

Community Rail Network press release

"The Community Rail Network, known until today (6 Apr) as the Association of Community Rail Partnerships (ACoRP), brings together a growing membership of 70 community rail partnerships, hundreds of station 'friends' and other groups around Britain. These community-based organisations, volunteer groups and social enterprises work tirelessly to increase mobility and access to opportunity, promote sustainable travel and create a sense of pride and cohesion locally. They also help rail industry partners put local communities' needs at the forefront of their thinking.

While events and face-to-face engagement have paused due to Covid-19, work is ongoing to strengthen the place of community rail, and our railways, at the heart of Britain's communities, while helping our communities to cope, bolster resilience, and look to the future.

Supported by the Community Rail Network team, community rail partnerships and groups are finding alternative ways to work, keeping in touch with volunteers and partners, and supporting local efforts to maintain positivity and build resilience. Many are also looking to the future, considering how they can step up their role as we rebuild, and develop their work to help communities, our railways, and transport, become more sustainable, inclusive and caring. This will become increasingly important as the government, industry and communities work to decarbonise transport and make public transport and active travel the 'natural choice'. (DfT Decarbonisation Consultation - March 2020)

Jools Townsend, chief executive of the Community Rail Network, said: "As well as supporting our members through these unprecedented times, we are very much looking to the future. Becoming the Community Rail Network marks our commitment to helping community rail, and our railways, to make an ever-growing contribution to sustainable development, inclusion and wellbeing.

"As we rebuild from Covid-19, this work will be more important than ever. Within community rail, and across the wider community sector, we will need to redouble efforts, with our partners, to create confidence and connectedness, and re-orientate ways of thinking and living around more socially and environmentally-responsible means, especially as we grapple with the longer-term crisis we face, the climate emergency. This is at the heart of our community rail network."

Richard Burningham, chair of the Community Rail Network, said: "The essence of community rail is the enthusiasm, inventiveness and quiet determination to make a difference, while celebrating your locality and the railway's place in it. Our community rail network stretches right across England, Scotland and Wales, from big cities to the most rural parts of Britain. Our members do amazing things. We're committed to helping them thrive and to shining a spotlight on more of their great projects so that many more people know the contribution that community rail makes."

Connecting communities with the railways: the community rail development strategy

Updated 6 April 2020

Executive summary

Community rail originally developed as a grassroots movement to shine a light on neglected and at-risk parts of the network, as communities came together to safeguard the future of their local lines. The entrepreneurial spirit of the organisations they formed, combined with their local knowledge, helped transform these lines into the thriving feeders to the rest of the rail network seen across the country today.

This first imperative of ensuring that local lines remain relevant and that community rail organisations continue to play their part in attracting increased ridership remains key. However, since the government published the first Community rail development strategy for England and Wales in 2004, most recently reviewed in 2007, the nature and focus of community rail activity has evolved beyond that.

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As its foundation, it supports community rail organisations themselves to flourish as inclusive, independent and sustainable groups so they are well placed to deliver the strategy's key pillars:

- providing a voice for the community
- promoting sustainable, healthy and accessible travel
- bringing communities together and supporting diversity and inclusion
- supporting social and economic development

The government and the membership body for community rail organisations, the Community Rail Network, will work together to help community rail to flourish through:

- supporting community rail organisations to demonstrate that they are inclusive, diverse and trusted representatives of the community
- developing a new accreditation scheme to replace the Department for Transport's community railway designation scheme, reflecting the more community-facing role that community rail organisations play
- providing the tools to develop a sound evidence base demonstrating the value of community rail, to help support its further development and attract additional funding
- sharing knowledge and experience from train operators, Community Rail Network and particularly between community rail organisations
- encouraging partners across the rail industry to work more collaboratively with community rail and provide flexibility where possible in order to help deliver social outcomes

Community rail organisations will provide a voice for their local community through:

- drawing on local insight to understand and act as an advocate for local people's views and needs to the rail industry and inform decisions about services and infrastructure to improve local transport provision. Ongoing dialogue with both the industry and the community is central to this
- acting in the role of critical friend to the rail industry, to identify and address problems and potential issues
- safeguarding the independence of community rail organisations, including supporting them to diversify their funding base
- strengthening the relationship between community rail organisations and local authorities, supported by better communication of the value of community rail by government and Community Rail Network

Community rail organisations will promote sustainable and healthy travel through:

- collaboration and partnership working with other transport providers, authorities and organisations to develop integrated transport systems around stations that reflect the community's needs
- the provision by community rail organisations of 'last mile' information and support at stations, to help passengers make their onward journey from the station
- encouraging modal shift to walking, cycling and public transport by promoting cycling and walking routes and public transport options to and from stations, and promoting rail as a key part of sustainable and healthy journeys
- working with schools, colleges and youth groups to promote travelling by rail to access opportunities

Community rail organisations will help to bring communities together and support diversity and inclusion through:

- recognising that community rail can be at the vanguard of supporting the government and rail industry to unlock the social value of the railways, and being bold in doing that
- building close relationships with local charities and groups, including those who have not previously had any involvement with the railways
- opening up opportunities for individuals to volunteer on the railways or on projects linked to the railways, providing opportunities for socially isolated people to connect with others and for individuals to develop new life skills, as well as give back to their communities
- building the confidence of people who have particular support needs to travel by train
- reaching out to those not currently accessing rail services to identify the barriers, and working with train operators and Network Rail to address those
- expanding community rail organisations' work with children and young people to educate the passengers of the future and increase access to education, employment and recreational opportunities
- promoting the career opportunities offered by the railways as part of this engagement with schools and young people, helping to create a more diverse workforce
- using the leadership provided by Community Rail Network to build community rail organisations' skills, confidence and inclusivity

Community rail organisations will support social and economic development through:

- promoting and enhancing tourism and leisure travel by train, supporting small businesses and social enterprise development, by attracting new customers to businesses around the railways and setting up railway-related enterprises
- working with train operators to explore flexibility around pricing to support disadvantaged groups
- identifying, contributing to or being a consultee on development opportunities around the railways, from the enhancement of existing facilities to schemes to unlock new housing or economic growth
- linking with heritage railways through joint promotion, collaboration on initiatives and sharing of best practice and experience, recognising heritage rail as an important element of the rail industry
- making better use of railway land and stations, broadening the role of the station building to offer more services to and space for the local community, with the rail industry taking a more flexible and enabling approach to lease conditions in relation to community use

Delivering the strategy

Partnership working is essential to the delivery of this strategy and government will work closely with Community Rail Network, train operators, Network Rail and others in doing that.

Most significantly however we look to community rail organisations to breathe life into this strategy, to continue to work across boundaries within their communities and beyond. We want to encourage individuals, communities, voluntary organisations and businesses to take responsibility for the issues that matter to them and their communities, working collaboratively and rethinking the way public policy and services are delivered.

Guidance

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