

Transport Select Committee inquiry ‘Joined-up Journeys’ – evidence from Community Rail Network

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/

Summary:

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/shared mobility) and reducing private car dependency.

To improve transport decision-making, communities must be included as a meaningful partner in creating positive and inclusive change. Local transport solutions are often designed without the involvement of the communities they seek to benefit, via modal silos instead of place-based, holistic approaches with people at the forefront. We advocate putting 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. New policy, such as the Integrated National Transport Strategy, 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 devolution or transport (e.g. rail/bus) reform.

**a) What are the key features that make a transport system feel joined up to the user?
How would 'integrated' transport look different to current services and networks?**

Greater integration between sustainable transport modes would produce a myriad of benefits for both society and individuals alike, such as reducing transport-related exclusion and transport poverty, enabling modal shift and decarbonisation, improving air quality and public health, and widening access to opportunity, particularly benefitting young people, disabled people, low-income and marginalised groups.

However, community rail's experience is that accessing and using rail and other forms of 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, and confidence to break down perceived barriers to rail and public transport use.

In addition, there are a range of practical barriers that need to be addressed if transport systems are to feel 'joined-up' to users. These are diverse and multi-faceted, but our experience suggests that in order to be considered as a genuine alternative to private car use, travel options need to be: reliable; affordable; safe and enjoyable; accessible; and offer easy and convenient interchange between modes.¹

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.

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.

b) What stops effective integration happening now, and how can these barriers be overcome?

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

- Transport modes are planned and operated in siloes, with modal integration greatly lacking in communities of all types and sizes;
- 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;
- 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, yet we are aware that local authorities have in the past found the rail industry difficult to engage on this;

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

- 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. Historically, rail franchise agreements mostly treated additional car-parking as the priority for multi-modal integration, rather than focusing on more sustainable and inclusive solutions and connections, i.e. bus and tram interchange, community transport, shared mobility schemes, and active travel routes and facilities;
- Funding for sustainable transport hasn't been delivered in a way that supports long-term, joined-up improvements. Instead of combining infrastructure, services, and local involvement, it's often competitive and doesn't encourage different parts of the system to work together.

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

To overcome the barriers cited above, we recommend that:

- The new Integrated National Transport Strategy (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, utilising and harmonising the full sustainable transport mix (rail, bus, community transport, shared mobility, and active travel);
 - 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, structured in a way to promote collaboration rather than competition across the sustainable transport field;
 - National policy 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 has a key role in ensuring the engagement of communities in station catchment areas (and widening station catchment areas through modal integration and local engagement), especially through supporting and empowering the community rail movement.
- c) What kinds of interventions and policy decisions are needed to provide joined-up transport, including in areas beyond transport such as planning?**

With regards to planning policy, we support recent amendments to the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) moving towards a ‘vision-led’ transport planning approach.² The NPPF states that transport should be considered from the earliest stages of development proposals, with opportunities to promote walking, cycling and public transport pursued. We agree that this early consideration is vital, and clearly not happening enough at present.

To ensure this occurs, updated planning practice guidance should encourage developers to embed a vision-based approach to sustainable, inclusive transport that actively reduces car dependency. Any new housing and commercial developments should be explicitly planned around sustainable transport access, with local plans and spatial frameworks prioritising sustainable connections from the outset. This includes aligning Local Transport Plans, Local Plans and Local Skills Improvement Plans through shared governance and common evidence bases.

We support 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 an early stage.

More generally, our experience tells us that one of the reasons the transport network is fragmented, is that decisions are made for communities, not with them. In rail, for example, the needs and experiences of existing rail passengers are given much attention (rightly) but there is much less data, insight and consideration to the needs of broader communities, and how to break down barriers for those who don’t or would struggle to use rail at present, often related to poor integration. There is scope to make greater use of community rail to better draw on community insights and experiences to join up modes and overcome barriers locally.

Broadly speaking, a key way to improve transport decision-making is to include communities as a meaningful partner in creating positive and inclusive change. Local transport solutions are often designed without the involvement of the communities they seek to benefit, via modal silos instead of place-based, holistic approaches with people at the forefront. We advocate an approach (and have offered practical support to our members in this area³) 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. 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 devolution.

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. The ITNS should seek to remove these barriers, ensuring community-led initiatives (involving community groups, local partnerships, and town and parish councils) can access support and resourcing, especially to create solutions in small

² <https://communityrail.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/04/NPPF-consultation-response-Community-Rail-Network.pdf>

³ <https://communityrail.org.uk/reports-and-research/a-quick-start-guide-for-community-groups-joining-up-transport-modes-and-helping-people-move-sustainably/>

towns and rural areas, places considered more difficult for creating joined-up, sustainable and inclusive transport.

Our experience in community rail 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;
- 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;
- 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 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. 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;
- Ensure local communities have access to the guidance, support, funding and collaborative opportunities to spearhead locally-led projects, encompassing engagement and infrastructure change. These tend to be especially relevant in smaller towns and villages that suffer from greater levels of car-dependency and transport-related exclusion, and where commercially-driven approaches don't work.
- Use opportunities for rail and bus reform to ensure transport contracts, franchises and decision-making prioritises integration between sustainable modes, accessibility, social benefit and decarbonisation. This should include: ensuring timetable integration and interchange facilities, including developing rail and bus stations into 'mobility hubs';

data-sharing and collaborative working between transport operators; and ensuring involvement of local communities in creating joined-up networks.

d) How should transport integration and its benefits be measured and evaluated—including the impact on economic growth, decarbonisation and the Government's other 'missions'?

There is a need for transport integration interventions to be monitored and measured by their practical operational efficiency and their effectiveness in changing or encouraging new or different travel behaviours. For example, this could be done via passenger surveys or via qualitative appraisals of local projects and their specific outcomes and/or impact.

It is vital, however, to find ways of measuring and evaluating the broader benefits of transport integration, including the areas outlined in the question above. With regards to benefits associated with decarbonisation and modal shift, for example, we, alongside our Sustainable Transport Alliance partners, collated evidence of the major carbon savings that can be achieved via relatively modest shifts towards more sustainable transport behaviour, and the strong socio-economic co-benefits this can lead to if delivered via empowering, inclusive and place-based approaches.⁴ We recommended the development of a mode share pathway, scoping and setting out how each mode in the sustainable transport mix (active travel, public transport, community and shared mobility) could take on a greater share of journeys each decade to 2050, across different locality types (urban to rural), bringing the big carbon savings needed, while contributing great benefits and socio-economic value to households and communities. Progress could then be evaluated against this pathway.

In community rail, we are developing the way we support community rail partnerships and groups to demonstrate the social, environmental, and economic value they deliver for and with communities. Our most recent 'value of community rail' report highlighted the significant social return on investment of £17.89 for every £1 spent on community rail projects, and the movement's vital role in bringing partners and people together to promote sustainable and healthy journeys, create more integrated transport, and encourage and enable modal shift.⁵ For integrated transport projects, we considered the social value of such schemes via factors such as increases travel confidence, access to work and leisure, and the health and wellbeing benefits of active travel. Our experience in working with the rail industry and other transport partners suggests that benefits such as these have been under-valued in the past, although we see promising signs of change with the introduction of the government's Social Value Model, and both the Sustainable Rail Blueprint and Network Rail's Greener Railway strategy recognising the ways that the railway can work with communities to deliver social and environmental value as well as economic benefit. We have been advocating for the process of rail reform to integrate this further into rail thinking and decision-making, but more broadly we recommend that this is embedded across the transport field.

e) How should the cost of interventions needed to deliver transport integration be assessed and appraised? Will proposed changes to methodology in the Treasury's 'Green Book,' including the introduction of 'place-based business cases,' change this?

⁴ <https://communityrail.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/CRN-Accelerating-Modal-shift-25.4.24.pdf>

⁵ <https://communityrail.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/VoCR-report-24-FINAL-FOR-WEB.pdf>

The introduction of place-based business cases is a welcome addition to the Treasury's Green Book, encouraging decision-makers to consider the collective impact and value of projects that may span different policy areas. Our experience shows that rail and transport-related projects can be highly effective if planned and delivered in conjunction with partners from different sectors, e.g. health, education, and an approach that recognises their shared objectives in addressing local needs could stimulate further investment, support and collaboration.

The addition of place-based business cases complements the changes to recent additions of the Green Book, which has seen an increased focus on social value in determining public value for money. This is also reinforced by the introduction this month (October 2025) of PPN 002, the UK Procurement Policy Note that stipulates a new Social Value Model as mandatory for central government procurements, aligning with the Procurement Act 2023 and the new National Procurement Policy Statement (NPPS). As above, these are welcome changes that we hope will embed social value as a key component of transport-related business cases and tenders.

We are starting to see progress in rail with Network Rail's new Greener Railway Strategy, which has social value at its heart, and recognised the importance of meaningful community engagement, including via community rail partnerships and groups, to integrating rail with local communities to enhance wellbeing and social and economic prosperity. We believe it is crucial that these commitments are not only carried forward through rail reform, but reflected and harmonised across the transport field.

f) Will integration in itself deliver other benefits such as wider transport options in more places, and behaviour changes such as mode shift? What other impacts could it have?

If transport integration is delivered effectively and helps to facilitate seamless, door-to-door multi-modal journeys, this will naturally break down common barriers and give people wider local transport options. This should support an increased modal share for public transport and would lead to wider benefits including increased social mobility, improved health and wellbeing from more active lifestyles, more liveable, pleasant, and cohesive communities, reduced social isolation, and giving everyone the chance to prosper.

At present, a lack of integration poses a huge barrier to people accessing and using the alternatives to private car use. This is a big part of our motivation for working together as part of the Sustainable Transport Alliance, to help us better support communities, and advise authorities, operators and decision-makers, on overcoming these challenges.

Modal shift itself holds a vital key for unlocking extensive social, environmental and economic benefit. Last year, we worked as an Alliance to collate evidence on the benefits that can be created,⁶ including:

- The major carbon savings of even relatively modest shifts in behaviour;
- Transformative impacts for physical and mental health and local environments, including building exercise into daily routines, reducing loneliness, increasing confidence and inclusive access to opportunity, and cutting air pollution and road casualties;

⁶ Sustainable Transport Alliance, Accelerating Modal Shift: Evidence on Carbon Savings and Co-benefits, 2024, <https://communityrail.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/CRN-Accelerating-Modal-shift-25.4.24.pdf>

- Boosting local business and economies, through the ‘pedestrian pound,’⁷ access to work, training and leisure, and the economic value of public health and environmental outcomes.

However, to encourage and enable the behaviour changes necessary for modal shift, sustainable, inclusive transport options need to be given suitable prominence and communities need to be empowered as a meaningful partner in creating and championing local transport solutions. To ensure this, we refer to the recommendations outlined in our answer to question c.

g) What is needed to ensure that integration is inclusive and meets the diverse needs of transport users? Will integration necessarily lead to better outcomes for accessibility?

Accessibility needs to be at the forefront of thinking in terms of integration between different modes; it cannot be treated as a given. It is essential that community members with diverse needs and lived experience, and local groups and partners can come together and put forward ideas and opportunities for sustainable transport to be inclusive and accessible for all, and to spur innovation. This co-creation and co-production should happen throughout the design and planning stages, and on an ongoing basis to ensure emerging issues and changing needs are understood.

Our evidence shows that community rail plays a leading role in enabling accessible, inclusive journeys, opening up rail travel to those with a wide range of physical and non-visible disabilities and other support needs, and their families and friends. The movement also helps to create inclusive and welcoming station environments that cater for, appeal to, and involve everyone. From our research, we have found that community rail’s local knowledge, and relationships with local groups, is vital in making accessibility-related projects a success.⁸

Our experience suggests that the impact of initiatives designed to promote accessibility and inclusion is enhanced when projects:

- Are built on genuine involvement with those with lived experience, with projects shaped by these groups;
- Utilise creative, holistic approaches that bring people together, provide a voice and empower people who may otherwise be marginalised;
- Consider and maximise access and inclusion benefits for as diverse an audience as possible, considering those with particular needs and who may be currently excluded from rail/transport, but seeking to deliver benefit beyond target groups.

As such, we encourage policy makers within rail and transport to draw on community rail for support and expertise with accessibility and inclusion programmes, particularly for direct engagement with those with lived experience, and feeding in local knowledge.

h) Will the meaning of integration vary across different kinds of areas and for different kinds of journeys? (such as rural and suburban areas, and inter-city journeys)

⁷ See Living Streets’ research on the economic boost of improving pedestrian access and creating people-friendly streets and urban spaces: <https://www.livingstreets.org.uk/policy-reports-and-research/pedestrian-pound/>

⁸ <https://communityrail.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/Inclusive-and-accessible-travel.pdf>

The meaning of integration and the principles underpinning it as a concept can be the same for different areas and journey types, and indeed for the user, their wants and expectations may remain consistent with those outlined in our answer to question a.

However, there is no one-size-fits-all model for how integration is achieved, and the way local transport solutions are devised and delivered must reflect local contexts, needs and aspirations. This should go well beyond thinking about current travel patterns, population and demographics, and consider local people's views, experiences and the barriers they face, and what might be changed to achieve more inclusive, sustainable, joined-up journeys. For example, there may be a particular need to focus on the reliability of integrated transport in more rural locations, where there are fewer or no alternative options like buses and taxis, and the risks, costs and consequences for users are greater if one element of the journey is disrupted or breaks down.

As we have alluded to elsewhere in this response, this is where communities must be included and empowered to help shape the practicalities of local transport schemes, to ensure they accurately reflect local contexts/wants/needs etc. If solutions are developed collaboratively, with communities empowered to lead, then the likelihood is that measures will be more realistic to implement, more well-received and better used. No community should be put in the 'too difficult' box, and no group should be branded '(too) hard to reach.' Rural communities are, understandably, seen as hardest to serve through integrated, sustainable, inclusive transport, yet our experience shows that locally-led innovation and initiatives are not only possible in these locations, but all the more relevant and important due to the challenges of commercial and at-scale solutions. Similarly, involvement of diverse groups, across the rural to urban spectrum, can unlock the creativity and energy needed to create truly inclusive mobility.

The role of the community and voluntary sector, not least established grassroots movements like community rail, is crucial in facilitating and supporting such engagement and locally-led change (see answer to question i). Over the years we have seen many community rail partnerships and groups across all types of localities, rural and urban, achieving all sorts of positive change towards integrated, sustainable and inclusive transport, from brokering agreements for multi-modal ticketing, to developing locally-run demand-responsive minibuses, to improving active travel routes and bus interchange facilities at and around stations.

i) What lessons can be drawn from attempts to integrate transport elsewhere in the UK and around the world? What examples should the Government seek to emulate?

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. We have many case studies and examples of best practice within community rail of partnerships and groups working to better integrate multi-modal transport and more joined-up journeys, which we would be happy to discuss further as appropriate.

For example, our Connected Stations resource ⁹ 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.

⁹ <https://communityrail.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/ACoRP-STP-toolkit-2025.pdf>

In addition, our report on modal shift ¹⁰ shows how community rail helps to overcome challenges around modal integration, highlighting work across the movement such as integrated ticketing/journey planning, stations being used as bases for multi-modal travel hubs, activities linking rail to active travel, and community and youth engagement initiatives. While community rail activity centres around joining the railway up better (with other sustainable modes) there is no doubt scope to apply the lessons of community rail to bus stations and other locations not served by a local railway, and indeed to widen the catchment areas of railways by creating better links with further-away communities.

Domestically, there are lessons to be learnt from 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 have been seen to facilitate joined-up working with local authorities and transport partners on modal integration, aligning with regional/local authority strategic development and investment programmes. However, we believe there is work to be done to ensure that the meaningful involvement, and empowerment of local communities, is part of the devolution process.

Internationally, notable examples related to integrated transport 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 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) ¹¹; and the emergence of multi-modal mobility hubs in the UK, building on the success of schemes in European cities such as Bremen, Bergen, and Amsterdam. ¹² Perhaps more fundamentally, we understand that in some other countries, such as Germany, social and environmental outcomes are put at the forefront of transport decision-making and appraisal, with a view that the economic benefits will flow from this. It is maybe looking to this kind of cultural mindset, rather than specific interventions, that could be most transformative in the UK. ¹³

¹⁰ <https://communityrail.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/Community-rail-encouraging-and-enabling-modal-shift.pdf>

¹¹ <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>

¹² https://assets-global.website-files.com/6102564995f71c83fba14d54/63342a494d25aa6aa761f3b4_CoMoUK%20collection%20of%20mobility%20hub%20evidence%20v02_Sept%202022.pdf

¹³ https://www.linkedin.com/posts/jonathan-bray-28807414_not-sure-we-are-fully-aware-of-how-much-the-activity-7378732341495750656-7_JT?utm_source=share&utm_medium=member_desktop&rcm=ACoAABkV8MIBxntRWSyM2Qr_X99psnNqZWEY--4