IMPACT REPORT 2025-26

Community Rail Network



Connecting communities with their railways and stations

CONTENTS

1 Community Rail Network in brief

2 A message from our chair

3 How do we support and empower our members?

6 Case study: Providing a voice for communities

7 How do we ensure community rail insights inform policy and decision-making?

9 Railway 200

11 Case study: Bringing communities together and supporting diversity and inclusion

12 How do we put community rail at the forefront of a shift to sustainable, inclusive, active travel?

14 Case study: Promoting sustainable, healthy and accessible travel

15 How are we developing broader support for community rail and a strong network of reciprocity?

18 Case study: Supporting social and economic development

19 How are we developing as an expert, well-connected, high-performing and dynamic organisation?

21 A message from our chief executive



Friends of New Milton Station



East Midlands Railway

Community Rail Network in brief

IMPACT REPORT 2025-26

Community Rail Network

For every £1 spent, community rail creates a social return of £17.89

What we do

We empower, support and champion the community rail movement.

What we stand for

A flourishing community rail movement connecting people and their railways, contributing to inclusive, empowered, sustainable and healthy communities.

Why we do it

Community rail brings profound benefits to our communities and people's lives. For every £1 spent, community rail creates a social return of £17.89 – helping to promote community cohesion, improve access to opportunity and shape a greener, more equitable transport future.

Where we work

We work to champion the community rail movement across Britain. The 78 community rail partnerships and nearly 1,300 station groups we represent now cover more than a third of Britain's rail network and half of its stations.

Who we are

As the national membership body for the community rail movement, we advocate for community rail, share its insights, and support our members through membership services and events.



Wherry Lines CRP

A note from our chair, Jeremy Whitaker



Jeremy Whitaker

I commend this report to you as a record of another highly successful year for Community Rail Network.

We continue to operate in a changing and uncertain environment but our outstanding social return on what we do demonstrates the tremendous value that we deliver to the railway and the communities we serve.

We continue to engage with policy makers at all levels across the nations of Britain to ensure our voice is heard and our contribution is recognised. This is underpinned by the activities that we provide in support of our members; the Community Rail Conference held jointly with the Department for Transport, our outstandingly successful and growing Community Rail Awards, and the range of support and resources we provide.

Identifying, developing and delivering new partnership opportunities is important for the growth of Community Rail Network. We have enjoyed success in delivering new projects and attracting the support of new sponsors.

Our Board recognises that to maintain our success it is vital that Community Rail Network evolves and does so in a timely fashion. Our new strategy was the first example of that. Work is well advanced, working jointly with the senior leadership team, to improve and update our governance structure and improve our membership offer and these changes will become evident over the next twelve months.

The dedication, hard work and innovation of our members continues to define who we are and to drive our success and I would like to thank them, our funders, sponsors and partners for their continued support.

I would like to also thank the Community Rail Network team and my fellow Board members for their dedication to the organisation and the championing of community rail more generally. In particular, finally, I would like to extend a very warm welcome to Bill Freeman as our new chief executive who has joined us permanently after a period as our interim.



Highland Main Line CRP



Darent Valley CRP

How do we support and empower our members?

We empower our members – community rail partnerships (CRPs), station friends/adoption groups, community-led station initiatives, and other community organisations engaging with rail – to develop their local and regional impact, whilst also championing community rail on a national scale.

Strategic advice and project support

- We provided more than 975 instances of tailored guidance on planning and projects, to maximise the value our members and the community rail movement delivers.

Demonstrating impact

- We help members monitor and evaluate their activities, enabling better understanding of the social value generated through community rail.

Profile-raising

- We advocate for and raise the profile of community rail, supporting our members to do the same.

Accreditation (in England and Wales)

- We run and guide CRPs through the process of the Department for Transport and Welsh Government's accreditation scheme, which recognises excellence in governance, financial propriety, planning and community engagement.

  This year we began work on a pilot project to establish a more flexible approach to the frequency of accreditation reviews. We hope this will provide a more proportionate approach while maintaining the strong standards that underpin accreditation.

Events, webinars and training

- Our programme of events and learning opportunities brings key topics to life, fostering collaboration, knowledge exchange and networking amongst members and partners.

Practical resources

- We produce guidance, toolkits and in-depth reports designed to help those working and volunteering in community rail expand their expertise and confidence.

Funding and grants

- We administer grant schemes, as well as signposting and advising on wider funding opportunities, to ensure community rail receives the vital support it needs.

Evolving membership support

- We continually enhance our membership offer to ensure it remains relevant, responsive and aligned with members' priorities, while aiding the ongoing growth and development of the movement.

> **We've been particularly pleased with the prompt and direct responses and advice we've received, particularly in relation to management responsibilities, appraisal and benchmarking. Much food for thought for the coming year, but the direct contact has been greatly reassuring.**
> *- What our members say*



Penistone Line Partnership

How do we support and empower our members?
Continued

Key achievements

Community Rail Conference

Held in Nottingham in October 2025, the Community Rail Conference for CRPs – delivered in partnership with the Department for Transport – marked a return to our dynamic 'open platform' format.

More than 140 participants took the lead in shaping the agenda, proposing and facilitating 18 in-depth sessions.

By putting members in the driving seat, the Conference created space for them to share practical solutions, build new connections and explore the issues they see as most important to the future of community rail.





Training, networking and webinars

7 webinars

7 training sessions

10 bespoke training sessions

28 networking sessions

We delivered a varied programme of training and events, providing valuable opportunities for our members to share insights and deepen their understanding across a broad spectrum of topics, including:

- **Sustainable gardening and biodiversity at stations**
- **Project planning and management**
- **Tackling anti-social behaviour**
- **Principles of co-production**
- **Cycle-rail integration**
- **Promoting greener leisure travel**
- **Using social media effectively**
- **Introduction to filming and editing**
- **Devolution and opportunities for community rail**
- **Gender-based barriers to travel**
- **Education and youth engagement**
- **Demand-responsive transport**

This programme of training and development helps to ensure skills, confidence and expertise travel across community rail, and that members are equipped with practical knowledge they can apply within their own communities.

How do we support and empower our members?
Continued

Key achievements

Community Rail Awards

Our annual Awards have become a flagship event in the community rail calendar, celebrating not only individual achievements, but the collective strength and diversity of the movement.

A record-breaking 600 guests joined our 21st Community Rail Awards in Derby in March 2026, supported by headline partners East Midlands Railway.



From a remarkable pool of more than 300 entries, 43 exceptional winners were honoured for their inspiring contributions.

Communications around this year's Awards reached a potential 3.9 million users on social media, secured 61 pieces of media coverage, and generated over 12,000 views of our Awards webpages, including the 'Hall of Fame', where we showcase our winners.

The impact of our Awards goes far beyond the event itself. They provide national recognition for the dedication, creativity and achievements of our members; the growing media and digital reach helps build understanding of community rail's value to wider audiences; and they provide a powerful national showcase for the importance of community-led action.





Case study:
Providing a voice for communities

St Edmund's Line CRP became a Community Rail Network member in January 2026, following work by our team, Greater Anglia and local partners to embed the CRP firmly within the communities it serves along the Ipswich to Cambridge/Soham Line.



We provided comprehensive guidance throughout the early stages of the CRP's creation, to ensure a strong foundation and long-term sustainability for the partnership. This included feasibility reporting, stakeholder engagement, activity planning, leveraging funding opportunities and recruiting the chair and officer.

> **As a brand-new community rail partnership, the support we've received from Community Rail Network has been amazing. The training for new recruits to the movement was a particular highlight for me, as it provided a great introduction to community rail and was an excellent way to meet other officers from around the country. Our board also received a bespoke training session, which was so useful for a new partnership.**
>
> **The regular network meetings relating to tourism, education and sustainable transport have been really inspirational and my local contact has been a constant source of support and advice as our CRP develops. I couldn't speak more highly, and that's without mentioning the support I know my chair also receives from Community Rail Network!**
>
> *- Lesley Rayner, St Edmund's Line CRP officer*



How do we ensure community rail insights inform policy and decision-making?

As the umbrella body for the community rail movement, we work tirelessly to elevate its profile, demonstrating how grassroots experiences can shape and inform transport policy and wider decision-making.

We actively engage with policy and decision-makers in Westminster, the devolved nations and regions, sharing community rail's deep insights to enrich strategy development. Through this advocacy, we aim to ensure rail plays a central and proactive role in enabling inclusive, sustainable and thriving communities.



Key achievements

Parliamentary Reception

Our first ever Westminster parliamentary reception in July 2025 brought together more than 150 community rail members and partners to connect with 30 MPs from across Britain.

Hosted by Helena Dollimore MP and attended by Lord Peter Hendy, Minister for Rail, the event at the Palace of Westminster brought local experience and community voices into Parliament, and demonstrated to decision-makers the strong role community rail can play in shaping sustainable, inclusive transport policy.

The reception marked an important step in broadening the coalition of support for community rail, strengthening connections between our grassroots network and national decision-makers and creating new opportunities for local voices, experience and expertise to inform wider thinking about the future of rail.



Rail reform and Great British Railways

This year proved to be a crucial time for ensuring the voice of community rail is heard as rail reform and the establishment of Great British Railways (GBR) progresses.

We monitored progress on the Railways Bill throughout the year, engaging DFT, Network Rail and DFTO colleagues in discussions on how community rail's role can be strengthened, aligning with the objectives of the Long-Term Rail Strategy, focusing on accessibility and devolution, and highlighting community rail's role in widening access to rail, and its importance to local engagement and decision-making.

We produced three policy papers on key issues where community rail can offer insights on GBR design and the Long-Term Rail Strategy: accessibility and inclusion, sustainable and integrated travel, and stations.

This work and these core recommendations are essential for securing a strong and meaningful role for community rail within the new structures, ensuring grassroots expertise and local priorities influence the future development of our railways.

Key achievements

Engagement with leaders and policy makers

We nurtured a relationship with Network Rail's GBR Mayoral Partnerships lead to explore how community rail can engage with and input to the GBR Mayoral Partnerships as these are established.

Following engagement with Elsie Blundell MP (at the time a member of the Transport Select Committee), and Baroness Pidgeon, Liberal Democrat spokesperson for Transport in the House of Lords, both submitted several parliamentary questions regarding the role of community rail in the context of rail reform. The responses to these questions include positive ministerial statements that are now on record.

We leant our expertise to supporting the Better Transport Week launch event between Leeds and Huddersfield stations alongside Campaign for Better Transport and Penistone Line Partnership. We also collaborated with SLC's strategy director to lead an interactive session during the campaign's conference on the role of the rail network in placemaking.

These relationships strengthened community rail's influence and visibility, creating new opportunities for its expertise and grassroots perspectives to inform policy and decision-making.

> **Keep up your good work in liaising with government at all levels; in supporting CRPs during this transitional phase and, most important of all, keeping CRPs informed about what is taking place.**
> *- What our members say*



Policy, consultations and research

We published our Rail Delivery Group-sponsored report, 'Community rail: placemaking and local identity', which highlights how community rail's local knowledge and relationships with other community groups and partners is crucial in enabling rail to enrich lives and strengthen communities through thoughtful, collaborative placemaking.

We provided evidence to two Transport Select Committee inquiries: 'buses connecting communities' and 'joined-up journeys', recommending that in order to improve transport decision-making, communities must be included as a meaningful partner in creating positive and inclusive change.

We submitted evidence to the Government's consultation on the National Planning Policy Framework, showing how community rail and community engagement supports a vision-led approach to transport.

We published our RSSB-funded research into community engagement best practice within the rail industry. The final report offers insights into how rail organisations can work more closely with communities and support the delivery of greater social value in line with the Sustainable Rail Blueprint.

200™ Years of Train Travel Since 1825

2025 was a landmark year as Britain came together to celebrate Railway 200 – commemorating 200 years since the world's first passenger train set off along the Stockton & Darlington Railway, a moment that transformed how we travel, connect and experience the world.

Launched on 1 January and running throughout 2025, community rail ensured the celebrations were truly grassroots, with over 50,000 people engaged and inspired through a programme of more than 300 community-led events and activities, honouring rail's remarkable past, its role today, and its importance for a sustainable future.

From 'try the train' trips, stamp trails and record-breaking benches, to music events, poetry and craft beer, community rail partnerships and station volunteer groups brought communities together in creative and inclusive ways and made the Railway 200 celebrations truly unforgettable.

Key achievements

Community Rail Week

Our flagship campaign returned for its fifth year from 19-25 May 2025, celebrating all things Railway 200.

89 CRPs and station groups and 99 partners got involved, delivering 140 community-led events and activities linking in with the key themes of skills and education; heritage, culture and tourism; innovation, technology and environment; and celebrating railway people.

Each year this key campaign provides a national platform for showcasing grassroots activity, and the Railway 200 year proved to be a particularly unique opportunity to demonstrate how community rail initiatives enrich lives and strengthen community cohesion across the rail network.

89 stations and **99** partners got involved

140 events and activities





RAILWAY 200
Continued

Tyne Valley CRP connected primary school pupils with talented singer songwriters, helping them to learn about Brampton Station's remarkable history by writing original lyrics and taking part in sound engineering workshops.



3 Counties Connected CRP developed 'Tours by Rail', celebrating the stories, people and places that connect communities along the rail network between Chester and Wrexham.



Glenfinnan Station Museum turned waiting-for-train downtime into meaningful engagement by creating the Solar Snowplough, a striking, open-all-hours climate-themed exhibition housed inside a restored 1936 railway snowplough.

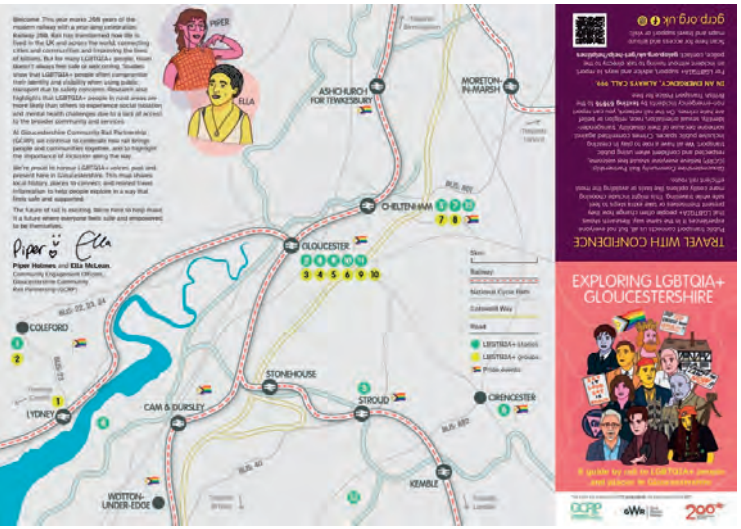


Severnside CRP hosted an activity train adventure for families to Bristol in connection with the 'Gromit Unleashed 3 trail', where the passengers had the chance to take part in a hands-on plasticine model-making workshop.



Case study:
Bringing communities together and supporting diversity and inclusion

The 'Exploring LGBTQIA+ Gloucestershire' project set out to empower Gloucestershire's LGBTQIA+ community by amplifying diverse voices, addressing barriers to public transport, and documenting and celebrating local queer history.



Members of local LGBTQIA+ groups led, informed and shaped every stage of the process. Alongside Great Western Railway and Pride in Gloucestershire, Gloucestershire CRP collaborated with Gloucestershire Archives to uncover LGBTQIA+ histories, from 18th-century court records to contemporary Pride events.

Through a community-led approach that involved interactive mapping, travel surveys and one-to-one conversations, the partnership collected over 67 significant personal stories and travel insights. These insights were compiled into the Gloucestershire Queer History Map and Travel Needs Report. These resources linked local queer history to rail travel and significant locations, highlighting both the vibrancy and the challenges of LGBTQIA+ life in the semi-rural county – from the joy of community connection to the realities of discrimination and isolation.

The culmination was a vibrant exhibition at Cheltenham Station to celebrate Pride Month, where the personal narratives were made visible in a prominent space. The resources have since been archived at Gloucestershire Heritage Hub.

By preserving the stories for future generations, and ensuring ongoing access for researchers and the community, it is hoped that LGBTQIA+ voices will inform future transport planning, in turn contributing to a more connected and inclusive future for rail travel in Gloucestershire.

> **Rail should do more than move people between places. It should connect people to communities, identity and opportunity.**
>
> **This project puts Gloucestershire's LGBTQIA+ stories firmly on the map, while recognising that safe and welcoming journeys cannot be taken for granted.**
>
> **Our ambition is clear: everyone should feel able to explore, connect, belong and thrive.**
>
> *– Hannah McDonnell, executive director of Gloucestershire & Oxfordshire Community Rail Partnership CIC*



How do we put community rail at the forefront of a shift to sustainable, inclusive, active travel?

We supported members and worked with partners to help achieve local and national progress on sustainable, inclusive and healthy travel.

Key achievements

Travelling with Confidence

Since the 'Travelling with Confidence' programme, funded by the Motability Foundation, launched in January 2025, the four core delivery partners – Community Rail Lancashire, Gloucestershire & Oxfordshire CRPs, Severnside CRP, and Southeast Communities Rail Partnership – have developed relationships with 46 community groups and disabled people's organisations across the UK.

These community partnerships have subsequently supported more than 900 people with a wide range of disabilities, exploring individual and collective barriers to travel, and collaboratively planning 58 co-created rail trips.

46 new relationships with groups and organisations

900 people supported

Working with community partners meant disabled people were able to identify and overcome barriers to travel, build confidence and experience rail journeys alongside others.



Kent CRP


Severnside CRP

On Track

For 'On Track for inclusive train travel', also funded by the Motability Foundation, we worked alongside Community Rail Lancashire, Gloucestershire & Oxfordshire CRPs and RNIB to improve the way rail staff communicate with and assist disabled people, creating a model for engaging disabled people with rail workforce culture change.

The findings of our report show that while disability awareness training is widespread across the rail industry, training alone cannot deliver consistently positive experiences. Disabled people must be involved in shaping training, services and decision-making, ensuring lived experience is at the heart of improvements.

This Discovery phase marks the first step in respective wider programmes of work being carried out by us to help create more accessible, inclusive and reliable rail travel for everyone.



Purbeck CRP

How do we put community rail at the forefront of a shift to sustainable, inclusive, active travel

Continued

Key achievements

Tourism and leisure strategy

In April 2025, we launched our first tourism and leisure strategy, to refine our work in promoting sustainable tourism along community rail lines.

This includes developing the Community Rail Tourism Network, a forum for members to share best practice and learn from others on how to encourage more people to take the train for greener, healthier leisure journeys.

Our flagship tourism and leisure campaign, Days Out by Rail, returned in August 2025, with 29 CRPs and station groups taking part in encouraging families to embark on memorable days out during the summer school holidays along lesser-known community rail lines. Messages shared through social media reached an estimated 3.5m users, and we welcomed support from 44 rail and tourism partners including Flight Free UK, Go Jauntly, Visit Buxton, Tonbridge Castle and Green Traveller.

3.5m users reached through social media

44 rail and tourism partners welcomed

By increasing the number of tourism and leisure campaigns we deliver from 2 to 4, we provided our members and their partners more of an opportunity to showcase sustainable leisure travel options, whilst further establishing Scenic Rail Britain as a leader in community-focused green tourism. Themes included Tracks and Trails, Scenic Rail Winter and Accessible Adventures.

> **I love being part of the Community Rail Network family and very much appreciate all the support on offer and try to make use of it as much as I can. The toolkits provided for social media campaigns are very useful, as are the education, tourism and integrated transport network online meetings.**
>
> *- What our members say*



Devon & Cornwall Rail Partnership

Case study:
Promoting sustainable, healthy and accessible travel

The Edinburgh-based 6VT Youth CRP teamed up with CrossCountry Trains to create a fun and educational activity pack that teaches young people about rail safety in an exciting and interactive way.



The Rail Explorers' Activity Book introduces primary school-aged children to the importance of train travel while also helping them learn how to stay safe near the tracks.

The ideas for the pack's content came directly from the young people involved in 6VT, the only youth-led CRP in Britain.

They wanted to make it not only an educational tool, but also a resource to encourage children to see trains as part of Britain's history, their daily lives, and their own futures.

Designed to suit different learning styles, the pack is full of bright visuals, hands-on activities, and playful tasks. Developed with i-Creation, it includes colouring pages, a quiz, puzzles, and even a cut-out train model for children to build, making the experience even more interactive.

6VT Youth CRP is committed to helping children and young people build a positive relationship with the rail network. Their goal is to make train travel safer, more inclusive, and accessible while also promoting sustainable travel as a greener way to get around.



> **As young people ourselves, we know how important it is to feel safe and informed when using public transport. We wanted to make something that children would enjoy while learning key safety tips at the same time.**
> *- CJ McLeod (17), former chair of 6VT Youth CRP*

> **This activity pack is a fantastic way to get children thinking about rail safety in a fun and engaging way. The ideas came directly from the young people involved in 6VT's Youth CRP, and they had great fun devising the content and activities.**
>
> **By making these important messages accessible and enjoyable, we can help children feel more confident when using the railway.**
> *- Fiona Horne, 6VT Youth CRP Operations Manager*

How are we developing broader support for community rail and a strong network of reciprocity?

We are developing broader support for community rail by acting not simply as a representative body, but as a connector between our members, government, devolved authorities and the wider community and transport sectors.

By strengthening key relationships with core funders and industry figures, broadening income streams through non-government grants and corporate backing, and fostering reciprocal partnerships with public and third-sector bodies, we are building an ecosystem around community rail in which our members, and the movement, receives the funding, expertise and support it needs.

> **[Community Rail Network] excels in their outreach and communication with the CRP network.**
> *- What our members say*

Key achievements

Grant funding

In 2025-26, we continued to manage and promote grant schemes on behalf of government and industry partners.

Through these grant programmes, we helped turn funding into practical projects and new opportunities for community rail groups across Britain.

- Community Rail Development Fund (for accredited CRPs in England and Wales), run on behalf of the Department for Transport and Welsh Government, awarded **£268,102**
- Small Grants Fund for England, run on behalf of the Department for Transport, awarded **£75,826**
- South Western Railway Station Adoption Fund, awarded **£10,702**
- Transport for Greater Manchester Small Grants Fund, awarded **£14,507**
- Motability Foundation Travelling with Confidence Small Grants Fund, awarded **£64,663**
- Integrated Sustainable Transport Fund, awarded **£6,712**

In total, £440,512 was awarded via our schemes to community rail projects and developments in 2025-26.



Barton Cleethorpes CRP

How are we developing broader support for community rail and a strong network of reciprocity
Continued

Key achievements

Corporate partner support

As well as providing financial support, our corporate partners offer a variety of different skill sets, knowledge and opportunities to aid our members' work and support the growth of community rail across Britain.



TeamBA worked with Essex & South Suffolk CRP on a music video celebrating the historic Flitch Line, encouraging more people to discover the region by rail, and using music as a creative way to promote community rail.



Porterbrook collaborated with Heart of England CRP to take a group of Year 10 pupils to the Long Marston Rail Innovation Centre for an inspiring, educational day centred on all things STEM (science, technology, education and mathematics).



Siemens Mobility employees supported the Friends of Mauldeth Road Station three times during the year, enhancing the station environment and providing valuable extra hands for larger tasks.



SLC Property supported the establishment of the Wivenhoe Library of Things, in what was a previously unused space at the station. SLC provided expert knowledge and guidance on planning consent, negotiating the lease, and securing pro-bono legal advice, in order to bring the project to life.

In 2025-26, we welcomed CAF Rail Services as a new corporate partner. The three-year partnership will see our organisations work together to connect CAF with community rail activity in the areas they are currently working, or where future bids will take place, ensuring local groups benefit from expertise and investment.

> **We accessed TeamBA through Community Rail Network's corporate partnership scheme. We always knew that we wanted to film the song, so when we read about TeamBA's offer, it seemed like a great opportunity. They were knowledgeable, flexible and supportive, and we are delighted with the end result.**
> *- June Povey, Essex & South Suffolk CRP*

> **This was an amazing opportunity for the students. They got to see behind-the-scenes, groundbreaking technology, and talk with engineers, project managers and operational staff. We are extremely grateful to these corporate partners who help us facilitate interactive 'hands on' trips, broadening students' awareness of career opportunities across rail.**
> *- Sarah Davidson, Heart of England CRP*

> **As a volunteer-led organisation, we did not have the legal understanding on how to navigate leasing a disused station property. SLC Property guided us through the process, from a change of use, to agreeing a 25-year lease. Now the building, once falling apart, is a spruced-up community hub that we can operate for years to come.**
> *- Liam O'Brien, Wivenhoe Library of Things*

How are we developing broader support for community rail and a strong network of reciprocity
Continued

As a not-for-profit organisation, Community Rail Network is dependent on sponsors and supporters, and we are hugely grateful to our growing list of funders, partners and donors.

Our core funders:

Department for Transport

Northern

Rail Delivery Group

Transport for Greater Manchester

South Western Railway

Transport for Wales

Motability Foundation

Our corporate partners:

Advance Consultancy

Beacon Rail (formerly Eversholt)

CAF Rail Services

Hitachi Rail

Porterbrook

Siemens Mobility

Skanska

SLC

TeamBA

Our corporate donors, awards and project sponsors, and in-kind supporters:

Angel Trains

Avanti West Coast

c2c

Cross Country

East Midlands Railway

Govia Thameslink Railway

Grand Central Rail

Greater Anglia

Keolis Amey Docklands

LNER

Merseyrail

Morgan Sindall

Railway Industry Association

Rail Safety and Standards Board

Severn Dee Travel

Southeastern

TrainPal

TransPennine Express

Case study:
Supporting social and economic development

'Make and Trade' was a project developed by the Heart of Wales Line CRP to connect and promote independent businesses along the scenic railway between Swansea and Shrewsbury. The initiative was set up to showcase over 100 artisans, producers, shops and attractions that define rural towns such as Llandovery, Knighton and Llandeilo, while encouraging sustainable leisure journeys by rail.

The CRP produced 'Goods Along the Line', a 48-page directory of makers and traders. Copies were distributed along the route and in tourist destinations across Shropshire, Wales and further afield, and the CRP also hosted a networking event with an accompanying marketing masterclass for those businesses featured.



The impact has been significant. More than 6,000 booklets have been distributed, guiding visitors to towns, trails and businesses along the line. Over £1,000 of products were sold at six community events, directly benefiting makers, and social media campaigns reached over 500,000 visitors in the three months around the booklet launch. Businesses reported new customers, shared learning and stronger community connections.

By linking tourism, small enterprises and sustainable travel, 'Make and Trade' demonstrates the Heart of Wales Line as a vital route for visitors seeking distinctive experiences while strengthening rural economies and community resilience. The brochure will be refreshed and expanded annually through advertising and sponsorship, ensuring ongoing support for local businesses – and the railway that connects them.



> **The funding we received from Community Rail Network enabled us to produce the 'Goods Along the Line' brochure, showcasing over 100 businesses and featuring high-resolution photographs celebrating the beauty of the landscapes and towns along the line, helping attract new passengers.**
>
> **The advice and support we received were equally valuable, giving us insight into similar community rail projects supporting local economies. We are currently exploring an updated reprint that will be financially sustainable for the future.**
>
> *- Owen Griffkin, Heart of Wales Line CRP development officer*

How are we developing as an expert, well-connected, high-performing, dynamic organisation?

We're a motivated and energetic team, driven to keep raising the bar. We invest in our people and organisational culture – encouraging continual growth in skills, mindset and approach – so everyone feels supported to thrive and make a real difference across the community rail movement.



Key achievements

Staff training

By investing in our people, we are becoming a more confident, agile and influential organisation. Every team member maintains a personal development plan and is supported to pursue ongoing learning.

In 2025–26, this included training in:

- Neurodiversity in rail
- Leading through change
- Active bystandership
- Mental Health First Aiding
- Understanding co-production
- Creative evaluation

This ongoing investment in our people strengthens the skills, confidence and resilience of our team, helping us respond to different needs, navigate change effectively, and continually improve how we work with and support our members.

Team development days

Our September 2025 and January 2026 team development days focused on incorporating the new policies and procedures for lone working and the Code of Conduct.

This year, our senior leadership team began working with corporate partner Advance Consultancy on a pro-bono basis on management and leadership development, including a diagnostic exercise.

As well as drawing on insights from our strategic review, we have taken a more dynamic organisation-wide approach to annual planning for 2026-27, identifying a suite of core cross-team priorities. This included a cross-team review of knowledge exchange channels for members, to better map all the ways we support and empower members to access information and skills development.

> **Community Rail Network membership is brilliant – very reasonably priced for a wealth of expertise and support!**
> *- What our members say*



Our team



Jools Townsend
Chief executive (returned from parental leave September 25)



Bill Freeman
Interim chief executive (January-September 25)



Sam Agnew
Director of member support and development



Sarah Chilton
Director of policy and communications (left February 26)



Chris Birks
(joined March 26)



Sarah Fatica
Director of people and funding



Paul Webster
Regions support manager



Karen Bennett
Education and youth engagement advisor



Alex Peel
Training and development coordinator



Naomi Lilley
Training and development coordinator (left October 25)



Allison Hughes
(joined March 26)



Gary Shipp
Projects development manager



Rob Lowson
Policy, research and resources officer



Alice Mannion
Campaigns and communications manager



Hazel Lavery
Events and partnerships manager



Dawn Bigland
Administration, finance and resources manager



Tiffany Allen
Fundraising and partnerships lead



Ian Davis
Community rail support officer (North of England)



Jenni Jones
Community rail support officer (England South and West)



Rhiannon-Jane Raftery
Community rail development coordinator (Wales and Borders)



Colin Burcombe
Community rail support officer (England East, South East and Midlands)



Sally Whitehead
Travelling with Confidence programme coordinator (left November 25)



Ellen Cameron
(joined December 25)



Ali Miller
On Track inclusion and engagement manager (left December 25)



Anya Bonner
(joined February 26)



Erin Kelly
Communications and marketing officer



Hannah Cottrill
Events and partnerships officer



Patrick Southern
Administration, grants and resources officer

Our team reports into our board, who are elected from our membership.

A note from our chief executive, Bill Freeman





Bill Freeman

This Impact Report covers part of the period during which I served as Interim Chief Executive of Community Rail Network, and I am delighted to have since rejoined the team on a permanent basis to lead the organisation into its next chapter.

My arrival coincided with the launch of a new strategy for the years ahead, alongside several important reviews, including our membership and governance reviews. Together, these share a common aim: to provide clearer direction and ensure we remain relevant and responsive to the needs and aspirations of the community rail movement across England, Scotland and Wales.

These reviews are also about recognising that Community Rail Network's value is not defined solely by the benefits members receive, but also by the opportunities they have to contribute, shape our work and get involved.

Our focus is on deepening community engagement, strengthening partnerships across rail, transport and the community sector, improving how we evidence impact and ensuring community rail's long-term sustainability in a new era of rail. We will continue to work closely with members and partners to ensure our approach is grounded in your experience and supports the work happening in communities every day.

You will begin to see this reflected more in the coming year through our advocacy for community rail, the opportunities we create and the support we provide.

This Community Rail Network Impact Report 2025-26 is a draft, subject to agreement by our members at our November 2026 AGM.

Find out more about community rail and our work supporting community rail partnerships and groups at communityrail.org.uk, where you can also meet the team and find out more about becoming a member or partner.

Community Rail Network

E: info@communityrail.org.uk
W: www.communityrail.org.uk

Front cover image courtesy of the Friends of Bletchley Station.