

Local community-led rail projects in Britain recognised at national awards

December 10, 2021



The Community Rail Awards, now in its seventeenth year, has announced its winners.

The event recognised a diverse array of projects, including many that had risen to the continued challenges of supporting communities through the pandemic.

The awards, organised by Community Rail Network, were held at Southampton's O2 Guildhall. The event welcomed more than 300 guests, both in-person and online. They included community rail volunteers, officers, rail industry leaders and government representatives.

The audience was addressed by transport ministers from the UK, Welsh and Scottish governments plus industry leaders and personalities passionate about community rail.

On the showcase night for the community rail movement, the Outstanding Contribution to Community Rail Award was jointly awarded to:

- Southeast Communities Rail Partnership, which coordinates activity on eight rail lines across Sussex, Kent, Surrey, and Berkshire, including education and sustainable travel programmes reaching thousands of children, helping adults with additional needs to build rail confidence, and promoting green leisure travel;
- Friends of Buxton Station, a volunteer group that has cemented its place at the heart of its community during the pandemic via hugely varied initiatives from arts projects at the station and run digitally, to raising awareness about biodiversity, to improving integrated transport, to supporting local businesses.

Joining Jools Townsend, chief executive of Community Rail Network, to present the awards were Mark Hopwood and Claire Mann, managing directors of Great Western Railway and South Western Railway, respectively, the headline sponsors of the event.

Speakers, meanwhile, included rail minister Chris Heaton-Harris MP; Vaughan Gething MS, minister for economy, Transport and North Wales; Graeme Dey, minister for transport at the Scottish Government; Michelle Handforth, regional director for Wales and Western at Network Rail; Jaqueline Starr, chief executive of Rail Delivery Group; Malcolm Brown, chief executive of platinum sponsor Angel Trains, and TV personality and rail enthusiast Chris Tarrant.

A Special Recognition Award, chosen by the Community Rail Network board, was given to Kulvinder Bassi MBE, who was an instrumental member of the community rail team at the Department for Transport from 2006 to 2020 and is now the department's stations and accessibility policy manager.

Jools Townsend, chief executive of Community Rail Network, said: "The Community Rail Awards give deserved recognition to community rail volunteers and partnerships across Britain. We were thrilled to welcome more than 300 guests in-person and online, alongside ministers, rail industry leaders and famous faces emphasising the great value of community rail, as we look to build stronger, more inclusive and sustainable communities, served and connected by their railways.

"Despite another challenging year, the array of entries defied expectations, showing how community rail adapted and responded, supporting communities through the pandemic, maintaining positivity, and continuing to help people get the most from local railways and stations. Huge congratulations to all our winners, and thanks to all who support community rail, as this grassroots movement continues to go from strength to strength."

Rail Minister, Chris Heaton-Harris, said: "Our railway offers a vital lifeline for local communities across the UK who depend on it for access to jobs and opportunities, to connect with friends and families, and experience everything the UK has to offer.

"These awards recognise those community rail partners and volunteers that go above and beyond, making a real difference to those that use our rail network, as well as neighbouring communities. I'd like to extend my heartfelt congratulations and gratitude to this year's winners and finalists for all their work."

Mark Hopwood, managing director of Great Western Railway, said: "We were especially pleased to host this year's Community Rail Awards.

“GWR has ten community rail partnerships on our network, covering some of the UK’s key holiday routes such as Devon and Cornwall, South and West Wales, Dorset, the West of England and the Cotswolds. We are very proud of the work they do. They have great local knowledge and I know that they all work incredibly hard, as volunteers, inspiring sustainable improvements to their community and the local economy.”

Claire Mann, managing director of South Western Railway, added: “It was an honour to be able to present the awards to a number of worthy winners at the Community Rail Awards. The calibre of the entries was truly excellent and demonstrated the immense commitment that community rail volunteers have to their local areas.

“Community rail is a very important part of the way that we and other train companies serve the communities on our networks, and it has been wonderful to be able to celebrate the inspirational achievements made by volunteers around the country. On behalf of SWR, many congratulations both to the winners and to those who were nominated.”

The night’s winners across all categories were:

- Community Rail Network Award for Outstanding Contribution to Community Rail – Southeast Communities Rail Partnership and Friends of Buxton Station
- Board’s Special Recognition Award – Kulvinder Bassi MBE
- Outstanding Volunteer Contribution sponsored by Merseyrail – Dave Carlisle of Friends of Buxton Station
- Station Friends and Adopters at the Heart of Communities sponsored by Avanti West Coast –

Friends of Buxton Station for Part of the Community: At the Heart of our Community

- Involving Children and Young People sponsored by Grand Central Railway – Community Rail Education Network for Backtrack: Create it, Share it, Save lives
- Involving Diverse Groups sponsored by LNER – South East Lancashire Community Rail Partnership for Hate Crime Awareness Project
- Community Creative Projects and Station Arts sponsored by Transport for Greater Manchester – Community Rail Cumbria and Workington Focus Group for ‘The Rails Which Circled the World’ – Outdoor Art Exhibition at Workington Railway Station
- Small Projects Award, Under £500 sponsored by Community Rail Lancashire – Bittern Line Community Rail Partnership, Greater Anglia Asset Team, Dura Composites Ltd for West Runton Station Sign Restoration
- Best Community Engagement Project sponsored by Rock Rail – Community Rail Lancashire for 100 Women, 100 Journeys
- Best Communications sponsored by CrossCountry – Devon and Cornwall Rail Partnership for Dartmoor Line Communications Group; Promoting a New Era for the Line to Okehampton
- Influencing Positive Change and Sustainability sponsored by TransPennine Express – East Suffolk Lines Community Rail Partnership and Suffolk County Council for Katch All-Electric Demand-Responsive-Transport Link
- Photo Competition | Community Rail in 2020/21 sponsored by Porterbrook – Poacher Line Community Rail Partnership and The Friends of Radcliffe Station for Roll out the Barrows!