



Community rail in the North



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Rail Delivery Group



Community rail is a unique and growing movement comprising more than 70 community rail partnerships and 1,000 volunteer groups across Britain that help communities get the most from their railways.

It is about engaging local people at grassroots level to promote social inclusion, sustainable and healthy travel, wellbeing, economic development, and tourism. This involves working with train operators, local authorities, and other partners to highlight local needs and opportunities, ensuring communities have a voice in rail and transport development.

Community rail is evidenced to contribute high levels of social, environmental, and economic value to local areas, and countless stations have been transformed into hubs at the heart of the communities they serve. Evidence also shows community rail delivering life-changing benefits for individuals and families, helping people access new opportunities through sustainable travel by rail.

The movement is currently looking to play a key role in the recovery of our communities post-COVID, helping them build back better and greener.



“Community groups on the Northern network have always been at the forefront of community engagement. An increasing number of communities and individuals are benefitting from initiatives and projects that break down barriers, foster a more inclusive society, and build foundations for a more sustainable future.”
 Carolyn Watson, Northern



The North in numbers:

20 community rail partnerships (CRPs)
 Working along railway lines, with industry partners, to engage local communities. Partnerships stretch from the Tyne Valley in Northumberland down to Crewe in Cheshire.

350 station groups
 Voluntary groups bringing stations into the heart of communities. In the North, more than 70% of the network is 'adopted' by local volunteers.

Each Year
 Giving **140,000 Hours**
 Worth **£11.7m**
3,000 Volunteers

Community rail partnerships in the North of England:

Tyne Valley CRP -

the CRP's core aim is to promote, strengthen, and protect the role of the Tyne Valley line between Newcastle-Hexham-Carlisle.

The group works to increase awareness of rail and identify and support new passenger groups, promote sustainable and active travel, and develop stations for community benefit, such as the £500k project to restore waiting rooms and create office/studio space at Haltwhistle Station.



Yorkshire Coast CRP -

covers 13 stations on the coastal route between Hull and Scarborough. The CRP's main aims are to promote the line to increase passenger numbers and to involve local communities more closely in the development of the railway. Recent projects have included station enhancements, themed trains and marketing events, and the development of a heritage rail trail, celebrating the history of the line.



Bishop Line CRP -

covers six stations from Darlington to Bishop Auckland. The CRP's aim is to raise awareness of the line and improve services and infrastructure for local residents, businesses, and visitors, and current priorities include recruiting a more diverse and active membership, carrying our regular customer and community engagement activities, and promoting sustainable tourism by rail.



Penistone Line Partnership -

covers stations on the line from Huddersfield to Sheffield via Barnsley. The CRP supports community engagement and involvement along the line, promoting events and activities including guided walks, music trains, and art and gardening activities at stations. Recent projects have included the installation of information boards at Honley Station, designed by the local high school, and Dwell Time, an arts project raising awareness of mental wellbeing.



Esk Valley Railway Development Company -

covers 18 stations along the Esk Valley Line from Middlesbrough to Whitby. The CRP promotes the line as a vital link for rural communities and visitors, with recent projects including monthly dementia-friendly trains and the launch of new commuter service serving Middlesbrough for work and education. The partnership is also leading a long-term campaign to upgrade the Victorian signalling on the line.



South Fylde Line CRP* -

covers ten stations from Preston to Blackpool South. The CRP's aims are to develop the line to ensure well-used trains, community involvement, attractive station facilities, integration with other public transport, and a service that meets the needs of local people and visitors. Recent activity has included surveys to improve access provision at all stations, and a number of station-based art and gardening projects.



Settle-Carlisle Railway CRP -

the CRP works in partnership with the rail industry, local businesses, community groups and organisations to encourage socio-economic engagement along the world-renowned Leeds-Settle-Carlisle railway. The group works alongside The Friends of the Settle-Carlisle Line and the Settle & Carlisle Railway Trust to enhance the passenger experience and preserve the line's heritage, and are contracted by Northern to deliver marketing and promotional activities.



West of Lancashire CRP* -

covers lines from Preston to Ormskirk, Southport to Wigan and Liverpool, and Wigan to Kirkby. Priorities include promoting sustainable travel and development along the rail corridors, by improving services and facilities, increasing community involvement, and promoting local heritage and identity. Recent projects have included 'Make a Bee Line for the Station', a marketing campaign promoting attractions easily accessible from the lines.



Leeds-Morecambe CRP* -

covers the Bentham Line from Leeds to Morecambe and Heysham Port via Skipton, Bentham, and Lancaster. Priorities include promoting sustainable tourism along the line and engagement with local schools and colleges. In 2019, the CRP created Britain's first-ever dementia-friendly railway by adapting station environments, supporting journeys for those living with dementia, and raising awareness of dementia among the wider railway community.



Cumbrian Coast CRP** -

covers 26 stations from Barrow-in-Furness to Carlisle. The CRP's aim is to contribute to the economic wellbeing of all areas served by the line. Priorities include improving the rail service, developing new businesses, increasing community involvement, promoting sustainable tourism, and improving station environments and transport links. The CRP's recent 'Better Side of the Tracks' project used rail to tackle issues arising from social deprivation.



* part of Community Rail Lancashire
 ** part of Community Rail Cumbria

Lakes Line CRP** - covers the five stations between Oxenholme and Windermere. Priorities for the CRP include increasing passenger numbers and identifying potential growth markets for the rail service, assisting in the development of rural businesses along the line, and working with the tourism industry to promote rail use. The partnership recently revamped Staveley Station with new artwork, and has applied for funding to deliver access improvements.



Clitheroe Line CRP* - covers the line from Manchester Victoria to Clitheroe. A key focus for the CRP is the development of gateway stations to areas of natural beauty, relieving congestion into urban centres and using rail to provide sustainable access to the countryside. Recent projects have included 'Connecting Clitheroe', which saw apprentices from Northern work with local schools to install artwork and dementia-friendly signage at the station.



Furness Line CRP ** - covers ten stations from Carnforth to Barrow-in-Furness. The CRP works to improve services and capacity on the line, involve community organisations to harness people's energies and creativity, and support station development projects. The partnership promotes sustainable tourism by rail, and recently installed wayfinder panels at each station to signpost people to attractions easily accessible by train complemented by 15,000 'window gazer' guides.



High Peak and Hope Valley CRP - covers lines from Manchester to Sheffield, Glossop, and Buxton. The CRP works with partners including the Peak District National Park to promote rail-based tourism, supports groups excluded from rail travel, and works with volunteers to deliver station development projects. Recently, the CRP celebrated the 125th anniversary of passenger trains on the Hope Valley Line and the opening of a heritage-style platform canopy at Dore & Totley Station.



North Cheshire CRP - covers 11 stations from Hooton to Warrington Bank Quay. The CRP's vision is to encourage community engagement, economic development, education, connectivity and inclusivity. The partnership promotes sustainability by rail, working to break down barriers to travel and promote connectivity via bus, cycle and walking networks. A long-standing project for the CRP is to upgrade facilities at Little Sutton Station, including a new community café.



South East Manchester CRP - covers lines from Manchester to News Mills Central, Rose Hill, and Glossop, and Stockport to Buxton. The aim of the CRP is to represent and support communities along its lines to enable them to get the most benefit from their local railway, driving improvements to services and stations. The CRP has recently supported art projects at stations across its lines, with images depicting local history and heritage.



East Lancashire CRP* - covers lines from Preston to Colne, and Blackburn to Manchester Victoria via Todmorden. Priorities include a focus on social enterprise and sustainable development. The CRP leads on a variety of community and education projects engaging young people and others in art and local history, and continues to promote services via the Todmorden Curve, a multi-million pound infrastructure scheme that restored direct services from East Lancashire to Manchester.



Mid-Cheshire CRP - covers 16 stations from Manchester to Chester. The CRP promotes sustainable travel by rail for both commuters and visitors to the area, encourages active travel via walking/cycling, and highlights attractions for 'Marvellous Days Out' within easy reach of the line. Recent projects have included the My Cheshire Children's Art Competition, which resulted in new paintings and posters for 12 stations on the route.



South East Lancashire CRP - covers 24 stations on lines between Bolton and Preston, Wigan, Bromley Cross, and Manchester. Established in 2019, the CRP grew out of the work of Bolton Station Community Development Partnership, and retains a strong emphasis on promoting social inclusion and community cohesion, particularly through arts-related activities. The CRP is extending activity to other local stations, alongside supporting the continued transformation of Bolton as a community hub.



Crewe to Manchester CRP - covers lines linking Crewe, Wilmslow and Manchester via Stockport and Manchester Airport. A key priority for the CRP is to develop and improve facilities at stations to encourage modal shift to rail, and to promote sustainable leisure travel. Recent projects have included installing community-inspired artwork at stations along the line and the hosting of an art exhibition at Stockport Station.



* part of Community Rail Lancashire
 ** part of Community Rail Cumbria

Community rail supports the four main aims of The Department for Transport’s **Community Rail Development Strategy**, with a wide range of projects helping towards:

Providing a voice for the community

- To compensate for travel disruption on the line, the Furness Line CRP worked to offer communities discounted rail travel via the My Cumbria card;
- Crewe to Manchester CRP has supported station groups on art, biodiversity, and school projects to give stations a community feel;
- North Cheshire CRP continues to develop services from Liverpool to Chester/Wrexham via the Halton Curve, which has opened up new employment and recreation opportunities for local communities;
- The Lakes Line CRP works on rail confidence and travel activities with Sandgate School, a strategic special needs school;
- South East Manchester CRP promotes art displays at stations showcasing local history and heritage, supporting community pride and identity.

Promoting sustainable, healthy, accessible travel

- High Peak and Hope Valley CRP runs a series of station-to-station guided walks, promoting active and sustainable travel;
- Volunteers on the South Fylde Line CRP conducted a survey of access provision at stations, then met with stakeholders to seek solutions;
- The Leeds-Morecambe CRP has created the Rail to Trail, a series of 12 station-to-station walks along a 68-mile stretch of the Bentham Line;
- Clitheroe Line CRP helps to coordinate DalesRail, which involves an extensive guided walk programme led by leaders from the Lancashire Rail Ramblers;
- Tyne Valley CRP trained volunteers to carry out walking and cycling audits to and from stations on the line, supporting active travel and healthy lifestyles.

Community Rail Development Strategy

Bringing communities together and supporting diversity and inclusion

- West of Lancashire CRP supports the 'Hidden Gems' photography project, in which schools, including SEND schools, build connections with local stations;
- Penistone Line CRP works to promote mental wellbeing in communities along the line, highlighted by the 'Dwell Time' arts project;
- The Todmorden Curve line within the East Lancashire CRP has been enhanced to become the UK's first 'autism-friendly' railway line;
- On the Cumbrian Coast Line CRP, the 'Rail Journey to Recovery' project uses rail to support the rehabilitation of people with addiction issues;
- Mid-Cheshire CRP developed the 'Amazing Women by Rail' project, encouraging people to use the train to follow in the footsteps of female pioneers.

Supporting social and economic development

- The Bishop Line CRP works in partnership with the neighbouring Weardale Railway heritage line to promote it as a tourism attraction and boost the local economy;
- Esk Valley CRP supported the introduction of a commuter service on the line, opening up rural communities to new employment opportunities;
- Yorkshire Coast CRP runs special 'themed' trains, e.g. at Christmas and Halloween, to promote the line and engage families and communities;
- The Settle-Carlisle CRP supports economies along the line by working with local suppliers on activities including catering, marketing, and merchandising;
- Bolton and South Lancashire CRP has worked with the station partnership to turn space at Bolton Station into a hub for social, creative, and community development activities.

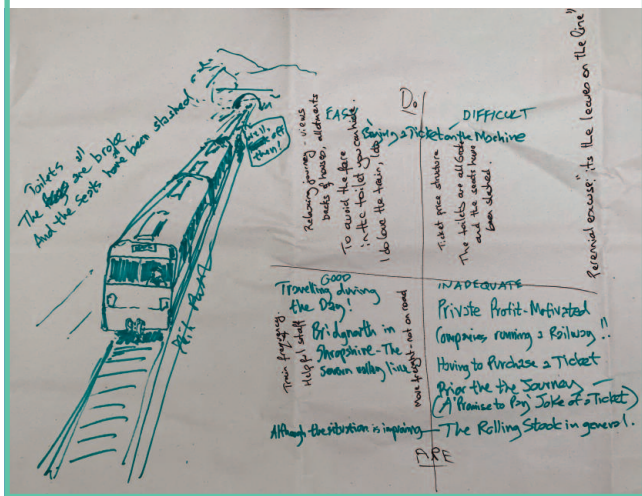
Community Rail Lancashire – education programmes

Community Rail Lancashire has been a pioneer for railway-based education projects for many years, with education programmes forming an integral part of its daily work. To date, the partnership has engaged more than 5,000 children from around 100 schools, including primary, secondary, and special schools. Experienced development officers have used the National Curriculum to generate flexible, meaningful sessions that develop an in-depth knowledge of the railway’s purpose and history, alongside promoting a love of rail travel, rail safety, and careers in rail. Projects are collated on the 'Down the Line' website, which offers a toolkit outlining links between rail and education. The partnership also chairs the national Community Rail Education Network.



Tyne Valley CRP – ‘Lyric and Line’

Tyne Valley CRP had been exploring different ways of identifying and understanding barriers to rail use, particularly among groups with additional needs. To engage three groups – a special school and two charities supporting adults with learning difficulties and isolation issues – they ran song writing sessions to bring out their views on rail travel through music, with each group writing and recording an original song that identified their challenges in using the train and the joys of rail travel. The findings allowed the CRP to set specific working objectives to reduce barriers to travel and continue to support the groups involved.



Station groups:

More than 350 stations across the North of England have been ‘adopted’ by their local communities, with around 3,000 volunteers helping to turn stations and their surroundings into welcoming, thriving, and celebratory gateways and hubs.

Across the North, groups are involved in: community gardening, food growing and biodiversity projects on station land; the creation of heritage boards or community artwork to help people learn about and take pride in their area; the basic upkeep of stations to create a safe and attractive environment for passengers; work with rail industry partners towards improvements, such as better shelters, signage or pedestrian and cyclist access; and running events, workshops or other activities to promote sustainable travel, bring people together, and celebrate the local community.

The Friends of Buxton Station

The station group at Buxton are involved in a huge range of community development and environmental projects. Their biodiversity work has included the creation of both a Japanese and wildflower garden, and they are part of the ‘Buzzing Stations’ project, in which stations offer environments for the rare and endangered Bilberry bumblebee. The group also coordinate a diverse range of artwork, producing murals, mosaics, and statues to make the station more welcoming. The Friends take a lead on local events, share their enthusiasm and expertise with other station groups, and last year were recognised as ‘heritage heroes’ by Buxton Civic Association, cementing their place at the heart of the community.



“

Our voluntary work, although in the main focused upon our station as an important gateway to Buxton, is really important to our town, perhaps now more than ever, as local independent businesses and tourist attractions struggle to come to terms with the damage done by Covid-19.”

David Carlisle, Friends of Buxton Station

‘Building back better’ post-COVID-19:

Since the pandemic hit, community rail has adapted, supporting local resilience, continuing to engage communities, volunteers, and partners, maintaining togetherness, and looking to the future. Groups are eager to do all they can to cope with challenges and seize opportunities, positioning rail at the centre of greener sustainable transport options needed to help combat the climate emergency.

In their local areas, individual CRPs and station groups have supported:

- Local understanding, insights, and dialogue, focusing on local people and places and how the railways can best serve their needs;
- Community resilience, wellbeing, and inclusion, bringing people and partners together;
- Building positivity and promoting rail and sustainable travel.

When Covid-19 first hit, huge demands were placed on the NHS and care sector, and volunteers at St Anne’s Station on the South Fylde Line immediately set out to help. They began making much-needed scrubs and bags for their local hospital, Blackpool Victoria Hospital, as well as other medical centres and care homes. With funding from the South Fylde Line CRP, Community Rail Lancashire, and the local town council, volunteers at other stations on the line also got involved to support the ‘Scrubs’ project, bringing local communities and rail partners together at a time of national crisis.

Many CRPs used their local knowledge and connections to support services for key workers and ensure essential travel was made safe during the pandemic, including the Bishop Line CRP, who gave out free face coverings for passengers, complete with the Bishop Line smile.



Action Stations Bingley and Crossflatts

This station group have been busy since their formation in 2017, turning a disused patch of land at Bingley into a Five Rise Locks-themed garden, celebrating the nearby Leeds Liverpool Canal. They have also established an Incredible Edibles project, with train and carriage planters on the platforms filled with plants and herbs, funded by the town council.

To improve the station environment, the group have developed a book swap scheme, installed new signage to promote Five Rise Locks and local tourism, added artwork to station buildings, and created a Finger Spelling project to aid communication and inclusion of the deaf community.

To support regeneration post-COVID, the Friends of Buxton Station are involved in the ‘Buxton Kickstart’ recovery campaign and have developed a Rail Retail Trail to help support small businesses and boost the local economy. During the first national lockdown, the group also ran a ‘mini-saga’ creative writing challenge to support the mental health and wellbeing of young people.

All CRPs have been supported by Northern and other train operators throughout the pandemic, and community rail groups will be working with all rail industry partners to promote rail as a safe, inclusive, and sustainable form of travel, particularly for leisure and tourism, when restrictions allow.



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