

**COMMUNITY RAIL NETWORK
2023 ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING
VIA ZOOM
Tuesday 7 November 2023**

1. Welcome and apologies for absence

The Chair (Jeremy Whitaker, Chair, Community Rail Network Board) welcomed everyone to the AGM.

Apologies had been received from: Karen Hornby (Calder Valley Line CRP & Community Rail Network Board Member); Robert Painton (Friends of Swaythling Station); Grahame Parsons (Friends of New Mills Stations); Annette Richardson (Barrow upon Soar Station Adoption Group); Garfield Southall (North Cheshire CRP & Community Rail Network Board Member); Mick Stone (Purbeck CRP & Community Rail Network Board Member); David Stubbins (Friends of Cark Station); and, Gerald Townson (Bentham Line CRP).

The Chair advised that the AGM was being recorded for the purposes of minute-taking.

2. Minutes of the AGM held on 1 November 2022

The Minutes had been made available on registration. The Chair and the CEO reviewed the Minutes shortly after they had been written to assure themselves that they were an accurate representation of the AGM.

The Minutes were unanimously adopted on the proposal of Ben Walsh (Fenland District Council), seconded by Richard Burningham (Community Rail Network Board).

3. Community Rail Network annual report 2022-23 and discussion on future plans for 2022-23 – Jools Townsend, Chief Executive

Jools Townsend, Chief Executive, Community Rail Network, presented a summary of the Annual Report as an Impact Report. The report had been circulated prior to the AGM and would remain available on the website. The presentation included: some of the headlines from the Annual Report 2022-23; provided some of the key results from the 2023 member survey; and set out the initial thoughts on the focus for 2024-25; with an opportunity for Q&A at the end. The CEO's comments included:

It was difficult to look back at 2022-23 without the challenges to community rail funding, which followed immediately after, warping the view. However, the work that had been done in 2022-23 and preceding years helped to weather that storm. In 2022-23, ongoing industrial action, and other issues on different parts of the network, affected many activities and made the promotion of rail travel difficult. So there was a challenging backdrop to 2022-23. Nevertheless, there were some real achievements on a number of fronts and plenty of reasons to be positive in terms of moving the community rail movement forward.

Some key numbers were:

75 community rail partnership members and 322 station friends and community station members:

CRN continued to support the growth of community rail. Membership had been increasing by about 10% year on year. 2022-23 was similar and at the end of the year there had been an 11% increase overall in membership numbers. There had been a small increase in the number of new CRPs being set up with the support of the team – but a number of CPRs also expanded their reach, giving growth within the existing framework. There had also been significant growth in the number of station friends and community station members.

20 webinars, training courses and events

6,805 social media friends/followers/subscribers

£387,604 provided in grants:

This was slightly lower than the previous year and was partly attributable to the pandemic and how this had impacted on finances and spending within the movement.

22 staff members at the end of 2022-23:

A number of staff were on fixed term contracts and had been brought in to work on specific projects; Karen Bennet was on secondment with CRN; and there was an increase in the number of staff working on a part-time basis. These all contributed to strengthening the organisation.

What CRN did and its impact:

The Annual Report commented in line with CRN's strategic objectives, the first one being supporting and empowering members.

Supporting & empowering members



- **1,100 instances of support; 55 accreditations**
- **Tailored support for officers + chairs + station groups**
- **Getting to know station groups & their needs better**
- **Helping you adapt and respond, while being more proactive**
- **Leadership & expertise on education, tourism, multi-modal**

The figures showed the extent of the support provided throughout the year, largely via the dedicated Member Support & Development Team, and gave an indication of the constant contact with CRPs helping them to achieve their goals and positive impact on the ground. Accreditations (and re-accreditations) helped CRPs maintain excellent standards. During the year CRN gave greater thought to the differing needs of the groups within community rail and more tailored support was provided for officers and CRP chairs. CRN reached out to all the station friends groups by phone helping CRN to reconnect with them and better understand their needs. There had been some tailored training courses and networking sessions for the different groups, and this was a positive development.

It had been a challenging period, and a lot of the support was around helping groups to adapt and respond and ensuring that CRN was responsive when members needed support. CRN had also, consciously, become more proactive (i) to make sure that CRN was supporting fairly across the movement and (ii) in taking the lead on providing specialist expertise in key development areas in community rail: education and youth engagement (Karen Bennett had been seconded to lead on and develop this area); there was on-going specialist support for tourism and leisure travel; and, at the end of the year, Gary Shipp had joined the team to work on multi-modal integration initiatives.

Strategic & policy advice



- **Advising via: Ministers, Shadow teams, Net Zero Transport Board, the Lords' Built Environment Committee, DfT teams**
- **Charing Sustainable Transport Alliance**
- **Regional engagement with mayors, senior officials, consultations on strategy & transport related exclusion**

Alongside working with members, CRN continued to step up its strategic level activity: working to share members' experiences, insights and views with decision makers. There had been positive engagement with government ministers (UK, Scottish and Welsh) – promoting understanding of community rail but also discussing policy and policy development.

CRN continued to provide input on transport decarbonisation - highlighting the importance of rail - through the Net Zero Transport Board and engagement with the Department for Transport's Decarbonisation Directorate alongside other non-governmental organization (NGO) partners in the Sustainable Transport Alliance.

CRN had responded to numerous consultations and had started to pick up pace on regional engagement with senior officials and mayors (such as Tracey Brabin , Mayor of West Yorkshire) around strategy. This was considered to be an important area of work going forward and Sarah Chilton (CRN Director of Communications & Policy) would be developing this regional engagement.

Putting community rail at the forefront of change

- **Growing Scenic Rail Britain reach: 8.2K web visitors/month; 2.5K bulletin subs; 13k social followers**
- **Days Out by Rail campaign**
- **'Let's go for 1 in 5' campaign in Scotland**
- **Major report on inclusion and accessibility**
- **Awards back to full strength: 200 entries, 430 guests**
- **Community Rail Week 2022: Give the Train a Try**

As well as advising government and decision makers on key issues, CRN provided opportunities for members to be at the forefront of change and lead the way on these issues in their localities and regions. There was ongoing development of CRN's core campaigns; making greater use of the Awards in respect of PR; and Community Rail Week – regular events and opportunities throughout the year as a vehicle for getting messages out.

Scenic Rail Britain (CRN's leisure and tourism platform) had an increased number of visitors to the website and some great engagement on social media which now spanned more platforms. The Days Out By Rail campaign ran despite facing some timing challenges because of industrial action – progress had been made with regard to working with more and different partners across the tourism and leisure sector getting community rail out to a wider audience.

CRN ran a 'Let's go for 1 in 5' campaign with the Scottish CRPs, linking in with the Scottish government's target to reduce car kilometers by a fifth and highlighting the role of rail and community rail in achieving that.

A major report was produced on inclusion and accessibility highlighting a broad range of community rail activity in this area. These reports (written by Rob Lawson, the Policy, Research and Resource Officer) were extremely useful as a backdrop to the strategic conversations with ministers and senior civil servants. Likewise, the reports were there for members to use, to evidence the impact that community rail can have, when talking to local partners, stakeholders and potential funders.

The Awards were back up to full strength and were being used to greater effect to promote community rail.

Community Rail Week continued to go from strength to strength and last year had the theme of 'Give the Train a Try' which was really effective and well-received. The number of events and activities throughout the week was very pleasing: CRN and its members using these events to carry out some great communications. There were good levels of engagement online and media coverage both at a local and regional level – again, despite the fact, that further industrial action was announced midway through the week.



Community Rail Week in numbers



Another achievement and source of pride was the Tackling Loneliness With Transport Project, funded by the DfT. This was a new model for CRN, working with a small group of CRPs and external partners (Catch 22 (a family and youth charity) and the University of West England) to set up and run a number of pilots. There was a pilot run by Gloucestershire & Severnside in the Bristol and Gloucestershire area; a pilot by CRL in the Blackburn area; and Catch 22 ran an initiative in the Newcastle and County Durham area. Working closely with an academic at the University of West England, each of these projects was set up with a clear theory of change, clear aims and expected outcomes and the ability to thoroughly evaluate the projects so that data could be fed back to the DfT. Dr Miriam Ricci had written a report on the projects demonstrating the profound and life-enhancing benefits experienced by many of the participants: helping to reduce the risk of loneliness; enhancing well-being; improving feelings of social connectivity; and, opening up new opportunities. (This can be found on the Reports page of the CRN website).

Creating a conducive environment

- **Building awareness with decision-makers**
- **Engagement with rail transformation**
- **Network Rail strategic planning**
- **Joint grant bids with CRPs**
- **Growing corporate partnership scheme**
- **Growing our evidence base**
- **Responding to the funding crisis (May 2023)**

Another key strand of CRN's work, and particularly important in difficult times, was building a conducive environment in which community rail could flourish. Building awareness with decision-makers was not only about having a seat at the table for strategic and policy discussions but was also to ensure that there was an understanding of the community rail movement and a supportive environment.

CRN continued to engage closely and constructively with a number of members of the Great British Railway Transition Team (and there were representatives from that Team at the CRN Conference in March). CRN contributed to their exercise looking at how to create a simpler, better railway – especially looking at how to make community-led station building projects easier. Although there was now a lot of uncertainty around GBR, those conversations had led on to progress being made on some of the issues flagged.

CRN engaged with Network Rail strategic planning for the CP7 period, for the first time with most of the Network Rail regions, getting community rail recognised in some of these strategic documents and again leading on to more detailed conversations about day-to-day matters.

The Tackling Loneliness Project was an example of a joint grant funding bid – CRN was now replicating this with a Motability grant application, and it was hoped there would be other opportunities going forward.

CRN continued to grow its corporate partnership scheme. There were a number of new partners who were working directly with members in different parts of the country on a variety of topics – sharing their expertise and support with members.

CRN continued to expand its evidence base to equip it to advocate on behalf of members.

The CEO concluded her summary of the Impact Report and reminded members that it could be found in full on the website.

Members' survey 2023

- **Good value? 94% CRPs & 89% station groups say 👍**
- **Good communication? 84% CRPs & 87% station groups say 👍**
- **Joined events/training? 92% CRPs & 73% station groups say 👍**
- **Had direct support? 98% CRPs & 59% station groups say 👍**
- **Involved in campaigns? 84% CRPs & 24% station groups say 👍**

- **CRP focuses: local engagement, tourism & leisure, various others**
- **Station groups: local engagement, volunteering, gardening/wildlife**
- **Support for sharing insights on wide-ranging policy issues**

The CEO was greatly appreciative of all those who had responded to the survey – the survey was crucial in CRN's understanding of members' concerns and it helped to shape CRN's planning for the following year. Overall the results were really positive. CRN had been somewhat apprehensive going into the survey, acknowledging that members had been through a tough time. Despite, or perhaps because of that, an increased proportion of members felt that CRN offered good value for membership. There were strong results in terms of CRN's communications and pleasingly high levels of engagement with events, training and campaigns. CRN acknowledged that the proportion of station groups getting involved in campaigns was considerably lower and this was something which CRN was thinking about going into next year.

The survey showed the key topics that members were focused on and this enabled CRN to consider how these might be supported going forward. Members also shared many interesting observations and thoughts in the survey and CRN paid close attention to these to understand how members might be better helped.

Looking ahead to 2024-25:

- **Strengthening support while growing the movement: new strategy**
- **Major focus on fundraising and resilience**
- **Evidencing our/your impacts and value**
- **Developing education/youth engagement**
- **More/bigger modal integration projects**
- **Further developing Scenic Rail Britain and out tourism/leisure support**
- **Strengthening regional relationships and proactive PR for public awareness**
- **Negotiating a changing political landscape**
- **Possible charity registration**
- **Growing out corporate partnerships**

CRN was at an early stage in the planning for 2024-25. There was quite a comprehensive process within

the team: lots of discussions and lots of reflection on the work of the previous year that influenced the way forward. CRN also drew on the member survey and conversations with partners and funders.

However, to give a sense of current thinking, CRN wanted to continue strengthening its support of members. It also needed to consider how to deliver this support because the membership was growing, and it was essential that support continued to be of a high quality. Dan Coles (CRN Director of Member Support & Development) was drawing up a strategy setting out how this might be done. Consolidating and formalising current good practice within the team but also looking at key areas of development and thinking about how CRN's operating environment influenced the way in which CRN was able to support its members. The strategy would pick up on fundraising and resilience in the movement and bring this to the fore in CRN's support services and conversations with members.

Evidencing community rail's impact and value helped to create greater resilience in the movement – this would be an on-going focus.

CRN wished to continue building on the work Karen Bennett and others had been doing on education and youth engagement and stepping up the support on integrated, sustainable transport.

Trainline was now sponsoring Scenic Rail Britain and CRN wished to capitalise on that. The ongoing work led by Alice Mannion (CRN Campaign & Leisure Promotions Coordinator) was vital for the railway's recovery, our communities and decarbonisation.

Regional policy relationships and strategic relationships, as discussed above, were a key on-going area that Sarah Chilton (CRN Director of Communications & Policy) was leading on developing. Generally, CRN was mindful of political change over the coming year and CRN had to ensure that community rail's place was recognised and secure moving forward.

Sarah Fatica (CRN Director of People & Funding) continued to grow the corporate partnerships as mentioned earlier.

Finally, as some might be aware, CRN was looking into the benefits of charitable status and Board would be making a decision on this in the coming months.

The CEO asked members to keep an eye on CRN communications to be aware of the opportunities, events and resources that were available and to keep sharing with the team the things that groups were doing and the impact they were having.

The Chair thanked the CEO for her presentation.

Michael Willmot (North Staffs CRP) referred to the Vision & Mission paragraph at the end of the Impact Report which said, *'to 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 social value'*. He noted that in the past months over 750,000 people had sent in responses to the ticket office closures and how had been accompanied by a lot of bad press for the rail industry, so the question was: should CRN remind the Rail Delivery Group and the DfT of the mission aim quoted above, so that when an idea, such as ticket office closures, next arose CRN was consulted first to check that the proposal made sense to all members of any community and not just to the mainly working-age male members of the group who proposed it?

The CEO agreed that CRN should be reminding RDG and DfT about that particular role of community rail which provided a voice for communities and helped the rail industry better meet local needs – and, she said that CRN was doing this all the time. Many members were involved and helped to feed in to the DfT's Community Rail Development Strategy a few years ago, and when it was published it the DfT had officially recognised that role of *providing a voice for local communities* as one of community rail's 'four

pillars'. This gave CRN leverage with decision-makers. A lot of the conversations over the past year on rail transformation were around this point of how to strengthen that part of community rail's role. With regard to the proposed ticket office closures, community rail made a strong but measured evidenced-based response. The webinar which CRN held with Transport Focus was well attended and feedback suggested that it had empowered members to engage effectively with the consultation.

Bob Owen (South Wessex CRP) asked for some more information about the Sustainable Transport Alliance. The CEO said that the Sustainable Transport Alliance was a relatively informal grouping of eight different charities, not-for-profit and NGOs working on different aspects of sustainable and inclusive travel and transport. These were: Bus Users; Campaign for Better Transport; CRN; Community Transport Association; CoMoUK (who worked on bike and car share schemes); Living Streets; London Cycling Campaign and Sustrans. The Alliance enabled groups to share information and insights; it helped individual organisations to think more holistically about what sustainable and inclusive transport meant; it helped CRN support members on modal integration initiatives; and it provided opportunities to link up different community-led activities at a local level. The Alliance had also worked together strategically: there had been a joint event at COP26; the Alliance was engaging with the DfT's Decarbonisation Directorate (a part of the DfT which CRN would not normally be feeding into); and a joint meeting was planned with Ed Miliband and Louise Hague. Being part of the Alliance enabled CRN to get in front of a wider audience and together the individual groups had a stronger voice.

<https://communityrail.org.uk/partners-and-supporters/sustainable-transport-alliance/>

4. Adoption of Community Rail Network Impact Report

The Impact Report was unanimously adopted on the proposal of Ian Dinmore (CRN Board), seconded by Simon Temple (South East Manchester CRP).

5. Adoption of the Accounts 2022-23

The Financial Statements for the year ended 31 March 2023 had been made available to members when registering to attend the AGM.

The Financial Statements were unanimously adopted on the proposal of Richard Burningham (Community Rail Network Board), seconded by Bob Owen (South Wessex CRP).

6. New Board Members

The Chair said CRN had a very active Board and he wanted to thank Board members for their support over the last year. As required by the Articles of Association there was a process of rolling re-adoption of members of the Board. There were three nominations this year for seven potential vacancies and therefore there no requirement for an election.

The Chair said that there would be seven elected members on the Board. Board had the ability to coopt members if that was in the interest of the functioning of the Board: Daisy Chapman-Chamberlain was a coopted member of the Board last year. Coopted members could join the Board at any time, but their cooption automatically lapsed at the next AGM. If any CRN member thought they might be interested in a role on the Board there was this route and interest was always welcomed.

Although there was no need for an election the three nominees (who were all existing members of the Board) had been asked to introduce themselves and to supplement their written personal statements previously circulated. The nominees were: Marion Atkinson, Ian Dinmore and Mick Stone.

The AGM appointed the three candidates to the Board on the proposal of Richard Burningham (Community Rail Network Board) and seconded by Richard Watts (Community Rail Lancashire Ltd).

On behalf of the Board and CRN, the Chair welcomed the newly appointed candidates back to the Board. The CEO thanked the Board and Chair for all the work and effort they put in and the support

they provided to the team.

The Chair wished to acknowledge Garfield Southall who was unable to attend the AGM. He had been an unstinting Secretary to the Board and also served as a Vice-Chair: the Chair had relied on him for his guidance and counsel. The Chair wished to note a vote of thanks, on behalf of the Board, for all his sterling work on the Board. He would be missed on the Board but his reasons for wishing to step down were fully understood.

The Chair closed the meeting thanking members for their attendance; the CEO for her presentation; and thanking the team at CRN who facilitated the smooth running of the AGM. Finally he thanked the members for their hard work and dedication to the community rail movement – it was very much appreciated by all on the Board.

In attendance:

Nigel Harry Allen, Mid Cheshire Community Rail Partnership; Marion Atkinson, Women in Community Rail/CR Network Board; Kate Belinis, New River CRP; Karen Bennett, Community Rail Network; Faatimah Bham, Gloucestershire CRP; Dawn Bigland, Community Rail Network; Bev Bishop, Hereward CRP; Dawn Branton, Barton Cleethorpes Community Rail Partnership; Andy Buckley, Beds & Herts Community Rail Partnership; Richard Burningham, Devon & Cornwall RP; Dave Carlisle, Friends of Buxton Station; Malcolm Chainey, Tyne Valley CRP; Roy Chapman, Community Rail Network - Board; Sarah Chilton, Community Rail Network; Daniel Coles, Community Rail Network; Hannah Cottrill, Community Rail Network; Heather Cullimore, Severnside Community Rail Partnership; Sheila Davidson, TfGM; Ian Davis, Community Rail Network; Sheila Dee, Severn Dee Travel; Ian Dinmore, Wherry Lines CRP; Katie Douglas, Community Rail Lancashire; Peter Eustance, SLC Property; Carol Evans, Chinley & Buxworth Transport Group; Hugh Everett, Friends of Handforth Station; Beryl Ezzard, Friends of Wareham Railway Station; Sarah Fatica, Community Rail Network; Owen Griffkin, Heart of Wales Line Community Rail Partnership; Sarah Grove, Meldreth, Shepreth and Foxton Community Rail Partnership; James Hadden, Hockley and Hawkwell U3A Gardening Group; Joy Hallsworth, Friends of Hadfield station; Therese Hammond, Kent CRP; Martin Jones, Friends of Droitwich Spa; Erin Kelly, Community Rail Network; John Kenny, Southeast Manchester and Crewe to Manchester CRPs; Hazel Lavery, Community Rail Network; Lucy Lomax, Hampshire Community Rail; Rob Lawson, Community Rail Network; Colin Major, Worcestershire CRP; Alice Mannion, Community Rail Network; Mhairi McKenna, South West Scotland CRP; Sarah Morgan, Crewe to Manchester and SE Manchester CRPs; Alan Neville, Abellio Greater Anglia; Sarah Newman, Darent Valley Community Rail Partnership; Gary Outram, Kent CRP; Bob Owen, South Wessex Community Rail Partnership CIC; Himali Patil, Community Train CRP; Alex Peel, Community Rail Network; Andy Pope, South East Community Rail Partnership; Peter Roberts, Poacher Line CRP; Fiona Saxon, Worcestershire Community Rail Partnership; Gary Shipp, Community Rail Network; Craig Sidebotham, Goostrey Station (FOGS); Julia Singleton-Tasker, Heart of England CRP; Stephen Sleight, Marston Vale CRP; Sally Spaven, HML Community Rail Partnership; Simon Temple, South East Manchester CRP; Caroline Thompson-Noble, Community Rail Network; Susan Tibbles, Oxfordshire Community Rail Network; Roger Tolson, Community Rail Network; Jools Townsend, Community Rail Network; Ben Walsh, Hereward CRP; Keith Walton, Severnside CRP; Richard Ward, Marston Vale CRP; Richard Watts, Community Rail Lancashire; Paul Webster, Community Rail Network; Sarah Wells, Penistone Line Partnership; Jeremy Whitaker, Community Rail Network - Board; Michael Willmot, North Staffs CRP; Dian Wilson, Mytholmroyd station Partnership; Daniel Wright, Community Rail Network; Bill Young, Strathallan CRP.