



Social media: Guidance for community rail partnerships and station groups

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Introduction

This guidance offers practical advice, ideas and inspiration for community rail partnerships (CRPs) and station groups looking to harness social media to effectively promote their work, impact and opportunities.

Whether you're just starting out, already active but seeking extra support, or consider yourself a pro, this guide aims to help you feel inspired and equipped with the tools to navigate social media with confidence.

Further advice tailored to your needs is available to Community Rail Network members by contacting the policy & communications team via news@communityrail.org.uk.



Abbey Line CRP

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What is social media and why is it important?

Social media is a great way for people to communicate and interact online. It is all about sharing information and making connections.

There are many benefits of having a social media presence. It allows you to:

- Reach out to and connect with new audiences
- Share the work, projects, events, news, etc that your group is involved with
- Raise your profile and awareness of community rail more generally
- Build relationships and collaborate with partners
- Engage with your community, so you understand what they need and how they can benefit most from their railway and stations

In contrast to the printing and broadcast schedules of more traditional media, social media is there 24 hours a day for you to tell your story. It is estimated that over five billion people around the world now use social media; it's where 51% of UK adults get their news,¹ and the average person spends roughly two hours and twenty minutes per day on social media.²

So, whether you're posting a request for volunteers, promoting an event or attraction on your line or displaying images of activities you've been delivering, you're getting in front of people and organisations who have an interest in your work. If your followers find it share-worthy and post it to their profiles, their friends and followers will see it as well. In this way, through sharing, you can achieve a snowball effect, reaching out to more people and partners than those who already know about you.



Sevenside CRP

Social media is now an essential mechanism within an organisation's wider communications and marketing plans. With this in mind, the opportunities for CRPs and station groups to use social media as a marketing and communication tool are endless.

Start with the right mindset

Social media is very much a journey and a learning curve. Everyone uses it differently and for different reasons – what is important is that you do what works best for your CRP or station group. People and organisations that have used social media for years still try out new things and discover over time what works for them.

Don't be scared of starting or put it off because you feel like you can't go 'all in'. Social media is a slow process – it takes time to build up content and engagement and get to the place you want to be. Doing everything all at once isn't realistic. What is important is that you are willing to learn and explore new ideas.

In this way, social media should incorporate an element of fun and be an interesting and engaging addition to the work you're doing. If it's stressful or subtracting from your other important tasks, it's time to step back, refocus and approach it from a different angle.

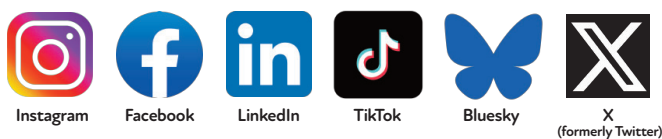
¹ Ofcom. (2025). News consumption in the UK: 2025 Research Findings.

² DataReportal. (2024). Digital 2024 Global Overview Report.

Which platforms are commonly used across community rail?

In a busy digital world, choosing the right social media platforms can affect the visibility, engagement and impact of your CRP or station group.

Some platforms may fit your group better than others. Pick the platform(s) that you think will be most useful to your group and learn how to use them effectively.



All these sites are popular and free to use, and allow users to upload photos and videos, send messages and build up a network of followers and friends.

You might already have an idea of which platform(s) you want to use for your CRP or station group. If you're still unsure, it might help to think about what types of audiences you are trying to reach.



Gloucestershire CRP

Who are your audiences?

It is important to think about who it is you want to engage with online. This will help determine not only your messaging and content, but also which platforms you use.



If you're aiming to engage people in your local community or recruit new volunteers, Facebook might be a good place to start.

If you'd like to create more targeted content for young people, or just to get creative with the way you spread your messages, maybe Instagram and TikTok are good platforms to use.

If you're hoping to raise awareness of your work more widely, perhaps among transport industry professionals, other community organisations or even just members of the public, LinkedIn, Bluesky or X might be useful platforms for you.

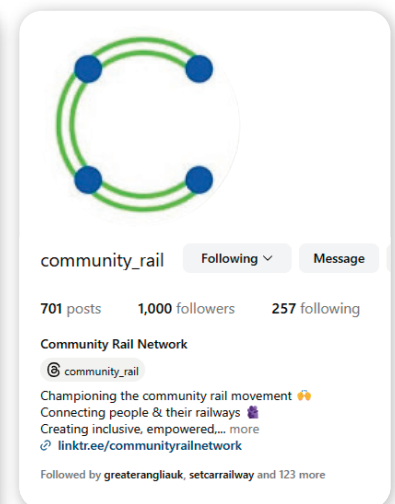
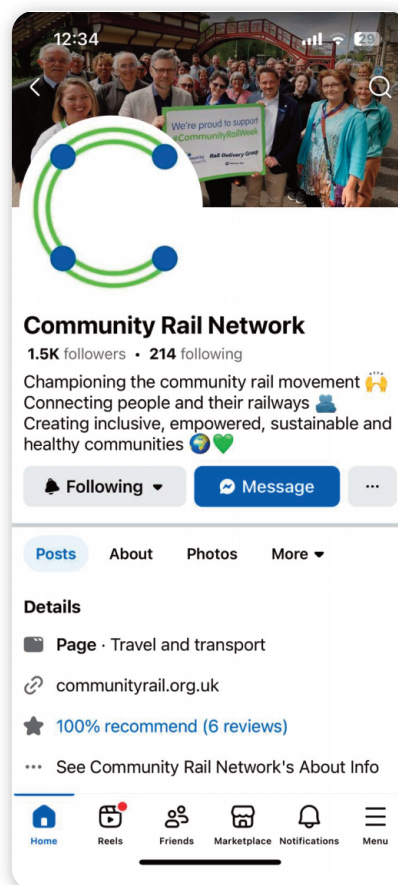
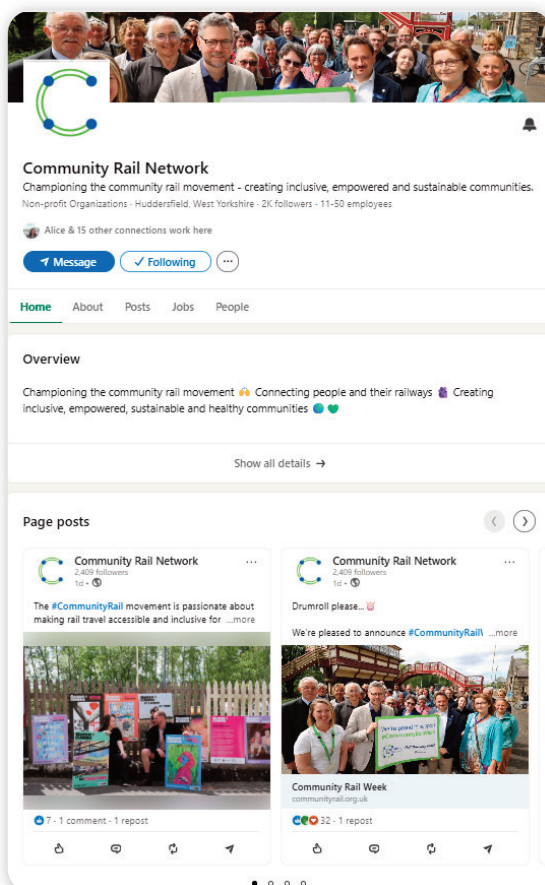
Setting up your accounts

Once you've picked your chosen platform(s), it's time to set up your account.

You'll need a clear, vibrant profile and cover photo, a snappy bio and a link to your website.

Try to create consistent 'handles' across platforms so that users can search for your channel easily. For example, on X we are @CommunityRail and on Instagram we are @community_rail.

Make sure you set up a business account or page rather than a personal profile. This will ensure you have access to the professional tools behind the scenes for managing content, promoting your channel and tracking insights.



For in-depth support on setting up a new account on social media, please get in touch with our policy & communications team via news@communityrail.org.uk.

Creating content

The content you create and post can vary and be in whatever form you want – the choice is yours and there is plenty at your disposal.

There is no one right answer as to what kind of content is likely to get more traction on social media. What is important is that you create visually and contextually interesting posts and are open to trying out different things. If your ten-second videos or longer blog posts aren't attracting as much engagement as you'd like, try creating an infographic instead, or opting for a shorter, 200-word piece.

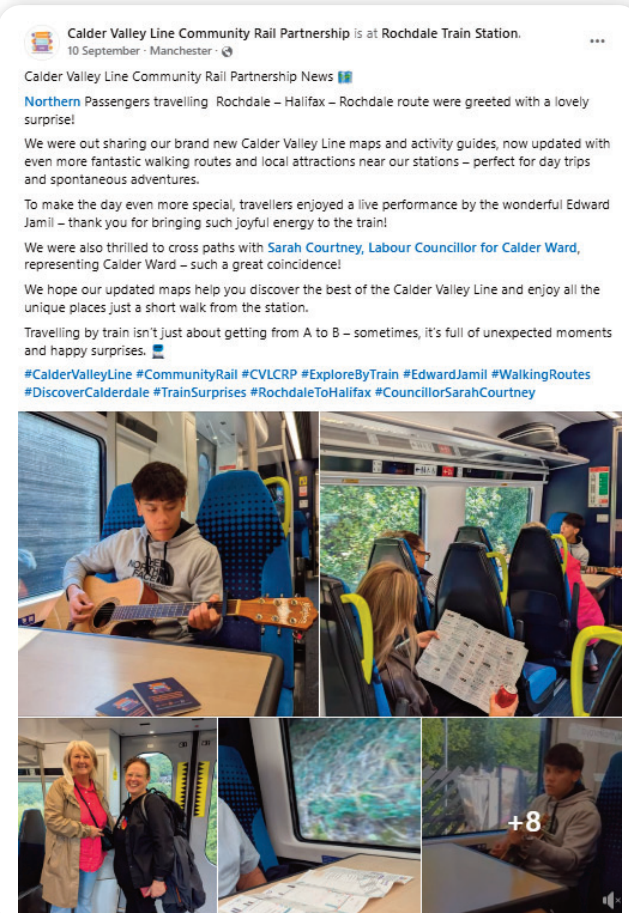
Written content

Set the scene and tell your story

Text can be in short or long form. Bluesky and X have a limit of 280-300 characters, whereas on Facebook, LinkedIn and Instagram you have the freedom to write longer posts.

Anything you post online should reflect inclusive and positive values, such as those in Community Rail Network's Code of Conduct.

Remember
Although most platforms do offer the option to edit posts, it's good practice to remember that once a post is out there, there's no taking it back. Double check your content before you hit post!



Try to get all the most important pieces of information into the post by thinking of the six W's – who, what, when, where, why, and how.

Keep the tone light, engaging and professional – you are representing your whole organisation when you are using social media, so you must be mindful of your voice and your messaging.

Visual content

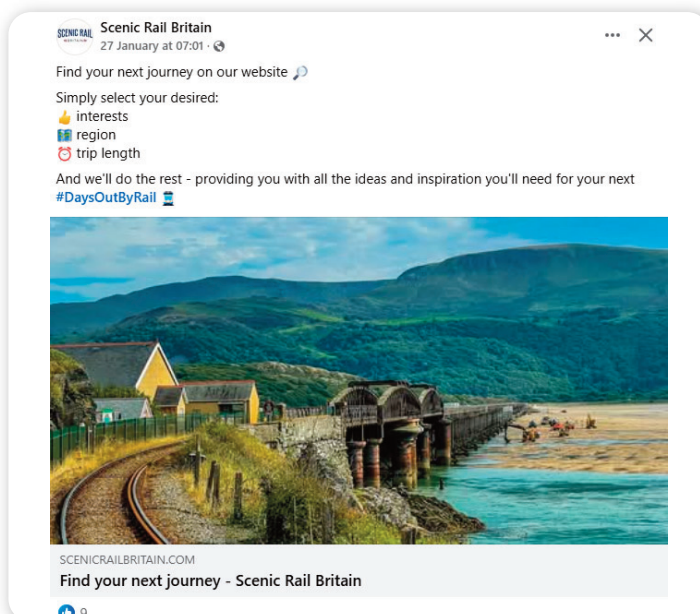
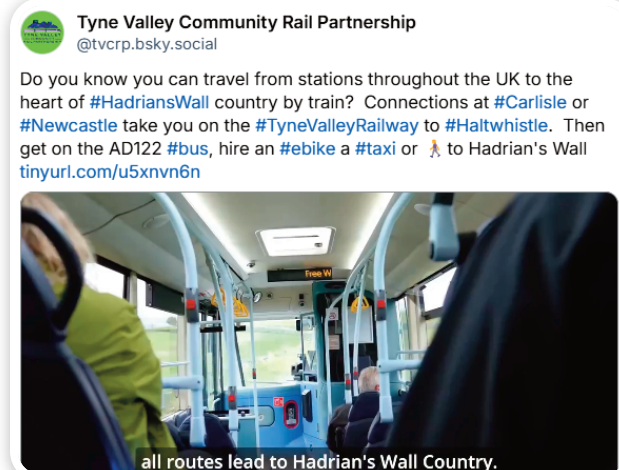
Grab people's attention



Accompany your post with vibrant and dynamic visuals to draw people in quickly.

Ensure you have the relevant permission of those featured in the visual and provide a photo or video credit where needed.

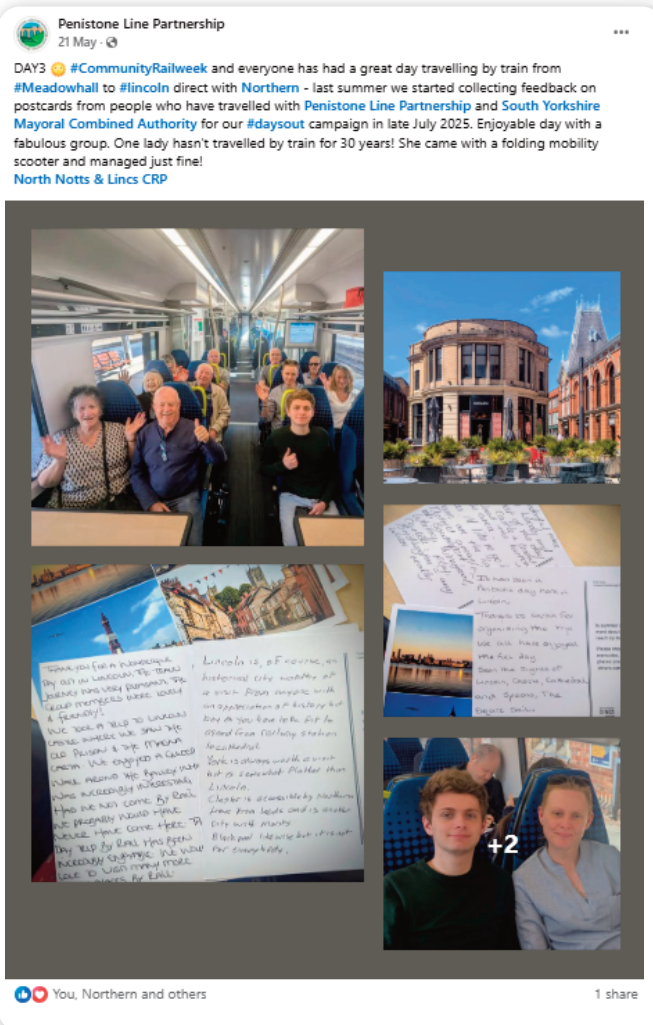
Videos can be of varying length (e.g. a 20-second TikTok or Instagram reel, or maybe a five-minute YouTube video). You can also make use of the 'stories' function on many platforms to create quick-fire, more casual videos or posts. Always add subtitles to your videos so everyone can engage with your post.



Check out these examples of community rail videos from Tyne Valley CRP, Devon & Cornwall Rail Partnership, 3 Counties Connected CRP and Gloucestershire CRP.

Web links are also incredibly valuable. These have a visual element included and you can use social media to help drive more traffic to your website.

What else should you include in a post?



Tagging is essential to loop in other users and broaden the reach of your post. To tag another account, simply type the '@' symbol, followed by their username (e.g. @CommunityRailNetwork). This notifies the tagged channel and creates a clickable link to their profile from your post.

CRPs and station groups are encouraged to tag Community Rail Network, your train operator, other community groups you've worked with and also media outlets. This will increase the chances of your partners seeing your post, and then liking, commenting and sharing.

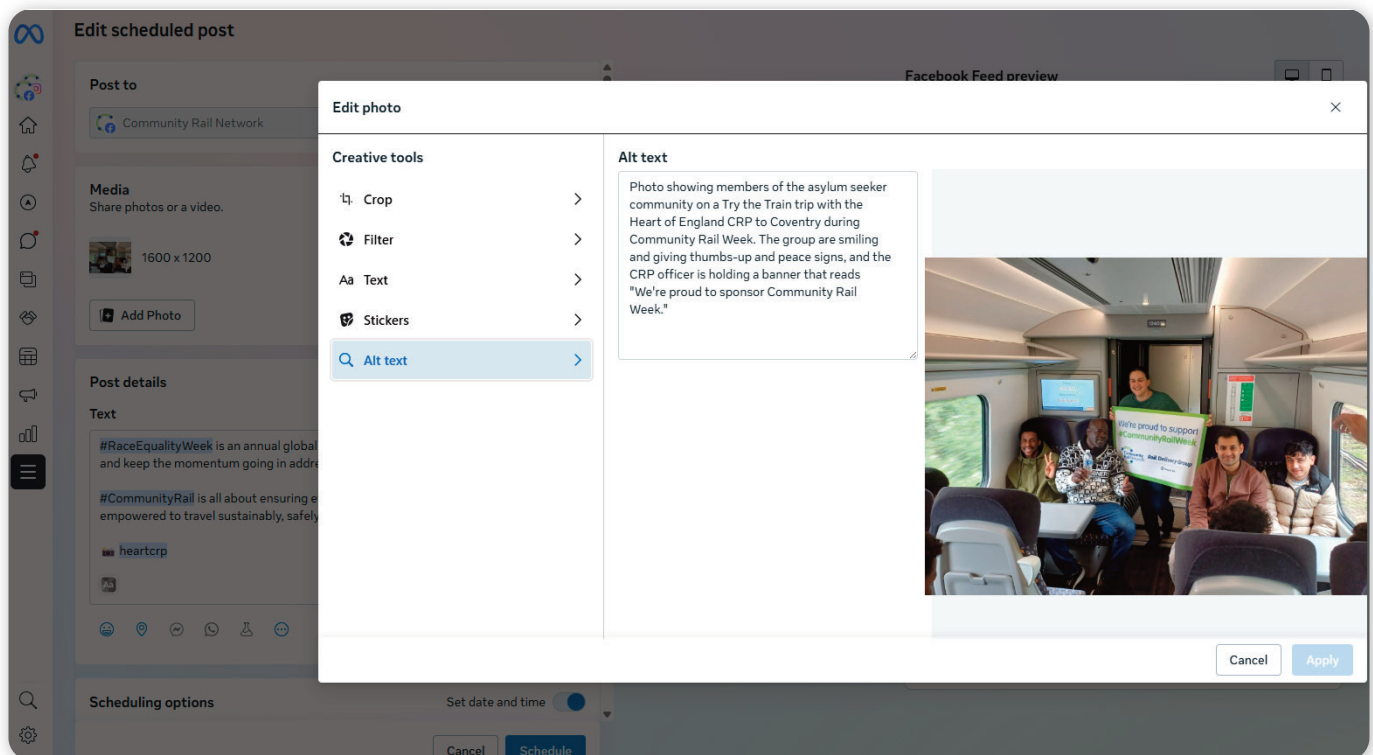
Hashtags increase the visibility of your post by turning words or phrases into clickable links, making posts discoverable to a wider audience who are searching for or following that topic.

Always use #CommunityRail and, if space allows, other key phrases such as #CommunityRailWeek, #Sustainability, #Railways, #TryTheTrain, etc. You may also want to hashtag place names or other important words relevant to your post.

If your hashtags have multiple words in them, you should use camel case to ensure the text is accessible to those who use reading supports – e.g. #CommunityRail, not #communityrail.



When attaching photos or infographics, include a short description for each piece of visual imagery. This is known as 'alt text' and is essential for your content to be as accessible as possible to more people, including those using screen readers.



Top tip



Why not have some fun with regular segments on your channel?

You could run Photo of the Week or Trivia Tuesday on Instagram, or perhaps pick a different project each week to showcase as a **#FeatureFriday** on Facebook.

Open questions and polls are also a great way to draw people in and start conversations on a particular topic or area of work.

For in-depth support on creating different types of social media content, please get in touch with our communications & policy team via news@communityrail.org.uk.

Scheduling content

To build up a consistent online presence and maintain regular engagement with your followers, it is recommended that you post three to seven times per week. If you are just starting out on social media, you may only be able to post once a week, or on an ad-hoc, more casual basis. This is still worthwhile – it's better to post engaging and meaningful content once a week than it is to just 'fill gaps' with anything. The idea is to keep your channel updated as much as possible. This keeps your feed fresh and shows other users that you're active.

In terms of what time of day to post, have a play around and see what works for you. Community Rail Network usually posts between 7-8:30am, 12-1pm and 4-8pm. Platforms like Meta Business Suite for Facebook and Instagram even suggest posting times based on your previous content and follower activity.

You also don't have to be sat at your computer or phone when you want a post to go live. Many of the platforms have built-in scheduling tools, and there are other programmes available (such as Hootsuite, Buffer or Later), which enable you to decide when you would like your posts to reach your audience.

Top tip

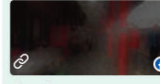
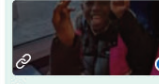
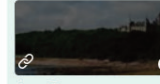
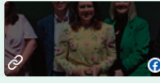


Look at Community Rail Network's **online calendar** to see what events, awareness days and national campaigns are coming up in the month ahead. Have a go at creating posts about your CRP or station group linked to specific days – e.g. World Sustainable Transport Day, Black History Month, International Women's Day.

Planner
Plan your marketing calendar by creating, scheduling and managing your content.

Week Month ☒ Today >

October 2025

Sun 19	Mon 20	Tue 21	Wed 22	Thu 23	Fri 24	Sat 25
12:45  11 1	08:28  7 1	16:47  5 1	07:23  12 1	17:38  4 2	07:43  4	08:08  4 1
19:00  13 1 1	11:52 Congratulations to Ashington, this year's #WorldCupOfStations Winner! 🏆 Ashington 14 2	18:01  2	19:44 LIVING STREETS 3	19:00  4 1	10:55 GOV.UK 4 3	12:29  8 1
19:00  12		19:01 FEEDBACK WANTED 7 2			12:23  8 3	18:02  4 1 1
					18:00  10 2 1	

For in-depth support on scheduling social media content, please get in touch with our policy & communications team via news@communityrail.org.uk.

CASE STUDY: High Peak & Hope Valley CRP

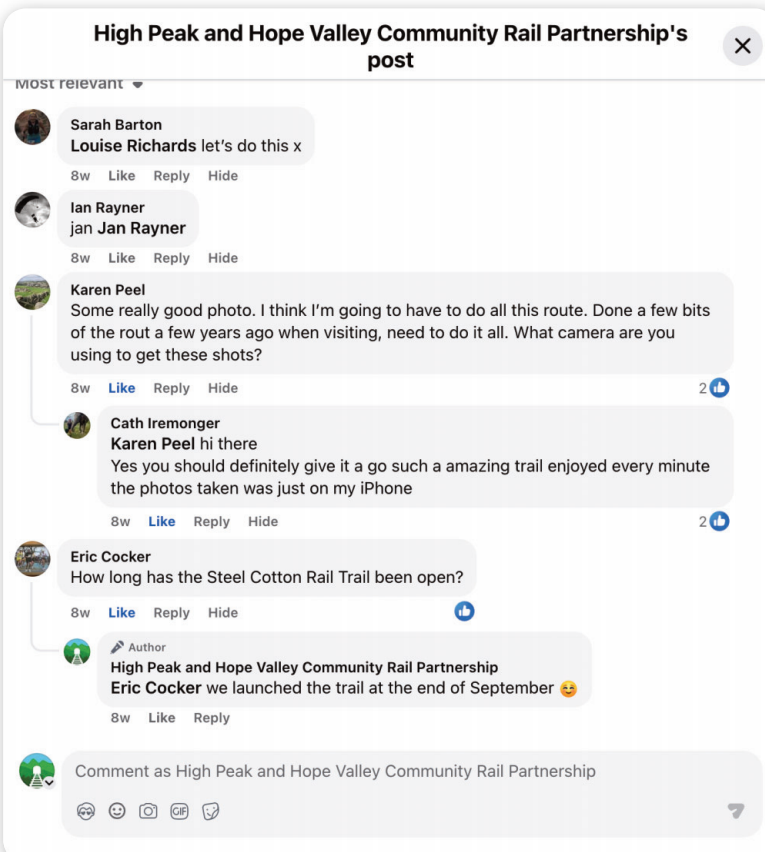
Establishing a strong social media presence has been integral to the work of the High Peak & Hope Valley CRP, enabling the partnership to promote their projects, collaborate with local businesses and creatives, and provide an easy way for people to get in contact.

During 2025, through consistently posting three or four times per week, the partnership's Facebook page saw a 51% increase in followers, as well as a 76% increase on Instagram, where their content averages 6.2k views per month.

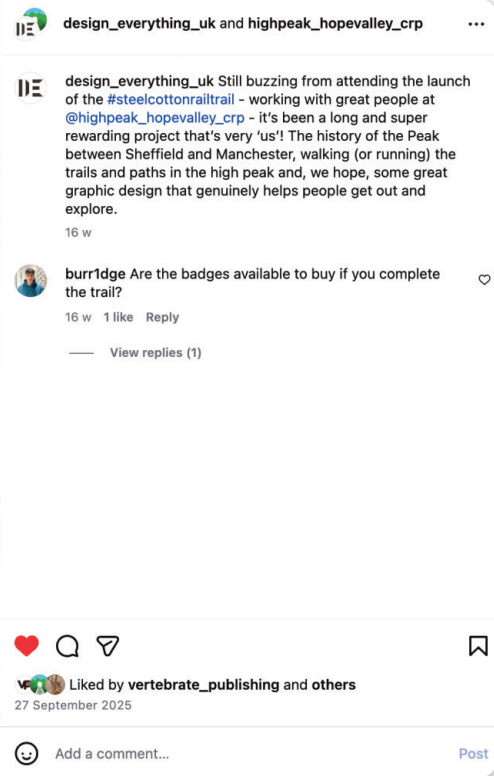
A highlight for the CRP was in October 2025, after the launch of the Steel Cotton Rail Trail project. The partnership created their own content, sharing short videos to Instagram and TikTok and photographs to Facebook. Alongside this content created 'in-house', the CRP also reached out to influencers, walking groups and photographers, inviting them to explore the new walking trail and share it with their communities on social media. These included Soft Girls Who Hike, Northern, National Trust and the Peak District National Park.



Continued>



CASE STUDY: High Peak & Hope Valley CRP (continued)



Members of the public also joined in the conversation, sharing their own photographs and feedback. Once consent was obtained, these images were then shared to the CRP's own social media platforms, including as part of 'collaborations', meaning the posts were seen by even more people, helping to spread the message even further.

The social media campaign surrounding the Steel Cotton Rail Trail led to a journalist walking one of the sections of the route and writing an article which featured in the Guardian. To date, the Steel Cotton Rail Trail page on the CRP's website has been viewed over 50,000 times, with social media playing a huge role in this impressive figure – showing just how effective social media is to a CRP or station group's wider communications and marketing plans.

Advice from Helen Wright, High Peak & Hope Valley CRP officer

“A really positive aspect for us has been working with a part-time, freelance marketing and communications coordinator. Having a specialist dedicated to this area of work has made a huge difference to our social media reach and impact, including in representing the look and feel of our CRP, reflecting who we are and the area we cover.

“Vicky Frost, who worked with us most recently, was keen to develop collaborations on social media. She sought out relevant groups and influencers and built up impactful stories and content through them, resulting in a much wider reach than would have been possible alone.”

Building your network

Establishing a strong social media presence isn't just about broadcasting information. Interacting with fellow users and content is equally as important as posting. Without engagement, social media becomes one way communication that fails to connect or grow.

As well as posting, be sure to scroll through your feed, where the 'algorithm' will suggest other posts and users that you might be interested in connecting with.

Follow other CRPs, station groups, train operators, media outlets, tourism organisations and community groups to build up your network and see similar inspiring content. Like, comment on and share this

content to show your support, further establish your own account and immerse yourself in the community rail social media movement.

Reposting is a common way to share something interesting from someone you follow to your own set of followers. Sharing content from partners is a great way of building relationships and further spreading your story. There are two ways to do this: a simple repost, which just reposts a user's content to your own followers, or a quote repost, where you are able to add your own content alongside a link to the original post.

Build trust and loyalty:

When you respond to comments or join discussions, people feel heard and valued. This strengthens brand perception and fosters long term loyalty.

Boost visibility and reach:

Algorithms reward interaction. Posts with higher engagement are more likely to be shown to wider audiences, amplifying your message.

Create community:

Engagement helps cultivate a sense of belonging. People don't just follow a page; they become part of a community where they can share ideas and experiences.

Top tip

Organisations that run campaigns often create toolkits of digital resources, much like Community Rail Network does for Community Rail Week and Days Out by Rail. These are designed to support more people to easily get involved, no matter your social media skills or digital literacy level, helping you to amplify your local messages and link them in with those of the national campaign.

Keep an eye out for other toolkits that include logos, graphics, example posts, press releases, guidance on engaging media, etc. These give you the option to tweak and tailor the templates to your own needs, or to simply 'lift and go' with the pre-made graphics and suggested text.



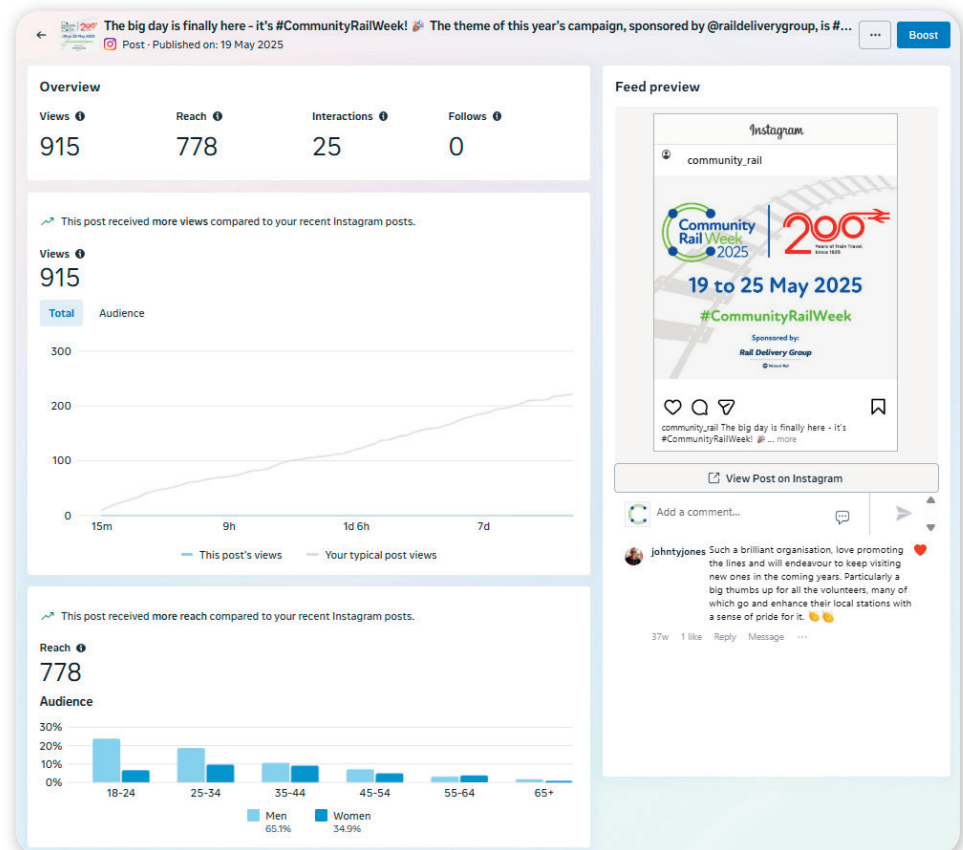
Worcestershire CRP

Evaluating your social media impact

Evaluating your social media is essential for keeping track of your progress, and planning what to improve or do differently going forward. Evaluation should be a key part of a CRP or station group's social media strategy – it is what makes the difference between just posting and communicating with intention.

Much like scheduling, social media platforms have built-in tools for you to explore your impact. This is why it's so important to set up a business account or page rather than a personal profile. You'll find these insights and analytics tools 'behind the scenes' of your main profile or page – they are visible only to you and are not accessible by the public. You can see how well your posts perform (how many views, impressions, likes and comments it received), the best times to post, and which types of content get the most engagement – including where in the world and from which demographics.

Making notes of some key insights each week, month or quarter will prove invaluable in building up a clear picture of your impact and achievements. You'll be able to set a benchmark for the future, especially during campaigns such as Community Rail Week.



'Success' on social media will look like different things to different partnerships and groups. Keep thinking back to what it is you want to achieve with your social media. Establish your own parameters and expectations for success – these should be achievable but with plenty of room to grow.

- ✓ A few likes from local people = success.
- ✓ One volunteer enquiry = success.
- ✓ Any number of newsletter sign-ups, website clicks, video views = success.
- ✓ One conversation started = success.

For in-depth support on exploring your social media insights and analytics, please get in touch with our policy & communications team via news@communityrail.org.uk.

CASE STUDY: Devon & Cornwall Rail Partnership

Devon & Cornwall Rail Partnership (DCRP) uses social media to promote rail travel, engage local communities and support businesses across the region. The partnership is most active on Instagram, Facebook and TikTok, where its @greatscenicrailways accounts have a combined following of almost 83,000.

While its Instagram and Facebook channels are long-established, the recruitment of a dedicated social media and content officer in 2021 enabled the partnership to expand into TikTok too, growing to over 36,000 followers and helping them to reach new and younger audiences.

The primary target audience for DCRP's social media channels is people living in Devon and Cornwall, alongside visitors from further afield

planning trips to the region. Content focuses on travel inspiration, highlighting scenic train journeys as a key part of the experience through a mix of videos, images, carousels and blog posts, with recurring themes such as *Days Out by Train*, *Walks from the Railway* and *Pic of the Week*.

DCRP also works closely with its rail operators, local Destination Management Organisations and other partners like South West Coast Path and The National Trust on Instagram 'collaboration posts', which go out to each partner's followers, helping to increase reach and expose DCRP to new audiences.

To assess the impact of its campaigns, DCRP uses engagement data, website traffic, feedback from local businesses and branch line journey figures.

Recent successes include:

- Promoting branch line travel
A summer-long promotion of the improved main line connections to visit Looe in South East Cornwall helped the branch line to achieve its busiest year to date. DCRP's videos, carousels and other posts received many comments tagging friends and expressing intent to visit, demonstrating social media's role in shaping real-world travel decisions.
- Engaging the community
A recent Facebook post showing progress in the construction of Okehampton Interchange Station, promoted with a £30 advertising budget to surrounding communities, generated over 1,700 clicks to the Dartmoor Line website (also run by DCRP) from local people excited to learn more about the station.



Continued >

CASE STUDY: Devon & Cornwall Rail Partnership (continued)

- Supporting local businesses

Videos to promote independent station cafés have proved popular and effective. The owners of cafés at Dawlish Warren, Axminster and Eggesford stations have all reported strong engagement and increased footfall following DCRP's social media support – requesting that DCRP visits again soon to make further videos.



Buddy's Cafe
Dawlish Warren



Tarka Line Bistro
Eggesford



Railway Kitchen
Axminster

Mitigating challenges

It is undeniable that social media has revolutionised the way we communicate and interact with each other. While there are many benefits and positive outcomes to having a social media presence, it does also present other challenges, including those in the realm of data sharing, cyber bullying and the spread of disinformation.

Again, what is important is that you continue to do what you feel is best for your CRP or station group. Monitor your content and the interaction you see on your feeds, and if a certain platform is no longer working for you, take a break, or try out a different one.

Negative comments

With any social media presence, there is always a chance you might receive negative comments. These might be frustrations with service levels or industrial relations, or perhaps even unprovoked, unpleasant responses – often referred to online as ‘trolling’.

It is up to you how you would prefer to handle these types of comments – however, we find the advice from the **Third Sector Network** to be a helpful guide.

Organic versus paid-for adverts

An 'organic' social media post refers to a piece of content you share on a platform without paying to 'boost' it. It reaches people naturally, or 'organically', through your followers, their engagement and the platform's algorithm.

To 'boost' a post means you pay a certain amount of money to the platform to show your content to a larger or more targeted audience than it would reach organically. It's a simple form of advertising where you choose a budget, select who you want to reach, and the platform pushes your post to those users to increase visibility and engagement.

Benefits of paid-for social media advertising include:

- Ability to target specific audiences by location, interests or demographics
- Instant visibility for campaigns, events or urgent announcements
- Cost effective – even a small budget of £100 would see results
- Opportunity to grow beyond your existing followers
- Measurable return on investment through analytics like impressions, clicks and conversions

There are many ways for CRPs and station groups to use paid-for social media posts:

Boost a post about an upcoming event to reach families within a specific catchment area, e.g. "Visit Buxton, it's only an hour away from Manchester by train!"

Run a campaign to raise awareness of your project, e.g. a tourism video for your line, to reach audiences beyond your current scope.

Boost a recruitment post for new volunteers or promote station adoption opportunities to specific age groups.

For in-depth support on setting up paid social media ads, please get in touch with our policy & communications team via news@communityrail.org.uk.

3 Counties Connected CRP



Social media dos and don'ts

Here are some handy tips to remember when embarking on your social media journey

Do:

- Be clear, concise and engaging in what you say
- Add visual imagery to draw people in
- Engage with your audience – like, comment, share and tag
- Use insights to guide future content
- Be authentic – create content that reflects your real values and voice
- Experiment! Have fun and try new things



Don't:

- Post text by itself – keep things interesting
- Get bogged down with 'trends' – do what works for you
- Post personal opinion, criticism, grievances, or anything negative towards others
- Use offensive or insensitive language
- Copy others – inspiration is great, but originality builds trust and credibility



Remember

If you would like in-depth support on any aspect of social media, please get in touch with our policy & communications team via news@communityrail.org.uk.

As well as providing 1-2-1 support online or in person, we can also facilitate group training and skill-share sessions on specific topics.



South West Wales Connected



Quick guide to social media for community rail

Start with the right mindset

- Keep it simple
- Do what works best for your partnership or group

Pick your platform(s)

- If you're unsure, start with Facebook
- Instagram is great for photos and short videos; LinkedIn for demonstrating your impact
- Other platforms are optional

Set up your account

- Include a short and snappy bio with clear, vibrant images

Create a strong post

- A short caption written in a positive tone – state what's happening, where and by whom, and why it matters
- Clear and engaging images or short videos showing people, events, activities, stations, trains or rail journeys
- Tag in your partners

Posting frequency

- Once a week is great, once a fortnight is still good
- Quality and consistency matter more than frequency

Build your network

- Follow other accounts
- Like, comment and share other content
- Tag other accounts into your content

What does success look like?

- A like, a comment, a share, a volunteer getting in touch, or someone learning something new
- Big numbers are not required

Final reminder

- Your social media output doesn't need to be perfect
- Always be authentic
- Get inspired and try new things
- If it ever starts to get stressful, stop





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