

# Scottish Parliament celebrates ‘passion’ of grassroots movement connecting communities with their railways

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Members of the Scottish parliament joined representatives from community rail to celebrate the work of the grassroots movement across Scotland and welcome the country's newest community rail partnership for the Far North Line.

The '*Community rail in Scotland: Getting communities and climate goals back on track*' reception was held in the Holyrood Room at the Scottish Parliament, organised by [Community Rail Network](#), and sponsored by Emma Harper, MSP for South Scotland, as part of this year's [Community Rail Week](#), 22-28 May, supported by Rail Delivery Group.

Ministers, MSPs and a range of transport and community sector partners heard of the vital role community rail is playing in helping Scotland shift towards green, integrated, inclusive travel, and empowering and connecting local communities by rail. Community rail in Scotland is now made up of **nine community rail**

**partnerships** – community organisations engaging communities along a line – **260 ‘station friends’ volunteer groups**, and many more community-led station and railway initiatives.

The new community rail partnership will work along the Far North Line from Inverness to Wick and Thurso, covering the area north of Tain. The community-led organisation will work across Caithness and Sutherland to engage communities in the railway and promote the social, environmental, and economic benefits of sustainable travel and rail tourism.

Addressing the reception, **Kevin Stewart MSP, Scottish Minister for Transport**, said: “Community rail partnerships are the embodiment of very passionate and dedicated people who volunteer on our railways. The work they do improves stations and lines across the country, bringing together communities, and giving greater local buy-in to Scotland’s Railway.

“That is why I am delighted to approve and welcome the new Far North Line Community Rail Partnership. I look forward to hearing more about the group’s plans and how they will benefit communities along the railway in the far north of Scotland. This latest approval means Scotland now has nine active community rail partnerships and demonstrates our commitment to growing this important network for the future.”

Jools Townsend, chief executive of Community Rail Network, told reception attendees about the crucial work community rail partnerships are doing to meet Scotland’s climate targets and the aims of the national transport strategy, by engaging communities to support wider use of rail, and helping communities to shape a green and equitable transport future.

**Ms Townsend** said: “We were so proud to showcase how community rail partnerships and station volunteer groups work tirelessly across Scotland to engage communities, raise awareness of rail as a sustainable form of travel, and empower people to become confident travellers and access the opportunities they want.”

She highlighted community rail projects that break down mobility barriers, boost rail confidence, inspire people to use rail for sustainable travel and tourism, and improve integration between trains, buses, walking and cycling.

Ms Townsend added: “Community rail breaks down barriers and helps rail to better meet local needs, enabling more people to make greener journeys and have a voice on transport. This helps to address the climate emergency and supports Scotland’s important aim to reduce reliance on cars, while putting communities at the forefront and benefitting local environments and economies.

“We are delighted to welcome the new Far North Line Community Rail Partnership, which is an exciting addition to the community rail movement in Scotland, set to deliver engaging initiatives along one of the country’s most remote but scenic lines.”

The Far North Line joins Scotland’s other eight community rail partnerships: **Borders Railway Community Partnership**; **South West Scotland CRP**; **East Lothian CRP**; **Strathallan CRP**; **Highland Main Line CRP**; **Rail 74 CRP**; **6VT Youth CRP** and **West Highland CRP**.

Supported by Community Rail Network and the Smarter Choices, Smarter Places programme, funded by Transport Scotland and administered by Paths for All, the partnerships are committed to supporting a shift to greener, healthier, fairer transport. They used the 2023 Rail Scotland Conference to launch the 'Let's Go For 1 in 5' campaign, in support of Transport Scotland's commitment to cutting car use by 20% by 2030.

Transport is the largest contributor to climate emissions in Scotland. In response to the climate emergency, Transport Scotland has committed to achieving net-zero by 2045. Rail accounted for just 1% of UK domestic transport emissions in 2020, despite representing 6% of the total distance travelled, and for a 30-mile journey, travelling by train instead of by car can reduce emissions by up to 86%.

For more information on community rail in Scotland, go to [communityrail.org.uk/scotland](https://communityrail.org.uk/scotland).

*Photo credit: Iona Shepherd*