https://communityrail.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/Decarbonising-Transport-setting-the-challenge-response-from-CRN.pdf>



### **3. Are there best practice or wider international examples that could be adopted to support growth through unlocking transport network and infrastructure delivery?**

Domestically, we have many case studies and examples of best practice within community rail linked to the various policy areas outlined in question 2. For example, our Connected Stations guide <sup>29</sup> outlines various ways in which communities can be empowered to lead and influence sustainable and integrated transport projects, using community engagement and data collection/analysis to inform local decision making and sustainable development. Our report on Community Rail and Modal Shift <sup>30</sup> highlights the importance of community-led activity, in partnership with rail industry, government, and other partners, in stimulating more sustainable travel behaviours and infrastructure/service improvements.

More generally, all community rail activity helps people feel connected with their local railways and stations, and a sense of ownership towards them, by making these transport assets a focal point for community life and giving people a voice on rail development. <sup>31</sup> Community rail's impact on rail use through these multi-faceted activities is evidenced through stronger passenger growth and recovery from the pandemic on lines with community rail partnerships. <sup>32</sup>

Internationally, notable examples related to the policy areas discussed above include the introduction in Germany of a multi-modal ticket that allowed passengers to use public transport across the country for nine euros per month (research <sup>33</sup> found those who took advantage of the ticket identified the low price, simplicity, and nationwide validity as success factors, with the project offering a 'seed of change' towards more sustainability mobility); and the success of multi-modal mobility hubs in European cities such as Bremen, Bergen, and Amsterdam. <sup>34</sup> We would also highlight the first steps towards the creation of a new network of community rail groups in the Netherlands, where the delivery of social initiatives at stations is becoming more commonplace and is supporting vibrant community hubs. <sup>35</sup>

#### **Clarity and certainty of policy and funding**

##### **1. What are the key tenants of a successful, strategic long-term policy for the delivery of rail and urban transport networks, taking into account wider decarbonisation and transport integration goals?**

See questions 1 and 2 above in the growth opportunity through unlocking planning section.

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<sup>29</sup> <https://communityrail.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/Connected-stations-a-guide-to-community-led-station-travel-planning.pdf>

<sup>30</sup> <https://communityrail.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/Community-rail-encouraging-and-enabling-modal-shift.pdf>

<sup>31</sup> See the wide-ranging examples in our Value of Community Rail report: <https://communityrail.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/The-value-of-community-rail.pdf>

<sup>32</sup> <https://communityrail.org.uk/community-rail-supporting-rail-passenger-numbers-to-bounce-back/>

<sup>33</sup> <https://findingspress.org/article/84645-a-public-transport-ticket-that-moved-a-country-assessing-the-value-of-the-german-9-euro-ticket-as-a-socio-technical-experiment>

<sup>34</sup> [https://assets-global.website-files.com/6102564995f71c83fba14d54/63342a494d25aa6aa761f3b4\\_CoMoUK%20collection%20of%20mobility%20hub%20evidence%20v02\\_Sept%202022.pdf](https://assets-global.website-files.com/6102564995f71c83fba14d54/63342a494d25aa6aa761f3b4_CoMoUK%20collection%20of%20mobility%20hub%20evidence%20v02_Sept%202022.pdf)

<sup>35</sup> <https://communityrail.org.uk/support-grows-for-flourishing-community-rail-movement-in-the-netherlands/>

**2. What reforms to current transport funding approaches would support the safeguarding and expansion of rail and urban transport networks and infrastructure? Does the Green Book allow for sufficient factors to be taken into consideration and what should any additional factors/considerations be regarding infrastructure?**

There is a lack of certainty over future funding for rail and transport projects, both within the industry and from local authorities. With regards to the latter, many authorities are in the process of delivering updated Local Transport Plans (LTP4s), some of which focus on encouraging a greener transport future and tackling inequalities.

For example, the Hampshire County Council LTP4 proposes transformational change which: shifts away from planning for vehicles, towards planning for people and places; meets national priorities to decarbonise the transport system; reduces reliance on private car travel; gives people a choice of high-quality travel options; supports sustainable economic development and regeneration; and promotes active lifestyles.<sup>36</sup> Such plans hold great potential but need to be well-joined-up with and supported by rail and strategic transport development, across all levels of government. At present the coherence needed across scales and sectors to empower local leaders and enable their plans to be progressed confidently appears lacking. Local authorities must feel confident in having the funding available to deliver what they propose, and in being able to collaborate across transport modes, sectors, policy areas and levels of government. It is also important that central government narratives and policies aren't pulling against the evidenced need to reduce car dependency and achieve a major shift in how we get around.

It is clearly essential that major rail and transport projects can be confident of long-term funding, despite changing political environments and cycles. This will also help to ensure investment from the private sector, and alignment of funding goals and priorities between government bodies, local authorities, and the rail industry.

This is also the case within community rail, where stable funding is vital for community rail partnerships to deliver their core functions and activities, helping communities get maximum value from their railways, and promoting sustainable, inclusive travel by rail. We are proactively working with our members to diversify their sources of income, bring in funding from non-rail sources, identify new opportunities, and be successful in their fundraising, but there is no doubt that the protection of community rail funding and a consistent approach remains vital in facilitating projects across the movement.

We do not have detailed analysis to offer on the Green Book, but as outlined under question one in the section above, we can see how incredibly important it is that cost/benefit assessments, decision-making and strategy development should look well beyond revenue. It must fully consider the wider social, economic, and environmental value and detriment of transport interventions, including specifically considering the imperatives for swifter, surer action on climate, and how to address growing transport inequalities. We do not believe this is being fully considered and understood at the moment in terms of the wider benefits and essentialness of rail and public transport. At the same time, it is well documented that the detriment caused by car dependency and car-orientated development (in terms of inequality, health, community wellbeing, local/global environmental damage, and the economic costs of these repercussions) is greatly under-estimated in policy and decision-making.

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<sup>36</sup> <https://www.hants.gov.uk/transport/localtransportplan>

### **3. What mechanisms are available to facilitate effective public/private relationships and funding?**

We cannot comment as experts in this field but suggest that one issue to address is the extent to which political narratives influence relationships, investment and other decision making. If there is an ability to have a more open discussion, then a 'mixed economy' between the public and private sectors could have real merit. For example, in rail, the private sector may be likely to be better able to deliver projects in areas such as construction, whereas the public sector may be better placed to deliver in other areas. The key to facilitating successful relationships is to be open and transparent whoever the operator is and whatever the project, and to prioritise this over margins. In this respect, a more 'open book' approach could help to foster and embed better relationships and working practices.

### **4. What role does the maintenance of existing transport assets play in harnessing growth and how could the current approach be improved?**

One aspect of maintaining existing transport assets of particular importance to the community rail movement is that of under-used and/or redundant buildings and spaces on the rail estate. Projects to develop these spaces can spur local development and improve access to and use of the railway, while also improving the experience of existing rail users and often reducing maintenance costs and issues like anti-social behaviour. While we have seen various successful examples in community rail,<sup>37</sup> the process tends to be fraught. If it were made much easier for local community groups/organisations to take forward projects and agree leases with the owners of such buildings (especially at peppercorn rents for experimental or non-profit uses), we would see far more stations rejuvenated in this way and brought into the heart of their communities.

Recent examples of disused buildings being transformed for community benefit include Hampshire Community Rail Partnership creating six new local jobs in Shawford by reopening a derelict station building as a community cafe,<sup>38</sup> and the former parcels office at Bishopstone Station being developed into a thriving community hub.<sup>39</sup> But despite these examples, it is often a struggle for even our most experienced members to achieve success, sometimes needing to persevere for ten years or more. For community organisations not familiar with the rail industry it is harder still, and the industry is often not responsive enough to local ideas and enthusiasm. A more proactive rail industry and simpler processes could unleash the power of communities to deliver a huge range of social, environmental, and economic improvements by using otherwise redundant railway sites as incubators for local innovation, sustainable mobility, and regeneration. We are happy to advise in much more detail on this topic.

## **Devolution and sustainable partnerships**

### **1. What role does devolution have in supporting and accelerating the delivery of rail and urban transport networks and infrastructure fit for the future?**

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<sup>37</sup> <https://communityrail.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/Community-stations-innovative-community-uses-for-railway-stations-and-land.pdf>

<sup>38</sup> <https://communityrail.org.uk/redundant-space-at-shawford-station-transformed-into-community-cafe/>

<sup>39</sup> <https://communityrail.org.uk/friends-of-bishopstone-celebrate-transformation-of-station-parcel-office-into-community-hub/>

Devolution can play a significant role in supporting and accelerating the development of transport projects and infrastructure. It allows for more localised decision-making, based on the unique needs and demographics of different nations, regions, and areas, and can facilitate the creation of well-articulated transport strategies upon which evidence-based programmes are formulated and delivered. In Scotland, for example, devolution has helped to stimulate a rolling programme of electrification of the rail network that is far more advanced than in England and Wales and delivers an affordable cost per km.

The devolved regions of England have less devolved powers, although regions such as Transport for the North and the West Midlands make geographic and economic sense, and in rail terms, have good relationships with their respective train operating companies. As alluded to earlier in question 2 of the 'growth opportunity through unlocking planning' section, creating regional/local devolution deals on transport networks can cater for the specific wants and needs of certain regions, with tailored planning and delivery supporting flexibility and innovation, helping to garner local buy-in and support.

However, we would stress that devolution does not necessarily/automatically bring the strong focus on shifting to more sustainable, inclusive, and integrated transport that we need, and although decision-making is brought 'closer' to communities, proactive engagement and empowerment of communities is not always fully recognised. See our comments under question 2 in the section above for key principles that we believe should be embedded within devolution.

**2. How can effective relationships be facilitated between all tiers of government, to help accelerate growth and deliver rail and urban transport networks and infrastructure?**

See our answer to question 2 in the 'clarity and certainty of policy and funding' section above.

**3. How can the capacity of public bodies be enhanced to effectively partner, procure and deliver urban transport and rail networks and infrastructure and provide value for money?**

We cannot offer a detailed response here but would suggest that the depleted resourcing within local authorities has restricted their capacity to collaborate effectively with local communities and transport industries. Most authorities used to have a dedicated rail officer, but that has now changed.

Using their extensive knowledge and networks, community rail partnerships have the ability to provide a model for local-level partnership working across the public, private, and third sectors. Therefore, for rail (and wider transport) projects, we would suggest that it makes sense for community rail to add capacity by being consulted and included wherever possible, as they offer value for money in terms of supporting, enabling, and encouraging more people to use rail, and other forms of public transport, active travel, and community and shared mobility.

## **Private Sector and Industry Capacity**

### **1. How can effective private sector investment be best leveraged in the long term to unlock growth?**

Private investors need certainty to support their investment decisions and eliminate risk, and this is generated by a consistent yet progressive funding and policy environment, as outlined in the earlier section on clarity and certainty of policy and funding. See also our earlier comments about better understanding wider co-benefits (including supporting wider regeneration) delivered through investment in rail and public transport generally.

### **2. What can be done to build resilient and efficient supply chains and necessary skills to accelerate infrastructure delivery and maximise value/job creation to local communities?**

We are not in a position to comment in detail on this question, but to develop skills in local communities and plug gaps within the transport sector, projects could, and should as much as possible, engage with local education institutions and youth groups to promote careers in rail and transport and ensure younger generations are aware of, and can potentially go on to access, opportunities within the industry. Engagement via community rail has proved to be an effective way of doing this, with our Community Rail Education Network <sup>40</sup> (for example) coordinating various projects working with train operators and supply chain organisations.

### **3. How to best harness the benefits and be adaptable to future technological trends in the sector?**

We do not have a detailed response to add here but would say that rail needs to be open to innovation and advances in technology, such as with transport decarbonisation. Where opportunities arise to trial and progress safe and potentially transformative solutions to carbon reduction such as hydrogen or battery-powered trains, they should be explored, working in partnership with communities as relevant. The community rail movement is supportive of this, as in the case of Revolution Very Light Rail (RVLR), which may have the potential to undergo trials on some community rail lines. <sup>41</sup> We would also highlight the scope to make greater use of technological developments on a smaller scale, such as to improve modal integration (e.g. via DRT minibuses connecting stations, or self-service e-bike hire at stations) or accessibility and inclusion (e.g. virtual station tours). Collaboration with communities as is typified within community rail can be a highly effective way to develop and implement technological solutions that best respond to local needs and break down barriers to travel.

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<sup>40</sup> <https://communityrail.org.uk/member-services/community-rail-education-network/>

<sup>41</sup> <https://communityrail.org.uk/how-community-rail-can-support-everholt-rail-to-decarbonise-britains-railways/>