

# Concerns for the future of community rail funding

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It has been revealed that funding for community rail could be cut by up to a quarter from train operators' budgets from the government, potentially putting the jobs of community rail officers in jeopardy and threatening the funding provided to station partnerships.

Rail Business Daily (RBD) has been made aware of cuts to core funding of Community Rail Partnerships (CRPs) as well as some train operators having to pause any payments as the Department for Transport (DfT) reviews train operating company expenditure.

It comes as CRPs continue to work hard across the network in improving travel confidence, increasing access to opportunity, tackling social isolation, giving communities a voice and putting the railways at the heart of community life.

The Department for Transport statement said: "reform of all aspects of the railways is essential".

The news was revealed shortly after Community Rail Week, which shone the spotlight on the year-round

work of Britain's 76 CRPs, which cover 34 per cent of Britain's railway network.

There are also 1,200 station friends' groups made up of more than 10,000 volunteers, who tend to about half of Britain's 2,570 stations.

The government says it is working closely with train operators and the Community Rail Network to ensure they can continue supporting as many events and outreach programmes as possible within this year's budgets.

A DfT spokesperson said: "Our railways are currently not financially sustainable, and it is unfair to continue asking taxpayers to foot the bill, which is why reform of all aspects of the railways is essential.

"The government is working very closely with train operators to consider proposals for how we run our railways in a way that is fair for taxpayers and delivers a truly passenger-focussed network."

Responding to the news, Jools Townsend, chief executive of Community Rail Network, said: "The Community Rail Network team is doing everything we can, working closely with DfT and train operator colleagues, to protect community rail funding, given its importance to helping communities get maximum value from their railways, and promoting sustainable, inclusive travel by rail.

"We are advising train operators on how to minimise any potential detriment, including prioritising community rail partnership core funding, to ensure the best possible outlook for these small, community-based organisations and their staff.

"Whilst we have been advised that core funding for the majority of community rail partnerships is not being impacted, we recognise the concern this situation has caused for some. Alongside working with train operators, we also continue to explore and develop wider sources of income.

"We are positive we will come through this challenging period together, and over time build a stronger and even more impactful community rail movement."

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