

Community rail looks to the future, and helping communities and railways rebuild

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As communities around Britain face unprecedented challenges, the grassroots network engaging local people in rail, and running community activities at stations, is looking positively to the future.

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'. (1)

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."

More about community rail:

There are now 70 community rail partnerships – community-based organisations working to promote and enhance local railway lines – plus at least 1,000 station 'friends' groups across Britain. These numbers are growing each year.

The group conservatively estimate that there are 8,500 volunteers giving nearly 400,000 hours of their time per year, worth £5.6m annually to the rail industry and £27.6m in social value to the volunteers and their communities.

Community Rail Network members are involved in a huge range of activities – from community events and arts projects, to social enterprise and volunteering at stations, to sustainable tourism promotion, to active travel integration.

Visit communityrail.org.uk for more details.

(1)

– https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/876251/decarbonising-transport-setting-the-challenge.pdf

Photo credit: Community Rail Network