

# Rail branch line recovery the focus as train operator and communities come together

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Community Rail Partnerships, station adopters, local authorities and other organisations from across East Anglia came together with **Greater Anglia** representatives at the annual Community Rail Conference to discuss how to ensure a bright future for the region's local rail branch lines.

Nationally, rail passenger numbers are back up to 80-85% of pre-pandemic levels so the focus was on how to continue to attract passengers to use their local rail lines, building on the transformational benefits brought by Greater Anglia's new trains.

Discussions focused on how to help community rail lines recover beyond the pandemic; how to maximise the positive impact of the new trains; how community rail partnerships can help strengthen further their links with local communities, involving schools, colleges and local authorities to help bring about positive changes locally, and how to improve diversity and inclusion.

The conference was attended by East Anglia's six Community Rail Partnerships (CRPs), Station Adoption community volunteers, local authorities, Transport Focus, the Community Rail Network (which represents CRPs and promotes community rail at a national level) and the Department for Transport.

Jonathan Denby, Greater Anglia's Head of Corporate Affairs, said: "Community rail initiatives help to bring railways closer to the communities they serve, encouraging more people to take the train and supporting local communities by making it easier for residents to travel for work, learning, shopping or leisure and for visitors or tourists to get around with benefits for the local economy.

"Most community rail lines saw significant growth in passenger numbers in recent years before the pandemic and our new, high quality, longer trains provide a fantastic opportunity to encourage more people to take the train.

"We'll continue to build on our strong track record of partnership working, which has seen community rail lines become more and more popular with customers, whilst train services and stations have become more integrated with local communities' needs, with more frequent services, all year round, in place on most routes."

He added: "A huge thanks to all involved for making the conference such a positive, effective event with clear goals and a shared desire to ensure our local lines continue to thrive and maximise the impact of the exciting transformation delivered by the introduction of our new trains."

To date in Norfolk, Suffolk, Essex and Cambridgeshire, partnership working has helped to boost tourism and local economies and improve health and well-being through the production of local area guides, guided walks, special event trains, volunteering initiatives, community art projects, wildlife initiatives, partnership initiatives to deliver service improvements and station upgrades and wider community involvement schemes.

*Photo credit: Greater Anglia*