

Building community engagement and social value into business cases/tenders

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An underlying theme running through the research was the need for community engagement and social value to gain a higher profile in the industry, to drive these areas forward. Participants felt both issues needed to be better linked to business objectives and included as key elements of business cases and tenders to support work-winning.

There was a general feeling that while things are moving in the right direction, there is still work to do to move community engagement and the role it plays in delivering social value from a 'nice to have' to a 'must do', which would need its inclusion and importance to be mandatory.

Desired and suggested elements of best practice included:

Strategic communications:

Embed community engagement and social value into business cases from the start

- Ensure social value is a core part of project planning, not an afterthought.
- Link community engagement and social value directly to business objectives and outcomes.

Make community engagement and social value a mandatory requirement

- Advocate for DfT to include community engagement and social value as core components of funding and contract/tender criteria.
- Treat community engagement and social value as essential for project approval and delivery.

Operational delivery:

Proactive community engagement

- Shift from reactive to proactive approaches (e.g. identifying unused land and engaging communities early).
- Use mapping tools to locate opportunities for community development.

Utilise existing teams and resources

- Empower property teams, e.g. in Network Rail, and other internal groups to incorporate community engagement and social value into their workplans.
- Encourage cross-functional collaboration (e.g. with community rail partnerships).



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Tendering and procurement:

Include community engagement and social value in tender evaluation criteria

- Ensure community engagement/social value accounts for at least 10–20% of tender scoring, as per the Procurement Act 2023.
- Highlight measurable commitments, delivery plans, and effective reporting methods.

Use tools for measurement and accountability

- Apply tools like the Rail Social Value Tool (RSVT) to forecast and track social value metrics and KPIs.

Incorporate penalties and incentives

- Include contractual obligations for social value delivery, with penalties for non-compliance and rewards for exceeding targets.

Cultural and organisational change:

Build collective understanding and will

- Promote a shared commitment across teams to deliver for communities.
- Encourage leadership buy-in by presenting social value as a solution to industry challenges (e.g. changing the comms narrative).
- Raise awareness by ensuring directors and senior leaders understand social value's strategic importance beyond promotional value.
- Promote passion over tick-box compliance by fostering genuine engagement and impact, not just compliance with regulations.

Business and social benefits

- Enhance reputation and trust – demonstrate authentic community commitment to build public and stakeholder trust.
- Support local economies and inclusion – develop initiatives that promote accessibility, social mobility, and local economic growth.
- Attract and retain talent – use social value programmes to appeal to value-driven employees and improve workplace engagement.
- Improve risk management and resilience – use community engagement to identify and mitigate risks early, improving project outcomes and sustainability.



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“At the moment, social value and community engagement relies on the passion of individuals, it’s not a mandatory part of the business model.”

“We need to build social value and community considerations into the business case. From there, it would flow through all stages of projects.”

“We are not currently linking up social value and community engagement to business objectives; there is a disconnect.”

“We are now being held to account on social value as never before. It can severely affect reputation of the business.”

“Social value is not only the ‘right thing to do,’ it helps to win work, and promises to clients that you’ll have the impact you say you’ll have.”

Why is building community engagement and social value into business cases/tenders important to the rail industry?

Building community engagement and social value into business cases and tenders is becoming increasingly important in rail, strengthening both project delivery and long term industry sustainability. When these principles are embedded from the outset rather than treated as an add-on, projects align more closely with community needs, building trust and improving public perception. Early engagement also helps identify risks sooner, resolve issues collaboratively, and uncover opportunities such as using underutilised land or supporting local development, ultimately improving outcomes.

Integrating social value into tendering ensures suppliers commit to measurable, meaningful contributions. Tools like the Rail Social Value Tool support consistent evaluation, while weighting social value more heavily in procurement drives accountability and encourages innovation. Partnerships with movements such as community rail provide practical frameworks for delivering community impact throughout planning and delivery.

Culturally, prioritising social value encourages shared purpose across organisations. With strong leadership and cross functional collaboration, it becomes a driver of strategic improvement rather than a compliance task. The business benefits are clear: stronger reputation, greater stakeholder trust, improved talent attraction, and support for local economic growth. Ultimately, embedding engagement and social value positions the rail industry as a responsible, people focused sector delivering wider societal benefit alongside transport improvements.



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Case Study:

Rail industry policy recognising social value and community engagement

In 2025, the UK's Railways Bill introduced statutory duties for GBR, mandating local business units and devolved collaboration to prioritise regional and community needs. Provisions require GBR to 'genuinely add value that benefits the public,' ensuring planning aligns with local priorities, passenger advocacy, freight growth, accessibility, and social inclusion.

Concurrently, the 2025 HM Treasury Green Book Review moved towards 'place-based business cases.' This urges broader appraisals spanning transport, housing, skills, and regeneration objectives, moving beyond conventional benefit-cost ratio metrics to capture social and economic factors and dependencies within communities.

The Cabinet Office's Procurement Policy Note 002 (PPN 002) formalised social value in public contracting. Mandatory from October 2025 for central government, it requires inclusion of social value criteria – weighted at a minimum of 10% – and enforcement through contract stages, aligned with the Labour Government's national missions.

Network Rail's Greener Railway Strategy (2025 2050) embeds social value in procurement and operations. It mandates community benefits, supports inclusive local economies, and integrates social criteria into supplier selection. Network Rail's Social Value Framework drives engagement, local employment, accessibility, and wellbeing through its supply chain and procurement processes.

Together, these policies form a cohesive framework that is working towards embedding social value and local engagement into rail planning, funding, and procurement, promoting sustainable, community-centred outcomes.

