

Youth group boards train to a green future

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Members of Britain's rail youth community partnership were given the chance to ride on the UK's first hydrogen-fuelled train to and from Glasgow at COP26.

Youngsters from the 6VT Community Rail Partnership, based in Edinburgh, boarded the HydroFLEX train along with Jools Townsend, chief executive of Community Rail Network.

Created in a project headed by Porterbrook and the University of Birmingham, Britain's first mainline-approved hydrogen-train, HydroFLEX, has been on display during the climate summit as part of the UK Government's plans to decarbonise rail travel by 2050.

The £8 million HydroFLEX project allows new hydrogen fuel systems to be installed on trains, adding a clean and renewable energy source. The train, which also welcomed Prince Charles and Prime Minister Boris Johnson during COP26, is a tri-mode — meaning it can also run on electricity and battery power.

While on board, 6VT members saw a demonstration explaining how the hydrogen technology works and discussed the importance of developing sustainable travel to combat climate change. They also had the opportunity to experience a train-driving simulator at the Rail Delivery Group's green and sustainable-themed stand at Glasgow Central station.

Last month, the partnership, which is a member of Community Rail Network and part of the growing community rail movement across Britain, marked the first-ever 'Community Rail Week' by taking a journey from Edinburgh to Glasgow. During their trip, its members pledged to 'Go Green by Train,' writing letters to themselves containing personal changes they could make to become more environmentally friendly.

6VT member Daisy Fiennes said: "Going on the HydroFLEX train was a great experience. It's incredible how like an ordinary train it is, yet so different. It's amazing how people are working so hard to solve the climate crisis, and it's so important that we do solve it, because there isn't a planet B."

Fiona Horne, operations manager at the 6VT Youth Café, where the community rail partnership is based, said: "6VT Youth CRP were delighted and privileged to be invited to experience a journey on the ground-breaking HydroFLEX train. Our young people got to hear and see first-hand how the train works. As passengers of the future, their hope is that this method of green travel will be part of the way forward."

Alongside her Community Rail Network role, Jools Townsend was at COP26 as the chair of the Sustainable Transport Alliance, a group that brings together the UK's leading sustainable transport organisations. The alliance's 'People make transport: communities enabling greener travel' event highlighted the importance of drawing on community actions and voices, including those of young people, to place walking and cycling, public, community, and shared transport at the heart of climate ambitions.

She said: "It was fantastic to join members of 6VT aboard HydroFLEX, and to be able to talk to them about sustainable transport and the vital importance of green travel at a local and global level. COP26 has underlined how we must put people, communities, and justice at the forefront in tackling the climate crisis, and this very much applies to transport.

"Rail, combined with buses, walking, cycling, and shared mobility, provides a huge part of the solution: shifting as many journeys as we can onto these modes, and reducing private car use, can help us forge a more sustainable, healthy, inclusive future, which is particularly important for our younger generations."