

# “Engage communities as partners to drive recovery and enable sustainable travel by rail” urges Community Rail Network chief executive

February 26, 2021



Rail industry partners can pave the way to a green and inclusive recovery by placing the communities they serve at the heart of their work said Jools Townsend, chief executive of the Community Rail Network.

Speaking at the National Rail Recovery Conference (held virtually this week), Jools outlined the vital role played by 73 Community Rail Partnerships (CRPs) and 1,000 station friends groups around Britain in working with rail partners to build understanding of local needs and enable more people to travel by rail.

She urged those planning rail recovery to:

1. Recognise local communities as partners in developing rail and its place as the backbone of local sustainable transport networks;
2. Draw on community rail's local knowledge and links, to aid place-based approaches that serve local needs, and to negotiate this challenging environment;
3. Shout "louder and prouder" about rail's green and caring credentials, and focus on connections with bus, community transport, and active travel, to make rail more accessible, and reduce car dependency;
4. Engage widely with communities, including hearing from the many people who don't travel by train;
5. Treat stations not just as gateways but as vital local centres of social and economic activity, and potential beacons for sustainability.

Jools concluded: "The pandemic has thrown many challenges our way, but opportunities too, and engaging with and hearing from communities can help the rail industry to seize on this moment of change. This isn't only about rail's recovery, but rail playing the maximum role in the recovery and long-term sustainability of our communities, and cementing its place as the backbone of a sustainable transport system. To do that, we need to understand what communities need and want from their railways, including the many people who don't use rail but might, and be as responsive as we can.

"The community rail movement has already played an important part through the pandemic, supporting local resilience and feeding in local insights to rail partners. We're looking forward to working with our railway colleagues to rebuild confidence and positivity around rail, and helping to move all our communities towards a green and inclusive transport future."

See Community Rail Network's briefing on the [role of community rail in recovery](#) or visit [www.communityrail.org.uk](http://www.communityrail.org.uk)

*Photo credit: Community Rail Network*