

# Placemaking and embedding railways/ stations into communities



PROMOTING GOOD PRACTICE IN COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT WITH RAIL | DEVELOPED BY



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**Another strong theme to emerge from the research was the need for community engagement to be organic, with initiatives co-produced and driven by communities themselves.**

**Participants agreed that the most fruitful community projects come from using local knowledge, enabling railways and stations to become strongly aligned with community aspirations and linked to a range of local policy objectives. Successful placemaking allows the rail industry to maximise the value of its assets, working for and with communities to deliver lasting impact.**

Desired and suggested elements of best practice included:

## **Use different types of data to measure impact**

- Combine quantitative data (e.g. usage stats, funding outcomes) with qualitative evidence (e.g. personal stories, community feedback) to humanise and validate the impact of placemaking.
- Highlight long-term benefits and legacy of successful schemes to build trust and support.

## **Embed projects locally for greater impact**

- Focus on localised placemaking where staff and community members are already embedded.
- Encourage organic engagement at permanent or long-term sites, which tend to foster deeper relationships than temporary project sites.

## **Leverage staff and community knowledge**

- Empower employees on the ground, e.g. station staff, who have built long-standing relationships with local communities.
- Collaborate with local groups, charities, and businesses who understand the needs and dynamics of the area.

## **Encourage proactive community involvement**

- Create visible, positive activities at project sites, e.g. stations, to attract community ideas and offers of help.
- Promote projects as opportunities to stimulate local pride and participation.
- Recognise that if railways are to be closer to communities, the human connection must be retained.



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### Align local projects with strategic goals

- Develop a suite of ‘off-the-shelf’ placemaking projects that can be tailored locally but align with broader rail industry goals.
- Improve coordination between rail operators, community rail partnerships (CRPs), and the voluntary sector.

### Maximise funding opportunities

- Use funding streams such as CCIFs (Customer and Communities Improvement Funds) and, where appropriate, match with other sources like the CRDF (Community Rail Development Fund).
- Explore appropriate funding opportunities from non-rail sources, such as local/combined authority funds, e.g. CIL/Section 106, charitable trusts, community foundations, local businesses or corporate partners/sponsorship.
- Ensure local buy-in and industry sponsorship to increase project success and sustainability.
- Recognise that support must go beyond financial: planning, delivery, and ongoing engagement are equally vital.

### Celebrate cultural identity and co-production

- Use placemaking to celebrate local culture, history, and identity.
- Adopt a people-first, co-production approach to empower communities in shaping their local railway environments.
- Treat railway spaces as sites of social value.

*“The most fruitful community projects come from using local knowledge.”*

*“Relationships become embedded over time, and stations develop that community feel. This heightens impact and the longevity and legacy of projects.”*

*“To create social value and a community feel at stations, you need that human element. If GBR wants the railway to be closer to communities, that needs to be retained for the industry to thrive.”*

*“Figures are important, but stories need to be humanised too.”*

### How proactive community engagement supports the rail industry

Placemaking and embedding railways and stations into the heart of communities is increasingly vital to the rail industry because it strengthens both social value and long term sustainability. When stations become meaningful local places rather than purely transport interchanges, they foster trust, pride, and a sense of shared ownership. Using both quantitative data, such as usage patterns or funding impacts, and qualitative insights like personal stories or community feedback helps the industry demonstrate real, human centred value, reinforcing the long term benefits of these schemes.

Locally embedded projects are particularly powerful. When staff and community members who already hold deep local knowledge play an active role, engagement becomes more organic and relationships strengthen over time. Empowering station staff and collaborating with community rail, local groups, charities and businesses ensures that initiatives genuinely reflect local needs and aspirations. Visible, positive activity at stations encourages communities to contribute ideas and get involved, helping railways maintain the human connection that underpins community trust. At the same time, aligning local projects with wider industry goals ensures consistency and strategic impact.

Working with communities to embed stations as sites of cultural identity and co production allows the railways to generate lasting social value and deepen their relevance within the places and communities they serve.



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### Case Study:

#### Sevenside CRP – placemaking at Ashley Down Station

**Sevenside Community Rail Partnership (CRP)** has played a pivotal role in transforming Ashley Down Station into a vibrant community hub, demonstrating the power of placemaking through collaboration. Reopened after a 60-year hiatus, the station is part of a £400m+ investment led by the West of England Mayoral Combined Authority, in partnership with Great Western Railway (GWR), Network Rail, and Bristol City Council.

To celebrate the station's opening, Sevenside CRP commissioned local artist Aumairah Hassan to lead an intergenerational art project, 'Progression,' involving Lockleaze Neighbourhood Trust and 1st Bristol Muslim Scout Group. A second mural, unveiled to celebrate Railway 200 and the station's first anniversary, was created by Andy Council with input from local sports clubs and councillors, further embedding the station – which has seen more than 100,000 journeys in its first year – in the community.

These projects reflect Sevenside CRP's newly strengthened relationships with rail industry partners. A new dedicated role within Network Rail's Western Region, jointly funded with the Combined Authority, has improved stakeholder engagement and strategic planning. Local authority champions have helped community rail influence wider rail development, ensuring the CRP is now treated as a valued partner and consultee in shaping new stations and other programmes across the GWR network.

