Integrated National Transport Strategy – a call for ideas

What is the name of your organisation?

Community Rail Network

We would like to have further contact with you on this subject beyond this call for ideas. This communication will principally be by email.

You are:

- not content to continue contact
- content to continue contact via email (specify email)

What is the approximate total number of employees in your organisation?

- 1
- 2 to 9
- 10 to 49
- 50 to 249
- 250 to 499
- 500 to 1,000
- Above 1000 (specify)

What best describes your organisation?

- Charity
- Non-government organisation
- Transport operator
- Other transport organisation
- Housing organisation
- Technology organisation
- Data organisation
- Government department
- Government arm's length body
- Local government
- Public affairs
- Consultancy
- Academia
- Research
- Another type of organisation (specify) – third sector not-for-profit membership organisation – please see below for further details

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), c. 1,300 'station friends' volunteer groups, and other community groups linked to the railways, spread across Britain. These are community-based and community-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 www.communityrail.org.uk

We are also part of the Sustainable Transport Alliance, a partnership of eight organisations working to advance and champion sustainable, inclusive travel, who are planning to develop and submit a joint response to this call for ideas. More information on the alliance can be found at www.communityrail.org.uk/partners-and-supporters/sustainable-transport-alliance/

In your opinion, how could the transport network be better 'joined-up'?

We strongly welcome the development of the INTS, as we believe a step-change is needed across the transport field to integrate modes with the stated intention of giving far greater priority to sustainable and inclusive travel (using public transport, active travel, and community and shared mobility), and reducing private car dependency. The evidence is clear that greater integration would reduce transport-related exclusion and transport poverty, enable modal shift and therefore decarbonisation, improve air quality and public health, and particularly benefit young people, disabled people, low-income and marginalised groups.

In community rail, our experience suggests a currently fragmented transport system, in that:

- Transport modes are planned and operated in siloes, with little evidence of modal integration 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;

- Car-centric thinking and assumptions within rail and transport planning gets in the way of creating space and advancing opportunities to connect rail with sustainable modes;

- Investment in integrated sustainable transport has not been provided in a way to support long-term, holistic, and effective change, combining infrastructure and service improvements with local engagement, across the full sustainable transport mix. It has tended to be competitive and has failed to encourage joined-up working.

These issues are summarised in our core policy recommendations on integrated sustainable transport, which can be accessed through our website *(communityrail.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/IST-policy-recommendations-FINAL-FOR-WEB.pdf)*.

Within the rail sector, we have seen some progress, with greater attention being given to 'end-to-end journeys' and 'the first/last mile,' but strategic planning and prioritisation of this field continues to be under-resourced, with most train operators lacking a dedicated person/contact working on integrated travel. Activity needs to be combined with thinking about accessibility, inclusion, and sustainability, in line with the sustainable transport hierarchy, and informed by local engagement. In other words, the rail sector needs a clear directive and suitable resourcing for working with communities to help everyone be able to access the railway through low-carbon, healthy and inclusive means.

There has historically been a push to get people to stations by any means, with increased car parking usually top of the list in past franchise agreements under 'modal integration,' even though this excludes those without a car, and adds to local pollution, traffic, road danger and emissions. There is a risk that installing EV charging at stations is seen as ticking the box of sustainable transport integration, a measure that only benefits the wealthiest households and reinforces private car dependency.

Ensuring that people can get to and from stations using public transport, active travel, and community and shared mobility is key to opening up rail to more people and enabling longer and more regular low-carbon journeys. In community rail, it is abundantly evident from the communities we work with how a lack of modal integration is getting in the way of people being able to use the railway to access the opportunities they want and to make greener 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 travel which depends on private car ownership is de-prioritised, and local knowledge and ideas harnessed. In our experience, effective community engagement is vital for understanding the myriad of issues and barriers in advancing sustainable, inclusive transport and mobility, and unlocking place-based solutions that local people buy into and want to use. The role of the community and voluntary sector (third sector) is critical here, as demonstrated in community rail, and across our Sustainable Transport Alliance partners: especially engaging less-heard, marginalised groups who are often excluded from rail and have greatly limited mobility and therefore access to opportunity, and

also involving communities in developing the alternatives to private car dependency and creating greener transport opportunities and habits.

To facilitate the step-change needed, we recommend forging a new, whole-systems approach 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.

As such, we recommend that:

- The INTS should set out an approach to ensure transport operators and authorities improve integration between sustainable modes and services, and work in synergy to provide a coherent, viable, attractive alternative to the private car;

- Across rail and the wider transport sector, delivery plans and decision-making should reflect the sustainable transport hierarchy, being clear about the need to reduce car dependency and provide for non-drivers, and the benefits this brings, across the urban to rural spectrum;

- The set-up of Great British Railways should be used to bring modal integration to the fore within the rail sector, and clarify a strong role for the railway, which involves engaging and empowering local communities and leaders, aligning with the new INTS;

- The INTS should support its aims and local ambitions with clear long-term commitments for suitable resourcing. This should be provided in a way that supports a holistic, place-based approach across the sustainable transport mix, involving local people, and requirements for different operators and authorities working together across modes and area boundaries;

- The INTS should promote and encourage wider adoption of good practice found within successful regional/local devolution deals (such as the Liverpool City Region/Greater Manchester 'Trailblazer' deals). Elements of these agreements have helped to create transport contracting/franchising agreements that ensure a strong focus on integration prioritised according to the sustainable travel hierarchy and emphasise the role of community engagement and empowerment as a specific and vital element 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, transport partners, and the third sector on modal integration, aligning with regional/local authority strategic development and investment programmes;

- The INTS should stipulate 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, for example, should not involve buying multiple tickets on multiple systems, and being penalised when one part does not function as planned, or if you make a mistake linked to the complexity of the system. The system should be designed to make sustainable

travel affordable for those who may be affected by transport exclusion poverty, e.g. marginalised groups, job seekers, young people etc.

Our Connected Stations resource *(communityrail.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/Connected-stations-a-guide-to-community-led-station-travel-planning.pdf)* offers specific ideas and examples as to how community rail links rail with other forms of public transport, active travel, and community and shared travel, including combined ticketing schemes, dedicated rail/bus links, improved first/last mile signage and promotion, and schools' engagement.

Our report on modal shift *(communityrail.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/Community-rail-encouraging-and-enabling-modal-shift.pdf)* also shows how community rail is helping to overcome challenges around modal integration, highlighting work across the movement such as integrated ticketing/journey planning, stations being uses as bases for multi-modal travel hubs, activities linking rail to active travel, and community and youth engagement initiatives.

All resources are available via our website at www.communityrail.org.uk

Data in the context of the next question can mean having better information about journeys, such as but not limited to departure times, journey planning, traffic information and accessibility information.

How could data be used to improve the transport network?

Community rail is a leader in understanding the barriers people face to using rail and engaging communities to overcome these. The movement, and the wider third sector, can be a rich source of data in understanding these issues, and developing solutions to overcome a lack of familiarity and confidence with public transport. Our experience from community rail projects reinforces the notion that developing travel confidence, i.e. people being comfortable with journey planning and the practicalities of travel, is crucial to repeated use.

We are supportive of the principle of data sharing across the rail industry being increased in order to deliver increased social benefit and opportunities to facilitate greater use. Rail industry performance, passenger satisfaction data, and monitoring and reporting should relate to whole journeys and incorporate modal interchange and modes used to access stations, supporting progress towards seamless, high-quality, and sustainable journeys. The railway should only be judged as high-performing and sustainable if it's working in sync with other sustainable modes in order to serve whole-journey needs.

Current data also often fails to consider the issues faced by those not currently using rail (and other forms of public transport) and the concerns they have. Transport policy makers need to acknowledge those people for whom rail and public transport has become foreign and daunting, and meaningful local engagement, such as that typified by community rail, is key to addressing this.

Technology in the context of the next question means new and innovative ways to complete journeys, for example but not limited to the use of autonomous vehicles, electric scooters and e-hailing rides.

How could technology be used to improve the transport network?

Technology has the potential to play a crucial role in delivering on our recommendations around integrated ticketing, affordability, and better understanding travel patterns and barriers, and how these are changing and being addressed. Like all aspects of transport development, this needs to be done in partnership with communities, using meaningful engagement. We have seen examples of this within community rail, with community rail partnerships working with train operators on new technology to improve accessibility, e.g. in station environments, and others creating interactive sustainable travel maps and itineraries to development first/last mile connections with rail and stations.

How, if at all, would you improve the way decisions are made about the transport network?

One of the reasons the transport network is fragmented and not as joined-up as it should be, is that decisions are made for communities, not with them. We would therefore recommend that one key way to improve transport decision-making would be to include communities as a meaningful partner in creating positive and inclusive change. The INTS needs to overtly acknowledge the crucial role of the community and voluntary sector in embedding this approach, and not assuming it will automatically happen via simply moving decision-making closer to communities, e.g. via devolution.

Local transport solutions should be designed as place-based, holistic approaches with people at the forefront, in place of mode specific and top-down approaches. We have found that when communities do 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 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.

Our 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, and they hold the knowledge on what will and will not work regarding sustainable mobility and integrated travel. 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 resistance;

- 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;

- 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;

- 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.

As such, we recommend that the INTS should make clear that local communities should be engaged and listened to in the design and delivery of local integrated transport solutions. Great British Railways also has a key role in conjunction with this, ensuring the engagement of communities in station catchment areas through community rail and other opportunities.

We advocate an approach at all levels of transport governance and operations that puts communities in the lead of change, taking an engaging, empowering approach that draws on local knowledge and insights to improve modal integration, inclusion and accessibility, and sustainable and healthy mobility, supporting structural and behavioural change simultaneously. 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), and removing the barriers to community-led initiatives.

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

- 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.

We would also recommend that sustainability and inclusion be put at the forefront of transport decision-making, with policy developed in light of the great importance and urgency of tackling the climate crisis, and the socio-economic benefits that can be unlocked through shifting towards a more sustainable and inclusive transport system. Transport needs to be better

understood for the wider role and value it delivers now, and its potential for creating a brighter future, not just in terms of costs and revenue from ticket sales. Engaging with communities and partnering with the third sector is again vital in developing this greater appreciation, encouraging and enabling more holistic and far-sighted decision-making.

Any other comments?

Community Rail Network is ready to work with government at all levels, partners, policy advisers and thought leaders to encourage and enable integrated sustainable transport, including any specific opportunities, e.g. 'roadshow' events, policy round table discussions, linked to the INTS.

Our membership is rich in community-based insights and perspectives on the blockers, challenges, and opportunities for creating a people-centric, sustainable, inclusive, and integrated transport system, and empowering and benefiting local communities in the process, and we would be happy to share these insights in any appropriate manner.

For more information on community rail and its work in this field, including reports/research and policy papers, visit communityrail.org.uk.