

# Why develop community engagement with rail?

As the rail industry undergoes reform to deliver a modern, sustainable, and inclusive network, community engagement and social value must become central to planning and delivery. Historically, these elements were often secondary to technical priorities, but sector-wide evidence shows that meaningful collaboration with communities is essential for successful outcomes.

Community engagement is more than consultation; it is a proactive, structured process that builds trust, enables inclusion, and ensures that rail developments reflect the aspirations and needs of the people they serve. When communities are involved early and consistently, rail projects, developments and delivery benefit from local insight that can identify risks, unlock opportunities, and enhance resilience. This approach reduces opposition, secures buy-in, and creates a sense of ownership, all critical factors for the long-term success and sustainability of rail investments.

Equally important is the concept of social value: the wider social, economic and environmental benefits that projects generate beyond their immediate operational objectives. Social value encompasses improved accessibility, job creation, skills development, environmental stewardship, and strengthened community cohesion. By embedding social value into business cases and procurement processes, the rail industry can demonstrate its role as a catalyst for positive change, supporting government priorities around greater access to opportunity, decarbonisation and inclusive growth.

The benefits of greater recognition of these principles are clear. Projects that integrate community engagement and social value deliver tangible returns: enhanced reputation, stronger stakeholder relationships, and improved project outcomes. They also help position rail as a trusted partner in local regeneration, aligning infrastructure investment with broader societal goals. For example, initiatives that involve local schools in STEM outreach not only address the industry's skills gap but also inspire future generations, while volunteering programmes and placemaking projects strengthen ties between stations and their communities, transforming them into vibrant hubs of social activity.

Policy developments such as the **Sustainable Rail Blueprint**, the **Railways Bill**, and the establishment of Great British Railways (GBR) signal a growing expectation that rail will embrace these principles. However, cultural and structural change is needed to make this a reality. Community engagement and social value must be embedded from the outset – within business cases, tenders, and delivery frameworks – supported by clear leadership, accountability, and collaboration across the industry.

This resource sets out why and how the rail sector should adopt a more community-centric approach, drawing on research, best practice, and case studies from across the network. By recognising the strategic importance of community engagement and social value, and working with partners including community rail, the industry can move beyond compliance and aspiration to demonstrable action.

