

# **Worcestershire** Community Rail Partnership



**ANNUAL  
REPORT  
2022-2023**

# CONTENTS

Chair's Report .....	3
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William Whiting tribute .....	5
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## EDUCATION

Interchange .....	6
-------------------	---

Platform .....	8
----------------	---

## COMMUNITY

Worcestershire Parkway Wellbeing Day .....	9
--	---

Remembrance Day .....	10
-----------------------	----

Annual event .....	10
--------------------	----

Bike marking events (WFS) .....	11
---------------------------------	----

Stations .....	12
----------------	----

Malvern Book .....	12
--------------------	----

## SUSTAINABILITY

Rail Trails .....	13
-------------------	----

Worcester access map .....	14
----------------------------	----

WCRP tourist film .....	14
-------------------------	----

## ABOUT WCRP

WCRP Aims and Objectives .....	15
--------------------------------	----

## CHAIR'S REPORT

**At our Annual General Meeting in November 2022, we both celebrated and thanked William Whiting for his 3 years of energy and enthusiasm in establishing and chairing Worcestershire Community Rail Partnership in its first 3 years, bringing together county communities and our rail operators, and making many innovative projects happen. Then suddenly in January 2023 he was gone. Many attended his funeral in Birmingham in March where the depth of affection and admiration for him was very evident. WCRP's ongoing success is one important part of his legacy.**

2023 has been a difficult year for the rail industry, with questions raised about its sustainability, and much time spent on examining how its costs can be managed, most particularly in the proposals to close ticket offices which generated one of the largest ever public responses to a consultation process. WCRP made its own carefully argued response to the different approaches suggested by our train operators, and the proposals were withdrawn in early November.

But if these are challenging times, Worcestershire's railway network is more than on its way to post-COVID recovery. Some services withdrawn during COVID have been re-instated; Worcester now has an hourly service to Cheltenham, Gloucester and Bristol; Worcestershire Parkway is dramatically outperforming its forecast passenger numbers and the County Council continues to work with the industry to see more long-distance CrossCountry Train services call there.



Ian Baxter speaking at WCRP's Annual Event 2022

In this positive climate WCRP has continued its many and varied activities. We support our many station adoption groups and their excellent work, and our ambition is to see all county stations adopted as soon as possible. We have continued our educational focus, one of William Whiting's key priorities, both in cross-industry partnerships seeking to protect children and young people from the 'County Lines' criminal drug networks and, via the 'Platform' education project, working with children to help them understand what the railway does in their

communities, and to have fun whilst learning! We have worked across the county in promoting rail, and the attractions around our railway stations, and played our part in many arts, heritage and tourism activities led both by railway people and local community groups.



Ian Baxter at Worcestershire Parkway celebrating the better than forecast customer numbers

I very much want to thank GWR, West Midlands Railway, CrossCountry Trains, West Midlands Rail Executive and Worcestershire County Council for their financial support and active engagement with WCRP throughout the year, and of course all our station adopters and supporting community bodies, as well as the University of Worcester. We also benefit from the national support of the Community Rail Network. Finally, I must thank Fiona Saxon, our CRP Officer, for her unending hard work.

I hope this year's AGM and Annual Event will be as full as 2022's celebration of 3 years of success, including presentations from the 'Platform' team, the University of Worcester, and the Friends of Kidderminster Station (U3A), and how the CRP is developing its priorities for the next 3 years.

**Ian Baxter**  
**November 2023**



## REMEMBERING WILLIAM WHITING

We were deeply saddened by the news of William Whiting's death in January 2023. William was WCRP's inaugural Chair and led our organisation from inception right up until November 2022 when his tenure ended after three years in post. He was passionate about making rail travel accessible and available to all and worked with enthusiasm and vigour to introduce individuals, groups, and communities to the joys of travelling by rail. William combined his great love of train travel with his passion for walking and was a key figure in the development of our Rail Trails project. His expert knowledge on all things rail, walking and music, together with his heart-warming optimism in identifying children as our future will be greatly missed.

As a founding member and staunch supporter of Platform (WCRP's joint education scheme), William's family requested that a Crowdfunding page be set up for those wishing to donate and £850 was raised. As a result, the Platform team will be taking pupils from a school in Great Malvern to the Swan Theatre in Worcester where the children will watch a pantomime. This outing incorporates another of William's passions – the theatre – and the children will hopefully also enjoy a party after the show in the Pod this December.



William at the Platform launch in May 2021



William (I) with Hilary & Martin (Friends of Droitwich Spa) at a Wheels 2 Rail event



William (I) with Lyndon on the Malvern to Worcester Rail Trail

## EDUCATION

WCRP is working to improve links with local schools and colleges to develop activities such as rail safety, education, and careers.

### Interchange

A new resource to help schools, train operators and youth workers prevent children being groomed and exploited by drug trafficking gangs has been developed in partnership between WCRP and Worcester Cathedral, Platform, the Clewer Institute, Mothers' Union.



Interchange workshop at the launch

Interchange was developed as a response to the activity known as 'county lines' where gangs and organised criminal networks move illegal drugs from one area to another using dedicated mobile phones lines. Victims are often enticed into county lines with expensive gifts, money and brotherhood promises but are then coerced by threats, violence, and blackmail, either from their exploiters or rival gangs. As a result of this control and fear, victims are likely to avoid telling others about the reality of their situation. Exploitation of children and vulnerable adults in this way is recognised as modern slavery and perpetrators can be prosecuted under this Act for forcing their victims to sell drugs. The National Crime Agency (NCA) cites the rail network facilitating 40% of the movement of illegal drugs across the UK. The NCA believes that the popularity of this method of transportation is, in part, due to children being used by gangs to move drugs and the fact that they are too young to legally drive.

Interchange provides a range of resources with the aim of providing a toolkit for young people and adults who could be affected by drug gangs and trafficking. A film demonstrates how a young person can be manipulated into the criminal world of drug dealing and the challenges of escaping from it without external help. The film is designed to appeal to young people and be an informative tool for communities including adults, parents, teachers, and rail staff. It highlights signs of grooming and signposts to organisations offering support. The film is designed to be a call to action and emphasises that there are 'reachable moments' where intervention can

break the cycle of manipulation and control. Alongside the film, and for its launch at Worcester Cathedral, educational resources were designed and developed by WCRP's joint rail education scheme, Platform. Together with other stakeholders, Platform created a structure for three mini-workshops. Each workshop has an overriding theme: how gangs target; the dissonance between expectation and reality when involved with a gang; and how to access help. At the launch, interactive theatre complemented the film and workshops, and young people could also enter a design competition to create a poster showing how to access support.



Interactive theatre from the Interchange launch at Worcester Cathedral



WMR Community Champions Award 2023 with Emily Barker, Fiona Saxon, Colin Major

The film inspired Worcester City Council to organise a Safer Communities Day in conjunction with Christopher Whitehead School, Worcester in June 2023. WCRP's Vice Chair and Partnership Officer attended the event and showed the film to small groups of students and then facilitated discussions around the central themes. More than 250 pupils took part and the feedback on the day was overwhelmingly positive. Platform have created a resource for use by schools on their website which is their most visited resource. Train Operating Companies are using the film for training frontline staff on how to spot and manage signs of exploitation.

WCRP was delighted to receive an award from WMR in recognition of our work to keep young people safe in Worcestershire.

The film is also a finalist in the RTS Awards and has been nominated for a Community Rail Network award.

Available for viewing at Which Side of The Tracks - YouTube or Worcestershire Community Rail Partnership – Promoting community rail ([wcrp.org.uk](http://wcrp.org.uk))



## Platform

Platform is our community rail education scheme jointly managed by five CRPs – Severnside, Transwits, Gloucestershire, South Wessex and Worcestershire Community Rail Partnership.

Since November 2022, Platform has delivered rail safety workshops or assemblies to 1,310 students and taken 180 children on train trips or station visits in Worcestershire. For example, they have worked with Woodrush High School to provide rail safety education to the full Y7-Y10 cohorts in March 2023. Platform also ran rail careers workshops with 344 KS2 children at Stourbridge Primary School with children attending from five different schools within the area in June 2023.



Young students learning at The Pod in Worcester



Pitcheroak school onboard a WMR train

In addition to the direct engagement of Worcestershire students, Platform have also brought 253 children and young people into Worcestershire by train from other CRP areas. For example, they have had several successful trips with bringing students into Worcester to visit the Civic Society History and Heritage Pod (Belmont School in Cheltenham travelled with the delivery team three times in May and Year 6 children from Alderman Knight School in Tewkesbury enjoyed the same trip October).



Students waiting for their train at Worcester Foregate Street Station

Most recently, in October 2023, Platform worked with pupils from Norton Juxta Kempsey Primary School at Worcestershire Parkway. WCRP was pleased to fund a bus to bring the children to the station for a morning of gardening and learning. They tidied up the wooden Bee Friendly planters at the station and walked along part of the public footpath where Imogen from the Platform team spoke about the sustainable elements of the station and the wildlife habitats.

More about Platform's work and links to their resources can be found here at Home - Platform ([platformrail.org](http://platformrail.org)).

## COMMUNITY

WCRP works across the county to develop stations as gateways to local communities and encourage the establishment, and support the activities, of station adoption groups.

### Worcestershire Parkway Wellbeing Day

WCRP was delighted to take part in the Worcestershire Parkway Wellbeing Day hosted by GWR on 16th August 2023. We were joined by Imogen from the Platform team and together we offered a drawing competition to young visitors. The theme was 'My dream railway adventure' and we had lots of imaginative and colourful entries. WCRP offered a prize of a family rail ticket to London for the winning entry which was chosen by Cllr. Mike Rouse. The winning entry was drawn by Bethany (7 years old) and features a rainbow train surrounded by trees and flowers.



Colin Major (WCRP Vice Chair) enjoying the Worcestershire Parkway Wellbeing Day



Piano installed at Worcestershire Parkway at the Wellbeing Day



Drawing competition



Winning design from Bethany (7)

## Remembrance Day

We were proud to take part once again in GWR's Poppies to Paddington train. Our Vice Chair, Colin Major, met the train to Paddington at Worcestershire Parkway on 11th November 2023 and handed the wreath to GWR staff.



WCRP wreath to Paddington with Colin Major (WCRP Vice Chair) and Alex Sinton (Chair, Wychavon District Council)

## Annual Event 2022

WCRP welcomed partners, stakeholders, station adopters and friends to our Annual Event on 18th November 2022. We were also joined by Cllr. Mike Rouse (Cabinet Member with responsibility for Highways and Transport, WCC, Andy Stevenson (University of Worcester) and Paula Shortland (West Midlands Safer Travel Team) who all gave thought provoking and inspiring talks on rail travel in Worcestershire, Rail Trails and rail safety respectively.



Cllr. Mike Rouse (left) speaking at our 2022 Annual Event at Worcester Guildhall (with Ian Baxter, WCRP Chair)



Annual Event 2022



## Bike marking events (WFS)

WCRP was delighted to support the Friends of Foregate Street and Worcester City Council with two bike marking events at Worcester Foregate Street Station in April and September of this year. A record of 31 bikes were marked in the September session. Both events also offered a free bike check by Nick Lambert from Reliant Cycle Services funded by WCRP. A huge thank you to Sunil (Friends), Aimee (Worcester CC), and Nick (Reliant Cycles) for making the event such a huge success.



Friends of Foregate Street adopter, Sunil de Sayrah at the September Bike Marking event at Worcester Foregate Street Station



Bike Marking event at WFS Station

A promotional poster for a 'FREE BIKE MARKING EVENT'. The background is yellow with a large black silhouette of a bicycle on the left. The text is in bold black and white. It includes logos for 'Worcestershire Community Rail Partnership', 'Friends of Foregate Street', and 'Reliant Cycle Services'. The event is scheduled for 'TUESDAY 18 APRIL 2023' from '3PM-6PM' 'BY THE ENTRANCE TO FOREGATE STREET STATION'. It mentions that 'Nick from Reliant Cycle Services will be on hand to offer a free basic bicycle check-up alongside Worcester City Council and Friends of Foregate Street Station'. At the bottom, it says 'Any queries please email: [community.safety@worchester.gov.uk](mailto:community.safety@worchester.gov.uk)' and features the 'Worcester CITY COUNCIL' logo.

**FREE BIKE MARKING EVENT**  
**TUESDAY 18 APRIL 2023**  
**3PM-6PM**  
**BY THE ENTRANCE TO FOREGATE STREET STATION**

Nick from Reliant Cycle Services will be on hand to offer a free basic bicycle check-up alongside Worcester City Council and Friends of Foregate Street Station

Any queries please email: [community.safety@worchester.gov.uk](mailto:community.safety@worchester.gov.uk)

Worcester CITY COUNCIL

Promotional poster for bike marking event

## Stations

The Friends of Droitwich Spa Railway Station created a brilliant Christmas display in December 2022. The Christmas tree festival included a bauble and Christmas Tree build and painting event where members of the local Scouts and St Johns Ambulance painted the decorations for the trees made from pallets in November 2022. The Friends have also been instrumental in securing the installation of a Defibrillator at the station in June 2022. Their tireless work to get this valuable machine installed means that passengers and visitors to the station have access to this vital safety equipment in an emergency.



Christmas Trees at Droitwich Spa



Defibrillator at Droitwich with Martin Jones from the Friends on the right



Evesham Nature Garden



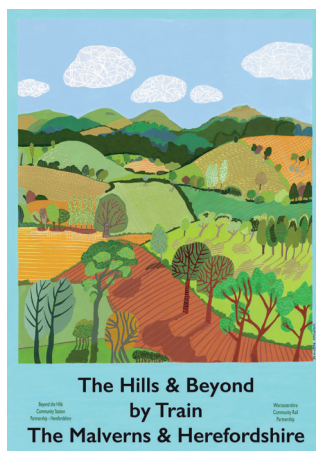
Artwork at Alvechurch



Alvechurch Planter

## The Hills & Beyond by Train The Malverns and Herefordshire

WCRP worked together with Gareth Davies, Ledbury and Colwall CSP on a book containing a collection of essays about the Malvern Hills. The finished product is wide ranging with contributions from partners from both sides of the Hills. It is intended to be used as a companion guide for travellers passing through the area by train. The front cover has been beautifully illustrated by Jeanette McCulloch. There are limited copies of the book available from WCRP or the book can be downloaded from our website.



Malvern Book artwork

## SUSTAINABILITY

WCRP aims to raise awareness of, and to promote, the rail services in the County of Worcestershire as a sustainable way to access destinations for recreation, leisure and tourism.

### Rail Trails

Our work on the WCRP Rail Trails continues and we now have both the Cotswold & Malvern Line and the Wyre Valley Line guide materials available on our website. The Arrow Valley Line and Saltway Line are in production and we are hoping that all four will be fully available by the end of January 2024. Lyndon Bracewell from Worcestershire Ramblers has been mapping the remaining routes and Andy Stevenson from the University of Worcester is working his magic turning them into appealing and informative visual guide materials. Andy has also been working on some A2 information boards showing project progress for display in the Hive and other venues. In addition, his students have been involved in creating some stunning ideas for leaflets to promote the walks when we officially launch them next year. A taster day was held from the Hive in June this year where Andy introduced the Rail Trails to attendees and Lyndon led a walk along part of our route from Worcester Foregate Street Station. Following on from successful walks from the Cotswold & Malvern Line in 2023, sections of the Rail Trail will be offered as walks by Malvern Walking Festival, Evesham Walking Festival and the Wyre Forest Sustainability Festival in 2024.

The Rail Trails are intended to promote the train as a way of accessing the walks in a sustainable way by minimising car journeys.



Andy, Lyndon and William at Malvern Link Station



## **Worcester Access Map**

A Worcester Access Map has been created with financial support from GWR. WCRP worked in partnership with the University of Worcester, and Gloucestershire Community Rail Partnership (GCRP) to produce a valuable resource for visitors to the city. Students from the University received training and guidance from GCRP on how to walk the routes collecting data which was sent to the designer for input onto the map. The map contains information on the best walking, wheeling, cycling routes for people with hidden and visible disabilities. It is available either as a download or printed copy. We hope the map will encourage Worcester visitors to use sustainable forms of transport – such as rail – to both access, and move around, the city.

## **WCRP Promotional Film**

To further encourage visitors to arrive in Worcester by train, WCRP commissioned a promotional film which aims to showcase the city to young people (25-30). Our models, Beth and George, together with the production company, Ottr, filmed in the city over two very sunny days in June. Beth and George were fabulous in their roles and Ottr have done wonderful work in capturing both the best and quirky aspects of Worcester. We are grateful to GWR (for providing the train and ground support) and WMR (for allowing us to film at Worcester Foregate Street Station). WCRP would also like to thank Visit Worcestershire and Worcester BID for their invaluable local knowledge of attractions for young people.

## **Take the train to Worcester with GWR and WMT**

YouTube <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9bgKFfAQuCA>



Beth and George being filmed for our Worcester promotional video

## AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

The aims and objectives of the Worcestershire Community Rail Partnership are to:

- 1.1. enable the rail services of the county of Worcestershire to play a more effective part in contributing to the local transport network by relieving congestion, especially in the City of Worcester and in Kidderminster, and through better integration with other forms of public transport;
- 1.2. raise awareness of, and to promote, the rail services of the County of Worcestershire as a sustainable way to access destinations for recreation, leisure and tourism;
- 1.3. involve the community in the work of user groups; station partnerships; arts initiatives and improving links with local schools, colleges and Worcestershire University to develop activities such as rail safety awareness;
- 1.4. provide information to further encourage more passengers to use the rail services of the county of Worcestershire for work, education, shopping and tourism;
- 1.5. work with West Midlands Railway, Great Western Railway and CrossCountry Trains, or any successor rail contract holders to achieve their objectives for community rail partnerships in their contract areas, as set out in their Community Rail strategic plan or any subsequent agreement;
- 1.6. meet the objectives set out in the Department for Transport Community Rail Development Strategy 2018; and
- 1.7. develop stations as gateways to local communities;
- 1.8. work with partners to develop improved train and station services; encourage the establishment, and support the activities, of station adoption groups.

Membership of the Worcestershire Community Rail Partnership is open to any local or regional organisation with an interest in furthering the aims and objectives of the Partnership such as local schools and colleges; environmental groups; chambers of commerce and trade; BIDs; tourism organisations; county, district and parish authorities and relevant train operating companies.

The Partnership is a non-campaigning, non-party political organisation and therefore political parties are not eligible for membership.

We thank our Partners not only for their Funding but also for their advice and active help.

### **Current Steering Group members** (\*funding partner):

Bromsgrove and Redditch Rail User Group  
Community Rail Network (advisory capacity)  
Cotswold Line Promotion Group\*  
CrossCountry Trains\*  
Network Rail (stakeholder)

Community First Herefordshire & Worcestershire  
Great Western Railway\*  
Stourbridge Line User group  
West Midlands Rail Executive\*  
Worcestershire County Council\*

## WCRP Partners

