

Community Rail 2021/22

by Changing



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Foreword



Last year, when I wrote the foreword to our 2020/21 Community Rail report, I reflected on how well community rail lines had stood up to the pressures of lockdown, proving to be among the most resilient of all our rail services. At the time, I was urging everyone to prepare for the easing of restrictions and for the return of rail customers.

As expected, community rail took up the challenge. They were quickly back into the station gardens, and on to their web pages promoting rail journeys and encouraging customers back for leisure or for work. We had some spectacular highlights, with our St Ives branch recording its highest ever passenger numbers over the summer.

We also had the excitement of returning regular rail service to Okehampton and the launch of Dartmoor Rail services. This was truly partnership in action, from the professionalism and expertise of Network Rail who used new Project Speed principles to deliver under budget and well within time, through to the very active Station Friends and community campaigners, who fought so hard to reopen the line, and who then worked tirelessly to make that opening a success. It was also very much a success for community rail. From the start, Devon and Cornwall Rail Partnership worked with the local community, with the schools, neighbouring businesses and the rural communities of the Moor. They put together a campaign of activity and a dedicated Dartmoor Line website that won the Devon and Cornwall Rail Partnership first place for communication at the national Community Rail Awards. An award I was very lucky to be able to present to them personally, given that GWR jointly hosted the event with South West Railway.

But none of us were expecting to be hit by Omicron before we could consolidate the growing return to rail and start to regain more of our business and commuting market. First came the 'pingdemic', which inevitably led to cancellations and delays, and then the return of restrictions, including working from home.

Again, it was our community rail lines that remained resilient, and our community rail partners who continued to plan and campaign, ready to start again, and start again we must. As a nation we all face challenging budgets and rail must compete for its place against other spending. Now more than ever, we need to work together, to make best use of our joint resources, so that we can keep connecting people, keep our communities in touch with one another and build for the future.

I know you can do that. I believe that community rail will be a lasting and growing part of any future railway structure and here at GWR we will continue to champion you, and your work, in the way that you champion our customers and your communities.

Thank you.

Mark Hopwood
Managing Director

Hello from the GWR team

After another exciting year, it's important to step back for a moment and survey the landscape. And where better to take stock than here, the GWR annual community rail booklet, where we showcase the most ambitious projects from across the network?

This booklet is a great way to document and celebrate what we've achieved over the last 12 months. It communicates to those outside the community rail family, such as potential funders, the true value of what we do.

Could there be a better measure of our continuing success than the growth of the community rail partnership (CRP) network? In the last twelve months, we've seen the emergence of two new CRPs on the GWR network (Reading Basingstoke and South Wessex), taking the grand total to ten.

It takes a lot of effort and commitment to set up a CRP, and although we offer support where we can, it requires dedicated volunteers to see projects through to the end. We are massively grateful to all those who have persevered, giving local people a voice and driving local economic growth.

And persevere you did! With the ongoing pandemic, CRPs have had to devise new and innovative ways of engaging communities with the rail network, even while train use was at its lowest. Through craft projects, virtual tea parties and much more, volunteers maintained a sense of togetherness and helped tackle loneliness, despite the odds.

Bringing people together is central to what we do. That's why one of the most exciting achievements of this year has been the growing capacity for collaborative working. More and more, we've been joining forces with Network Rail's Customer Support Manager Vicky Clift, who has been a vital partner in helping realise many of our community rail projects.



From left: Nicole Black, Ann Jenner, Jo Hake and Emma Morris

Vicky and GWR's Community Manager Emma Morris have been nominated for the Alliance Award at GWR's Excellence Awards 2022. The nomination recognises Vicky and Emma's hard work in improving collaboration between Network Rail and GWR in the context of community rail. Well done to them both! The winners will be announced at a special event in Cardiff on 6 May.

While collaborative working has helped us expand our reach, the team at GWR has simultaneously seen significant internal growth. There are now four GWR colleagues dedicated to CRPs: Community Manager Emma Morris; CRP Relationship Manager Nicole Black; Community Delivery Manager Ann Jenner; and CRP Marketing Manager Jo Hake.

As one of our first projects together, we published an exciting newsletter that celebrated the day-to-day activities of community rail volunteers. Keep an eye out for the next issue, coming later this year.

Among the projects included in the newsletter, and here in this booklet, are many promoting accessibility and inclusivity. We continue to work hard to actively encourage greater diversity on the railway. It's only through engagement with underprivileged groups that we can make the network as inclusive as possible.

We look forward to hearing from you. If you have any questions, don't hesitate to get in touch at community.rail@gwr.com

Diversity and Inclusion

I recently spoke to new colleagues as part of their induction training. It was their second day in the business and, using just three words, I began by telling them my key responsibilities: colleagues, customers, community. When it comes to thinking about inclusion, equality and diversity in the railway industry, those three words are at the centre of it all.



Odis Palmer

I always feel extremely privileged when asked to support projects that directly impact on people's lives in a positive and meaningful way. Not only do I get to interact with our community rail partners, I also get to meet other amazing people through the various charities and organisations I work with.

In GWR's east region, we work closely with The Prince's Trust, providing work experience training sessions, coaching and mentoring – supporting groups of young people who have overcome challenges every day just to show up, take part and learn from our team.

Also in the east, we have been working with Mencap to provide six-month internships at stations such as Oxford and Paddington. In fact, our last intern at Oxford started a new job at Reading station in January. Due to Oxford station's great work supporting Mencap, we are now working directly with Oxford County Council to provide work placements for neurodiverse members of that community.

It's my hope that we can replicate this great work in as many parts of the network as possible, and encourage our inclusion, diversity and equality staff networks to engage with these projects and demonstrate to communities that they are being seen.

In our central region over the last 12 months we have worked with the charity Whizz-Kidz, which supports young wheelchair users. Despite the restrictions of Covid-19, members of our Disability Working Group were able to provide online work experience conversations, helping young people learn about our industry and encouraging them to consider working with us in the future.

Other projects with Whizz-Kidz include reverse mentoring, so colleagues can learn from these young wheelchair users. It also includes an accessibility audit of our internal workspaces to ensure we are providing an inclusive environment for our colleagues as well as our customers.

In the west, we are working with the Devon BAME community to upskill volunteers to become qualified trainers in the workplace. They will assist and guide other community members in job applications and interview techniques.

Also in the west, we are supporting the Torbay Council Community Education programme, where I help facilitate work experience for young adults from socially disadvantaged and neurodiverse backgrounds. This work involves support from stations and our Learning and Development team, who have dedicated staff that deliver content for many of the inclusion, diversity and equality projects I'm involved in.

I encourage CRPs to reach out and contact me. The access I have to the Learning and Development team and staff networks could be very useful. Also, my experience working with some of our CRPs, as well as charities such as The Prince's Trust and Mencap, means I can offer programmes that may already fit with your community's project goals.

Wherever I can I'm happy to help.

Odis Palmer, Inclusion & Diversity Manager
Odis.Palmer@gwr.com



From left: James Frank, Joshua Dean and Craig Page

South West Wales Connected Community Rail Partnership



Launched in March 2020 and hosted by 4theRegion, South West Wales Connected covers stations across South West Wales, bringing together communities in Port Talbot, Neath, Swansea, Carmarthenshire and Pembrokeshire.

Since it began, our number one goal has been connecting communities and putting people and places at the heart of everything we do. While many CRPs have faced challenges due to Covid-19, we haven't stopped! As well as hosting several virtual meetings to help create a shared vision and a set of priorities for improving our communities, we have worked on a number of collaborative projects across the network.

Welcome project

We have completed the designs for our welcome banners, and we are now working hard to get them printed to scale and installed at many of the stations across the South West Wales Connected network. The banners have been designed by local communities, with photos and quotes revealing why the location is so special. This has connected people to the railway, giving them a sense of ownership, and will hopefully encourage others to visit destinations they have never considered before.



Changemakers project funds colourful containers at Surf School Wales, Port Talbot

Train Chat

Here at South West Wales Connected, we believe that young people are the future of the network. That's why we reached out to various groups to get a view on how we can encourage young people to use the train. We heard about the factors that inhibit young people from travelling by train, including location, accessibility and cost, and asked why they thought train travel instead of taking the car was a good idea. The response was outstanding. We discovered that many young people don't know about railcards, the environmental benefits and the enjoyability of taking the train. Working with the feedback, we came up with a project called Train Chat. The project was co-created with young people to showcase the benefits of train and public transport. The principle of the project is to encourage youngsters to ditch the car and plan a sustainable day out. Young people across the region were tasked with designing a media campaign to encourage other young people to think sustainably when planning a day out.



Neath Port Talbot College hosts a youth engagement event

We gave them a sizeable budget to create their campaign, from making TikTok videos to producing social media adverts and posters, before launching their final campaign in early 2022. The young people also took part in workshops about sustainability and the social values of running a campaign. Once the campaign is completed, participants will be invited to attend an event, watching their campaigns go live and showcasing their ideas to others across the network.

Changemakers

We are extremely proud of our Changemakers project, which spans the region. While many CRPs have had funding pots available to help support communities across their network, we have been working with our host, 4theRegion, and with train operating companies such as GWR and Transport for Wales, as well as various private companies, to ensure that we connect communities and businesses on the network.

We have completed our first round of funding to support projects, encourage place-making and help with the co-creation of community businesses. We have supported these organisations with grants of £300 to £1,000 per project.

We supported a surf school in Port Talbot; helped fund the procurement of shipping containers that were turned into modern workshops and decorated with local art. We helped fund a craft group in Llanelli that helps connect people with befriending services, dementia support and community art.

With round two of the Changemakers project under way, we can't wait to continue connecting local projects, communities and businesses on the railway network, and to create a trusted relationship with communities and train operating companies in the future.

What's next for South West Wales Connected?

As we continue to work with our communities and train operating companies, we can't wait to showcase more positive change across the network and really put the heart back into the railway. We continue to work on place-making, community cohesion and connecting people with everything we do. We have lots of plans for the coming year, including creating community gardens in stations and promoting the railway's accessibility across the region, while ensuring that the communities are consulted when it comes to their areas.



Participants at a Changemakers event at Ysgol Hendrefelin school in Neath



Partnership Officer, Ashley Morgan, celebrating the Changemaker Fund launch at Swansea station

Gloucestershire Community Rail Partnership



Although a quieter year on many fronts, we continue to support and represent communities on matters of connectivity and sustainability. Thanks to the community rail family, and our committed and dynamic team, we have gone from strength to strength, despite the challenges faced due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

People and communities have been central to our thinking, helping bring the region and sustainable transport to the fore. We have used a participative, community-led approach in our four programme areas:

1. Communities
2. Youth and Education
3. Tourism and Leisure
4. Transport Planning

In summer 2021, we welcomed Faatimah Bham, our Community Rail Development Officer, to the team. Faatimah comes with a background in engineering and a fresh dedication to community voice and environmental sustainability – and she’s already proving to be transformative. She launched our Gloucester Gallery in November and has plans to deliver further creative station activities across the county.

Communities

Station galleries

We are proud to have launched two new galleries this year. At Cheltenham Spa, Cheltenham Camera Club turned the waiting rooms into galleries that inspire people to explore the wider Gloucestershire area by rail. Our inaugural exhibition at Gloucester, in partnership with Cotswold Canals Connected and Unlocking the Severn, explores how local people can connect through photography, mindful walks and the River Severn, with the group sharing stories of resilience through the first Covid-19 lockdown. Gloucester, Stonehouse and Stroud stations have linked exhibitions connecting urban and rural communities through rail and art.



Attendees at the launch of the Community Art Project at Gloucester station

Station adoption

After the necessary pause during the pandemic, we are delighted to see station adoption groups back working across Gloucestershire. Our various adoption groups have been hard at work improving the station environment, with new areas of land allocated to gardens, platform galleries, community workshops and exhibitions, brightening up the everyday.

Thirteen Network Rail volunteers supported Edible Stroud by tidying up the beds, helping to get the group active and inspired again. Thanks to GWR’s Community Cohesion Programme, Edible Stroud are now replanting the area and sealing the pathways to reduce maintenance requirements. At the same time, Stonehouse in Bloom have exciting plans to develop the old Station Master’s garden. Watch this space!



Pocket-sized accessibility maps were produced for Gloucester, Stroud, Stonehouse, Lydney and Cheltenham (above)

Access and connectivity guides

This year, we worked with Gloucestershire County Council, and other partners, to design and produce local access maps for Gloucester, Cheltenham, Stroud, Stonehouse and Lydney. These pocket-sized connectivity guides help local people and visitors find their way more easily. For Gloucester, the access map contains additional information that supports disabled people (including those with hidden disabilities), highlighting accessible and quieter routes.

Youth and education

Platform – joint education programme

We are delighted to be working in partnership with Severnside, Worcestershire and TransWilts CRPs to deliver our new education programme, Platform. Platform will engage with young people and schools to help CRPs better understand local needs while actively encouraging the use of rail. We welcome three new members to the education team: Imogen Sackett, Emilie Dawson and Galena Ivanova.

Let’s Talk Travel

Let’s Talk Travel is designed to promote travel confidence and develop access to jobs and opportunities. This year, we have extended and developed links with employability and educational professionals, gathering information about attitudes to public transport, and providing information and support for professionals.

Jobseekers and learners often limit their choices because travel is a barrier. Our resources and workshops address issues such as anxiety, financial barriers and logistical difficulties related to travel. Resources include leaflets about travel confidence and cutting the cost of travel, along with access maps. As demand for our bespoke workshops has increased, we produced our first bimonthly newsletter, allowing tips and information to be shared more easily among partners.

Kickstart Scheme

Through the Kickstart Scheme, which provides funding to employers to create jobs for 16-to-24-year-olds on Universal Credit, Andy Ives has spent the last six months on placement with GCRP.

“My main project was analysing the Youth Transport Survey, which collected data on the feelings and experiences of young people when using public transport in Gloucestershire,” Andy explains. “A key highlight from the data is that over 80% of young people are conscious of public transport being a smarter environmental choice. I presented this information to our steering group, helping to encourage more young people to use sustainable modes of transport.”

“I’ve massively enjoyed my work with GCRP. Seeing projects through to completion has helped me achieve what I wanted: developing my workplace skills and seeing my work benefit people’s lives.”



A group of young people visit Hawkwood in Stroud as part of the Getaway programme



Safety training at Gloucester station

Getaway

Last autumn, we launched our new youth programme, Getaway. Underpinned by the idea that the countryside is for everyone, and that young people should feel confident and independent when travelling by rail and sustainable transport, we’ve been working with two Gloucester-based community organisations, The Friendship Café and The Music Works, to provide inspiring days out to rural destinations.

Access to active and creative experiences at Hawkwood in Stroud, WWT Slimbridge and Cotswold National Landscape has helped build young people’s aspirations. This project provides up to 120 young people from underrepresented urban communities with enriching experiences, and with return rail journeys that build confidence and independence.

Leisure and Tourism

Taste for Travel – Taste for Travel Bookable

Working with community groups, local artists and independent food and drinks businesses, we produced four maps that included 16 food, farm and forest trails. Each was designed to inspire local adventure near Stroud, Stonehouse, Cheltenham and Lydney stations.

Working with Visit Gloucestershire, we are now developing bookable trails, linking rail, bus and active travel to destination experiences across the county. These easy-to-use integrated experiences will be designed to attract locals and visitors to consider rail journeys as part of the adventure, meanwhile supporting local businesses.

The Great Rail Experience

This pioneering project encourages leisure travel in the region, with a focus on sustainable transport. We aim to establish a working model that helps forge and sustain relationships between community rail, destination management organisations and the rail and transport industry, in the context of leisure travel. We hope to inspire further understanding around the role sustainable transport plays in the climate emergency.

Working in partnership with Visit Gloucestershire, we will include rail and other sustainable modes of transport in the destination experiences designed for tourism in Gloucestershire. Our Taste for Travel Bookable is a working model that will show the economic, social and environmental impact these leisure and travel choices will provide.

Transport Planning

Connecting New Communities

In 2021, we worked with local organisations and a travel plan coordinator to run local events, promoting sustainable transport choices to new residents in Great Oldbury, a new housing development area near Stonehouse.

We produced a connectivity guide for residents at Great Oldbury, focused on rail and sustainable transport links. We also supported transport awareness events and collaborated with the local bus operator to promote a new bus route that connects the site to Gloucester city centre, Stonehouse and Stroud. The King’s Stanley development also benefited when we researched local travel needs and issues at a pop-up event.

The Connecting New Communities project will now look at the importance of community in relation to transport issues, innovative participation and engagement. This project brings together developers, local authorities, transport operators and, most importantly, local community organisations and groups.

Developer Guide

A key priority in 2021 was developing a way of working with the local transport authority that ensured rail and wider transport integration was fully considered in planning processes.

The Developer Guide was produced to make sure local communities and stakeholders have their say on important transport issues. It also provided templates and tools that bring together hyperlocal evidence to aid decision making. The guide helps with shaping community views throughout the planning process.

We are working with Community Rail Network to promote this approach at its 2022 conference, and are providing support in the development of a national guide.



Edible Stroud volunteers get down to some much-needed maintenance

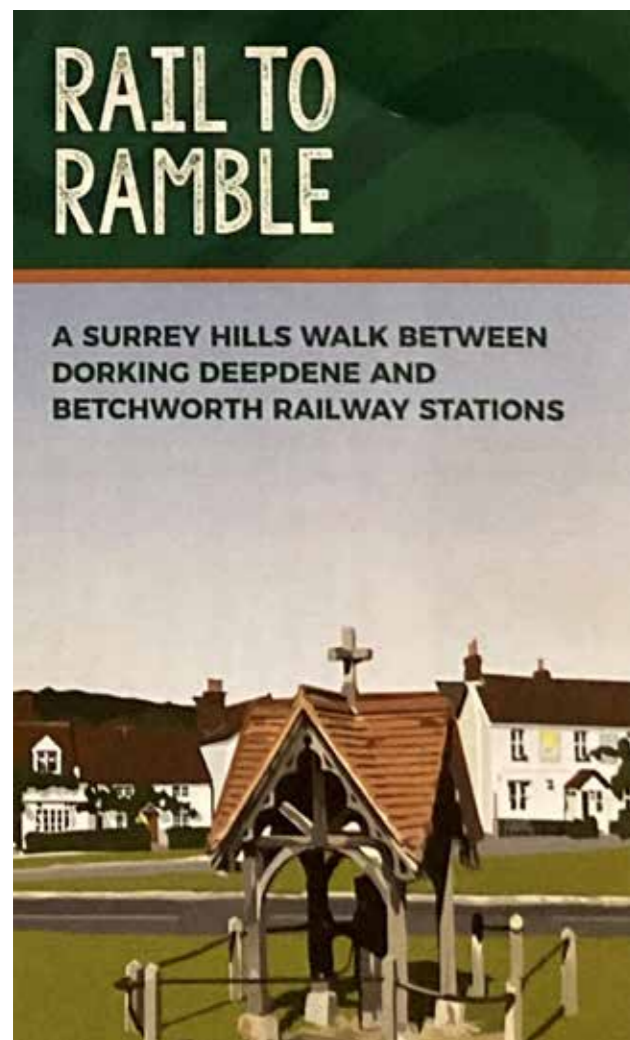
Southeast Communities Rail Partnership



Southeast Communities Rail Partnership covers nine lines across East and West Sussex, Kent, Surrey, and Berkshire, working with GWR on the North Downs Line between Reading and Gatwick Airport, and looking after 11 stations in the Surrey Hills and Blackwater Valley. As there are several major interchange stations, notably Guildford, the CRP also works closely with Govia Thameslink Railway, South Western Railway and Network Rail.

Highlights of 2021

This past year has been a highly successful one for the CRP, with the launch of the Rail to Ramble initiative in the Surrey Hills, which maps out walking routes between stations, taking in local landmarks and businesses.



The Rail to Ramble booklet encourages people to explore the countryside by train

Reg's Garden at Farnborough North was formally opened in September 2021 by Sir Peter Hendy (Chair of Network Rail) and Mark Hopwood CBE (Managing Director of GWR). It was a great occasion, which brought members of the railway family together with the local community to celebrate an amazing transformation – the garden going from overgrown plot to food farm, play area and apiary. A major feature of the garden is the tables, planters and benches, all made from recycled pallets, kindly donated by local builders merchant Gibbs & Dandy. Network Rail volunteers are seen here putting the finishing touches to some furniture.



Bench construction at Reg's Garden, Farnborough station



Mark Hopwood MBE and Sir Peter Hendy at the opening Reg's Garden



Planters at Reg's Garden

Once again, The Patchworking Garden Project, a local group supporting those with additional needs, because of physical or mental health conditions, learning disabilities, dementia, bereavement or isolation, will be looking after the planters at Deepdene. GWR will be sponsoring several students to plan and stock the areas ready for the 'pickable patch', where passengers can help themselves to broad beans and strawberries.

With grant funding awarded by GWR, a project that has been on the CRP and community radar for over four years will finally come to fruition at Chilworth

station when the wooden picket fencing is replaced by anodised and painted metal, dramatically reducing the need for regular maintenance. Several redundant items will also be removed in a general tidy-up of the area around the station. Once the new running-in boards have been installed, the station will be a real gateway to the Surrey Hills.

Chilworth Infants and Tillingbourne Junior schools have brightened up the waiting shelters at Chilworth with their artwork based on the local area and connection to the railway, which was installed in February 2022.



Platform paintings: Chilworth station displays work by local schoolchildren

Coming soon

- New running-in boards are due to be installed at ten stations on the line, six in the Surrey Hills and four in the Blackwater Valley respectively. In most cases they will replace old, signs that are looking weather-beaten, and some that have suffered graffiti.
- A joint project between Network Rail, GWR, SWR, CrossCountry and the CRP to commission a major artwork that will be sited in the underpass below the platforms in Guildford, is due to be formally unveiled in April 2022.
- Network Rail contractors will carry out survey work at the Farnborough North Station House, at the same time as a Change of Use planning application will hopefully come to fruition,

- moving the building from 'commercial' to 'community use'. Once ready, the local community group will press on with leasing the building and refurbishing for the many groups already lined up to use it.
- GWR has kindly supported the 1st Sandhurst Scout Group in their efforts to make the Scout hut safe and secure after suffering many bouts of vandalism. They intend to install CCTV monitoring and expand the use of the Scout hut to the wider community.
- We are planning a treasure trail along the North Downs Line. The trail must be completed by train, with opportunities to jump off and collect clues at various points. It is due to take place during the Easter holidays.

Worcestershire Community Rail Partnership



As a young CRP, we are continuing to develop links with local communities, charities and interest groups, alongside our funding partners GWR, West Midlands Railway, CrossCountry, Worcestershire County Council (WCC), West Midlands Rail Executive and the Cotswold Line Promotion Group.

We have four stations operated by GWR in Worcestershire and three of them – Evesham, Pershore and Worcestershire Parkway – are officially adopted and receive love and attention from our wonderful volunteers, making them fabulous places to visit. We will be working hard over the coming year to get Honeybourne adopted so that travellers, tourists and local residents can enjoy similar benefits.

WCRP was constituted in the last quarter of 2019, so we are still very much a young yet enthusiastic organisation that has a wealth of knowledge and expertise both in rail and other areas. Obviously, the global pandemic, together with its associated restrictions, has had an impact on our plans for community rail in Worcestershire. That said, we have had some fantastic results, with several community events taking place across the county in the past year. We also held our first anniversary event at Worcester Guildhall in November 2021, where station adopters, stakeholders and partners could come together to discuss our activities. We were extremely pleased to welcome Councillor Alan Amos, who is a Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Highways and Transport at Worcestershire County Council, to our event.

At Worcestershire Parkway (the first brand new station to be built in Worcestershire in over 100 years), WCRP and GWR worked with the Bee Friendly Trust to create a habitat to encourage bees and insects. GWR also worked with artist Alice Baker, who designed a colourful, vibrant mural on white walls, depicting the importance of bees in our lives. The station has been adopted by St. Richard's Hospice, whose volunteers will be looking after the planters from Spring onwards.

Aside from station adoption, WCRP has coordinated two Wheels 2 Rail events at Evesham and Pershore stations, in conjunction with Wychavon District Council and GWR, and with funding from Community Rail Network. Cyclists were encouraged to bring their bikes to the stations for a free maintenance check and security marking from Dr Bike, a mobile bicycle repair and maintenance service. There were family cycling sessions during the morning and afternoon, with a qualified Bikeability instructor who helped riders gain confidence in riding to and from the station. As with the station adoption groups, these events emphasised the link between town and station, while encouraging sustainable travel and environmental awareness.



Alice Baker brings some colour to Worcestershire Parkway with her mural exploring the importance of bees in our lives



Riders attend Wheels 2 Rail at Evesham station



Cyclists take advantage of free maintenance and security marking at Wheels 2 Rail

We have been working in partnership with three other CRPs (Severnside, TransWilts and Gloucestershire) to deliver a Joint Education Scheme to teach children across the area about rail travel. It will support community rail's four pillars by providing a voice for the community; promoting sustainable, healthy and accessible travel; bringing communities together and supporting diversity and inclusion; and supporting social and economic development. Two teachers have now been recruited and have started work on this project.

We have also worked with Window Seater (a platform that delivers stories to travellers about the incredible world outside their windows) and GWR to help develop a phone app that gives passengers details of places of interest coming up on the line.

WCRP is hoping to build further links with communities across Worcestershire over the coming year to showcase the county's many attractions.



Bee Friendly planters at Worcestershire Parkway encourage pollinating insects

Reading Basingstoke Community Rail Partnership



This time last year, Hampshire Community Rail Partnership CIC began discussing with GWR the possibility of creating a new CRP – GWR’s tenth and Hampshire CRP’s third! We were delighted to be given the go-ahead and to start promoting the stations on the line between Reading and Basingstoke.

It has been an exciting time launching the Reading Basingstoke Community Rail Partnership, discovering all the destinations along the line and reaching out to community groups in the area, despite the impact of Covid regulations on activities.

After extensive research into local attractions in easy reach of our stations by bus, bike or on foot, we launched our new website, line guide and Facebook page. The line guide is now being made available in other railway stations further afield to encourage more people to visit our area by train.

To coincide with Community Rail Week and its Go Green by Train campaign in October, we hosted our first CRP awareness day in the Brunel Arcade at Reading station. We handed out the new line guide, found out why people should visit Reading and asked passengers to sign ‘Go Green Pledges’. They told us there are more cultural activities happening in the town than people are aware of; that some of the best things about Reading are the abbey and the river; and that a walk along the Kennet and Avon Canal is not to be missed. So, a great deal for us to work on in publicising the area more widely.



Children learn about railway safety at Reading station

Part of the work we do is to encourage young people to travel safely. To make a change from visiting schools, we worked in partnership with GWR, Network Rail and the British Transport Police to invite children along to Reading station to enjoy a presentation, a trip around the station and a look inside a police van. The excitement on some of the children’s faces as they were shown how a train is dispatched was memorable and they took a great deal of learning, particularly about railway safety, home with them.



Passengers at Reading station were encouraged to sign ‘Go Green Pledges’

We are looking at how we can improve the station environments at all the Reading stations and several groups from Reading’s diverse population have already expressed an interest in this project. In addition, we worked with GWR and Network Rail to hold a joint event at Reading station in March to promote International Women’s Day.

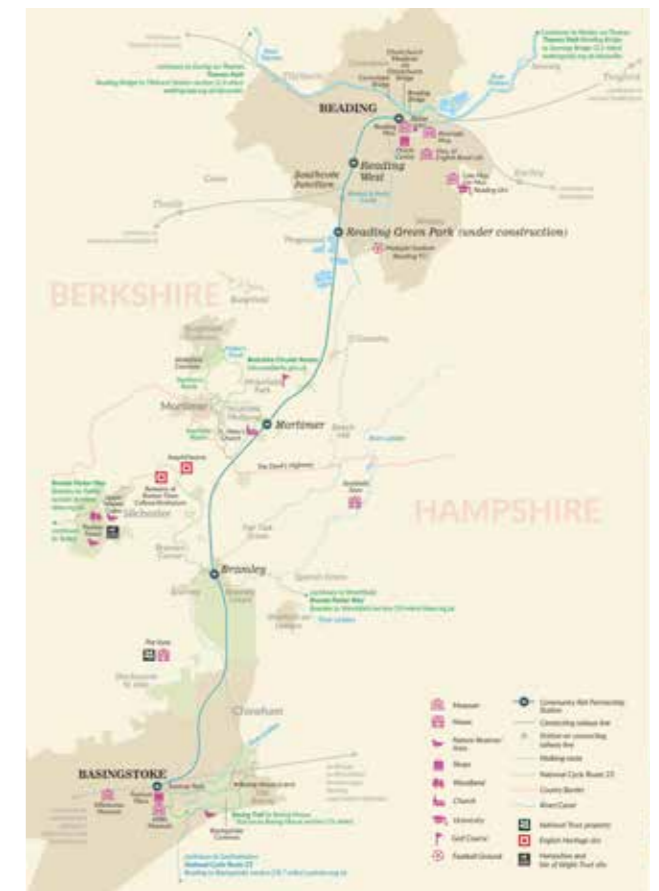
Elsewhere in Hampshire, we piloted Dementia Training for front-line railway staff and are delighted to soon be working with Basingstoke’s Station Manager to roll out the training at Basingstoke station. This will complement our Travel with Confidence

Training package, helping those with learning difficulties or mental health problems to navigate rail travel information and travel safely. As this training develops, we will be working with the British Transport Police and GWR accessibility mentors to identify and mitigate barriers to travel.

We are excited that the new Green Park station will open this year and, seeing how our initial contact with local community groups develops, we plan to enhance the appearance of Reading West, Bramley and Mortimer stations and make sure as many people as possible can feel confident in using our trains.



Reading station hosts a CRP awareness day



A new guide highlights things to see on the Reading Basingstoke line

Three Rivers Community Rail Partnership



Our work at stations has been slower than usual over the past year, but we were delighted to have eight stations added to our approved station adopters lists, including large stations from South Western Railway, such as Winchester and Salisbury. The work volunteers undertake across the county is amazing and we are thankful for their continued support.

While our rail bus link services were out of action because of Covid-19 restrictions, we tried to find a way to improve onward travel opportunities using funding from the Community Rail Network and Department for Transport's Integrated Transport Fund. In Three Rivers CRP, another pioneering project was set up to link rail, bus and ferry joint ticketing. After much negotiation we were able to establish a one-day ticket, called the Waterside Wanderer, which provides unlimited train and

bus travel in the Southampton and New Forest Waterside area, along with a trip on the Hythe Ferry. We hope the joint ticketing will let others see that all public transport operators can work together, especially as Three Rivers is promoting the reopening of the Waterside Railway at the same time under the Government's Reversing Beeching Fund. Special thanks must go to South Western Railway, GWR, Blue Star Buses and the Hythe Ferry for developing this great ticket idea.

The Day Ranger ticket allows passengers to explore the area by bus, train and ferry

Hampshire Community Rail Partnership

Both Three Rivers CRP and Reading Basingstoke CRP, as well as East Hampshire CRP, come under Hampshire Community Rail Partnership CIC, which continues to develop well, thanks to its partners' input and support. Hampshire CRP CIC is looking to develop more in the coming year, so watch this space.

South Wessex Community Rail Partnership



Setting up a standalone CRP from scratch, including becoming a Community Interest Company, is not easy. Doing nearly everything on Teams and Zoom probably doesn't help. But we are getting there.

By the time this goes to press, we should be functional, with a new recruit to the family of CRP officers, who we will encourage to engage with their neighbouring colleagues as much as possible, so everyone knows the new kid on the block.

We will be covering the Heart of Wessex Line from South of Westbury, including all the stations and stops from Frome to Weymouth.

Our directors together represent the communities and station groups of Westbury, Frome, Chetnole, Maiden Newton and Dorchester. And we will be sure to familiarise ourselves with the other station groups along our line so that no one feels left out.

In addition, we will actively support GWR in encouraging wider recognition and use of the whole Heart of Wessex Line from Bristol southwards.

We have already started by supporting Heather Cullimore of Severnside CRP in her efforts to help the Community Rail Network put up a new unified Heart of Wessex Line page on the Scenic Rail Britain website.

Meanwhile, the smaller things, individual to our stations, continue. A very impressive ramp on the western side of Dorchester West station was formally opened on 22 October 2021. It will greatly assist the less able to access the station, and anyone who has to visit Dorset Hospital. While that activity pre-dates our existence, we must thank all those who contributed to its cost.

Although for safety reasons we were unable to install a heritage-style bench at Chetnole, the station's loss was Maiden Newton's gain, as the bench has been placed there instead. Maiden Newton now has better disabled access too. Maiden Newton has the blessing and curse of being a listed building and will soon need some tender loving care to keep it looking good. We will be encouraging all involved to help achieve this.

Other stations have plans to improve their environment or access. Yetminster will be seeking to tidy up its disused platform, which is currently an eyesore.

Bruton, which has improved its pedestrian access to the town, is exploring easier access from the Western side of the platform, to limit the need to use the footbridge.

At Frome, there are plans to keep the disused platform on the other side of its listed wooden station hall (which can only be accessed by crossing the line) in good repair and looking attractive.

We have lots of things to be getting on with, and we look forward to seeking even more exciting projects to improve the standing and importance of our railway communities in the coming years.



Plans are afoot to tidy the disused platform at Yetminster station



A GWR Turbo passes Melbury Bubb, near Chetnole

TransWilts Community Rail Partnership



Despite the restrictions and complications brought about by the pandemic, it has been another busy year at the TransWilts CRP.

The Melksham Hub Café opened in March 2021, after months of fitting out. The café uses a sustainable income model, which relies on drawing in a variety of customers, including passers-by, local businesses, regular customers and those attending an event or meeting. The café offers take-away or eat-in options, with tables and chairs inside and out. The menu includes a variety of local produce and the breakfasts are becoming 'legendary'. The outside gazebo has been fitted with protective shutters, heating and lighting and is available all year round.



Home of the legendary Melksham Hub breakfast

The café also provides a pick-up-and-go service for those rushing for a train, and has been awarded a five-star hygiene rating from the local authority.

The Hub has already proved popular, with a number of activities staged there, including car-boot sales, school artwork competitions, a Melksham bikers' club meet-up and a petting zoo event.

At Chippenham station, local schools took part in a Little Growers project. Community Rail Network provided funding for seeds, compost and other materials, and the children nurtured the plants before they were transported to the station and grown in planters. The children also designed artwork, which was hung around the platforms to brighten up the area. The schools thoroughly enjoyed the project and are keen to do something similar in the future.



Little Growers show off their achievements at Chippenham station

Up the line at Swindon, the newly formed Station Adoption Group successfully applied to GWR for funding to provide planters for the station. The purple containers have enhanced the environment on the platforms and at the short stay car park. The group is now working on further plans for 2022, including a Try the Train event, when conditions allow.

Last year marked the 180th anniversary of the opening of Chippenham station. The friends' group at the station collected artefacts that tell the story of the station, and mounted an exhibition that ran in the autumn and is available online.



Chippenham station's 180th anniversary exhibition

Alongside other CRPs, TransWilts was proud to take part in the annual Poppies to Paddington event for Remembrance Week. Our wreath was carried from Westbury to London to join more than 100 other commemorative messages ahead of a special service beside the war memorial on Paddington station's Platform 1 at the 11th hour on the 11th day of the 11th month.



TransWilts CRP's Remembrance Day wreath embarks for London Paddington

With the relaxation of Covid-19 restrictions, alongside government guidance that advised outdoor exercise, TransWilts produced two leaflets for walkers and cyclists.

The aim is to inspire people to use local trains to head to destinations with accessible walks and cycle rides.

The leaflets can be found at all our stations and have been circulated to local businesses and organisations now lockdown restrictions have been lifted.

TransWilts CRP, Severnside CRP, Gloucestershire CRP and Worcestershire CRP are working together to develop their education provision over the next two years. None of the partnerships has a dedicated Education Officer nor relevant teaching experience or qualifications, so we have developed a business case and plan to develop a Joint Community Rail Partnership Education programme that can be accessed by schools and young people across each of the four partnership areas, with funding from GWR, CrossCountry and Community Rail Network.

The programme will be delivered by an education team comprising a full-time Learning Development Manager and a full-time Learning Development Officer, supported by an Admin Assistant, and will provide guidance and expertise across all four regions. The team of educationalists will include a special educational needs and disability specialist.

Sevenside Community Rail Partnership



The Sevenside Community Rail Partnership is synonymous with vibrant and creative community art schemes across our network. The restrictions of the pandemic proved no barrier to delivering our most ambitious permanent mural to date – one of the highlights of the Partnership's achievements during 2021.

Network Rail recently undertook major infrastructure works in the Bristol area, including a rebuild of the Stapleton Road viaduct at Fox Park. The structure quickly attracted graffiti tagging and the area became unsightly. Bristol City Council served a penalty notice, instructing prompt cleansing.

We saw an opportunity to invest (only slightly more than the value of the penalty notice) in a mural for the space, created by local artists. The concept aligned with Network Rail's Project Sprint initiative to reduce graffiti tagging on the railway network. The eye-catching artwork, themed around the four pillars of the Department for Transport's Strategy for Community Rail, attracted widespread press and social media attention, and is regarded as a 'must-see' for visitors to the area.

Sevenside CRP has also been involved with the coordination of a new mural at Sea Mills station. We await the unveiling of new artwork at Patchway, Filton Abbey Wood, and Nailsea and Backwell stations in spring 2022.

Community Payback

We continue to invest in improving Stapleton Road station and the Fox Park area of East Bristol by sponsoring weekly visits from the Probation Service Community Payback Scheme. Service users enhance the ambience of the space, keeping it tidy and litter-free. While attending the placement, many service users learn new skills and build routine to help them with the next stages of their personal development.



Local artists transform the newly rebuilt Stapleton Road viaduct at Fox Park, Bristol

Celebrating station adopters old and new

While the fabric and aesthetics of each station may vary, the dedication and enthusiasm of the 'pink army' of station volunteers and their passion for making their station a welcoming gateway to their community is wonderfully consistent. Our station adoption family continues to grow: we were delighted to introduce new station adoption projects at Patchway station and at Nailsea and Backwell station – where we have our first ever intergenerational station adoption group, tending green space set well away from the platforms. During the year we welcomed our youngest ever station adopters and celebrated the 90th birthday of two station stalwarts – Mike Hodges of the Friends of Bridgwater station and John Irvine of the On-Board group at Oldfield Park station. It was with great sadness we later learned of Mr Hodges' passing and hope to name a community room at Bridgwater station in his memory.



Station stalwart John Irvine (left) celebrates his 90th birthday

Apricots in Avonmouth

The Secret Garden food growing project, occupying an area of disused platform at Avonmouth station, continues to produce fruit, vegetables and herbs for the local community centre to share with those most in need. The space is tended by volunteers on a weekly basis under the guidance of the highly skilled team at Incredible Edible Bristol. Encouraged by the wide range of pollinator plants, the garden has become a haven for bees and butterflies, while biodiversity measures include water harvesting, a productive composting unit and a small wormery. A well-planned planting schedule means the garden is providing nutritious fresh produce throughout the seasons. It might sound unlikely, but the talented team at Edible Bristol have even managed to produce a crop of delicious apricots! These were thoroughly enjoyed by members of the Avonmouth Community Centre Association Lunch Club.



Produce from the Avonmouth Community Garden



Hannah More Primary School pupils enjoy the British Library's Paddington exhibition

Involving young people

While our traditional rail familiarisation visits for primary schools were put on hold under Covid-19 restrictions, the Partnership created new opportunities to engage young people in their local railway. Between 31 August and 3 September, Bedminster station became a temporary rail terminus, while the Bristol East engineering works were in full swing. Young people from the Grove Youth Group in Bedminster Down helped to enhance the customer experience by creating colourful directional signage between the station and the rail replacement bus stop.

During evening youth group sessions, arrow-shaped stencils were designed to illustrate a bus and a train. Just before the rail replacement got underway, the group visited the station and, under the supervision of youth group leaders, used their stencils as guides to spray their designs on the pavement using temporary chalk paint. Customers changing their way between arrival and departure points and appreciated the vibrant wayfinding markers. The youth group members enthused about being invited to be part of a creative project in their neighbourhood. They clearly enjoyed the opportunity to visit the station and make their mark in chalk paint.

During the autumn, students attending Backwell School were supported by Unique Voice – a social enterprise that focuses on helping children build emotional resilience and self-belief through performance – to create a film encouraging their peers to make sustainable, healthy travel choices and to feel confident in using the local rail network as they grow their independence. During a series of workshops, students made storyboards, provided input on the script and steered the artistic direction of the film.



Children from The Grove Youth Club with their pavement stencils at Bristol East

They also had a lot of fun, especially when filming on location at Weston-super-Mare pier. The film, sponsored by the GWR Communities and Education programme, may be viewed via our YouTube channel – bit.ly/3sATlu9

We also had the privilege of accompanying year six pupils from Hannah More Primary School on a day out by train to visit the Paddington: The Story of a Bear exhibition at the British Library, thanks to a winning entry to a GWR creative writing competition. This amazing family-friendly exhibition delighted pupils with over 50 books, documents, film clips and original artworks on view. The visit proved to be the first trip to the capital for many of the young people and demonstrated the ease of using the rail service to reach opportunities in London.

During the inaugural national Community Rail Week, we visited local youth groups to gather young people's views on sustainable transport. The findings of these visits will be used as a basis of our youth engagement for 2022.

Shedding light on passenger information

Sevenside CRP understands that passenger information at stations needs to be clearly visible, so we secured funding from GWR for solar-powered illuminated poster cases at many of the stations in our area. Installation is complete at Bedminster station and will be rolled out across many more stations by the end of February 2022.

We are excited at the prospect of resuming many of our popular activities in 2022, including on-train events, healthy walks from the railways, and promoting days by train to popular destinations and hidden gems across the area.

Devon and Cornwall Rail Partnership

**Devon & Cornwall
RAIL PARTNERSHIP**

Devon and Cornwall Rail Partnership brings together local authorities, GWR and others to support the counties' branch lines. Despite having its challenges, 2021 was a year of exciting new milestones – from the reopening of the Dartmoor Line to the expansion of our team.

It's not often that a line reopens, so we were very proud to play our part in the return of the Dartmoor Line, which, for the first time in nearly 50 years, has trains running seven days a week.

Thanks to decades of hard work and campaigning from the local community, the Exeter-Crediton-Okehampton line became the first to reopen under the government's Restoring Your Railway initiative in November 2021.

The project is a great example of partnership working. Thanks to our digital marketing expertise, we were asked by GWR and Network Rail to create the official website for the project – dartmoorline.com. This provided an excellent platform to inform the public about the latest developments and to share behind-the-scenes photos and videos of the record-breaking work to lay 11 miles of new track in just four weeks.



The newly reopened Dartmoor Line gets a brand new website

Our other contributions to the reopening included supporting local organisations OkeRail and the Dartmoor Railway Association, advising on heritage features at Okehampton station and securing funding for signage. We helped coordinate community celebrations to mark the 150th anniversary of the railway's arrival in Okehampton, and made sure young people were involved by engaging local schools and the Girl Guides to create bunting and a visual timeline of the railway's history.



Locals put the flags out for the Dartmoor Line reopening



Celebrating the return of train services to Okehampton station

To help promote inward tourism on the line we held a photo and video shoot to show off Dartmoor at its best, produced walking guides from Okehampton station and created a promotional video shared by GWR and other partners.

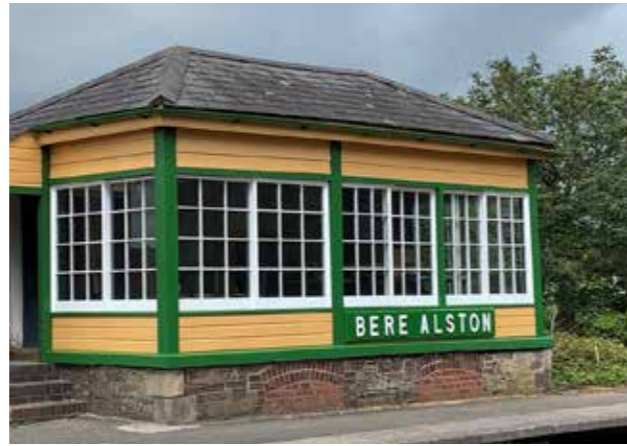
All of this work helped to build up excitement and make the reopening a huge success, with more than 10,000 passengers using the line during the first fortnight. Our partnership working on the marketing of the line won the 'Best Communications' category at the Community Rail Awards.

In other exciting developments, we were delighted this summer to expand the team with the arrival of Betsy Saunders, our Social Media and Content Officer. This means we now have a two-strong marketing team, led by our Marketing and Communications Officer, Mike Parker-Bray. This was made possible by money from GWR's Community Rail Major Projects Fund, and is enabling us to increase our social media output, as well as to reach new, younger audiences on new platforms.

Foremost among these has been TikTok – the rapidly growing video-sharing app increasingly favoured by younger generations. By showcasing the scenic journeys and destinations accessible by train across Devon and Cornwall, we have built up a TikTok following of more than 4,500 people in less than three months, with nearly 50,000 video 'likes' to date. In terms of followers, TikTok is now our second biggest social network behind Facebook, having already overtaken our long-standing Instagram and Twitter accounts, despite having published a fraction of the number of posts.



Plymouth student volunteers at Sandplace station...



The restored signal box is now a potting shed for the local Scouts

Alongside our marketing efforts, our community programme has also had a very successful year, with a range of projects coming to fruition despite the challenges of the pandemic.

Our student volunteering project with the University of Plymouth returned, with students helping to spruce up Sandplace station on the Looe Valley Line as part of national Community Rail Week. We worked with GWR to take young adults with complex learning disabilities on a 'confidence to travel by train' trip on the Tamar Valley Line. At Barnstaple station, we organised a pair of volunteering days which saw representatives from Barclays Bank, Network Rail, The Veterans Charity and the Tarka Rail Association transform the planters on Platform 2. And in the run-up to Christmas, we took school children on the train to Bere Ferrers to



...tend to flower beds as part of national Community Rail Week



The Okehampton reopening received significant media attention

make poetry-inspired gifts for older people in the community. The children handed over the gifts while performing socially distanced carol singing.

We also pioneered the new Creative Classrooms project, using trains as travelling classrooms. Working with poet Sally Crabtree, we designed trips around creative literacy – with children from three schools in Cornwall creating edible poetry, poetry bunting, 'word birds' and their own poems, inspired by what they saw out the window on the journey.

Another highlight of the year was our work to celebrate the history and heritage of the branch lines. At Bere Alston station we restored the former signal box – which dates back to 1890 – which will now be used as a potting shed for the local Scouts, who have been busy at the station creating nature-friendly planters. And at Liskeard station, we unveiled the Looe Valley Line Heritage Centre. Located in the building on Platform 3, opened in 1901, the centre includes the original ticket office and general waiting room. A traditional ticket office has been recreated around the original serving hatch

and the ticket office drawers tell the story of how things worked in the days before computers. The centre was made possible by funding from GWR and from the Community Rail Development Fund.

In 2022 we look forward to supporting and promoting the opening of Okehampton's station building, including a station café, Dartmoor National Park visitor centre, Dartmoor Railway Association shop and heritage-style waiting room. And we will promote the upcoming hourly service on the line, made possible by additional infrastructure work this spring.

We will also be working with GWR and the Rail Delivery Group to explore the potential to develop a digital version of the Devon and Cornwall Railcard, and we will be using our increased marketing capacity to promote branch line journeys across the two counties.

Community Rail Awards



The Community Rail Awards celebrate the hardworking volunteers, groups and community-based partnerships that contribute to the community rail movement across Britain. They showcase the people and projects that help communities connect with their railways and stations.

Last year the uncertainty and restrictions caused by the pandemic affected the number and range of award entries, as well as the format of the event. Community rail is nothing if not a resilient and growing grass roots movement, however, and the awards saw an inspirational 130 entries representing an amazing range of initiatives, with many groups and individuals rising to the challenges of Covid-19.

Working with schools, young people and groups with different needs, community rail has helped people gain confidence when using railways, and promoted inclusion and diversity. Among their many achievements, volunteers have helped create a greener transport future, celebrate history, enhance stations, boost local businesses and transform spaces and places.

As we slowly emerge from the pandemic, community rail lines will be the routes that holidaymakers head for when they plan staycations and day trips in 2022. We need to be ready to make sure that we give returning and new customers the best experience – and the confidence to travel on our trains. This is how we will rebuild rail and how we will continue the shift from car to train. Community rail, and our brilliant volunteers, are key in helping to achieve this.

Great Western Railway was a proud headline sponsor at the Community Rail Awards. GWR's Managing Director, Mark Hopwood, along with South Western Railway's Managing Director, Claire Mann, helped to present the awards.

Congratulations to all those whose efforts are recognised on the pages that follow, and thanks to everyone who has helped to make community rail the wonderful movement it is.

Community Rail Network, which hosted the awards, is dedicated to supporting community-based groups and partnerships that connect their community with their railway and deliver social benefit.

For more information visit
communityrail.org.uk

Best Communications



The reopening of the Dartmoor Line between Exeter and Okehampton – the first reopening under the Department for Transport's Restoring Your Railway initiative – was the result of a major infrastructure project, long in the planning. Prior to the initial public announcement in March 2021, decisions had to be made about how to unveil the news, how to promote the reopening, and how to bring people on the journey as the story developed. As a result, the Dartmoor Line Communications Group was born.

The group, a collaboration between Devon and Cornwall Rail Partnership (DCRP), Great Western Railway, Network Rail and others, worked together to coordinate and deliver joint communications and media activity.

DCRP created dartmoorline.com, which has had more than 25,000 visitors since its launch, to look ahead to the new train service, revisit the history of

the line, and acknowledge the vital community efforts of OkeRail (a local information service for passengers using the Dartmoor Line to Okehampton or Exeter), the Dartmoor Railway Association, and others.

The group also teamed up with award-winning Devon artist Becky Bettsworth, and DCRP used her motif and colour palette for the website and subsequent print materials, creating a unique partnership brand.

When the government put out its official press release about the reopening, it included a link to the website, which helped to drive further traffic. The group also secured significant media coverage for the launch event, with BBC Breakfast broadcasting live from Okehampton Station on the opening day, and print articles appearing in national, regional and local press.

Best Communications



The Dartmoor Line website helped Devon and Cornwall Rail Partnership secure first place in Best Communications

As the story developed, Network Rail produced regular behind-the-scenes pictures and videos to give people an insight into the work involved in restoring the line and to provide updates on progress. There was also a host of activities to encourage the local community to get involved, including a request for people's memories of the line's 1972 closure, and a project that saw more than 90 people, including local schoolchildren, submit designs for the line's roundel logo.

The group's efforts have been praised both by the rail industry and the communities the new line

will serve. Councillors and local rail campaigners described the Dartmoor Line website as, "one to be proud of." The group also received recognition from Network Rail, winning its Achieving Communications Excellence award in May 2021.

Next steps in the project will involve engaging the local community at events, including the Okehampton Show, working with local schools, and expanding the website with travel planning resources and day trip ideas, such as walks and video guides.

Second place

Southeast Communities Rail Partnership, along with Meldreth, Shepreth and Foxton Community Rail Partnership, Darent Valley Community Rail Partnership, Marston Vale Community Rail Partnership and Beds and Herts Community Rail Partnership for 'Countryside, Capital, and Coast' – an Online Thameslink Guide

Community rail partnerships on the Thameslink network wanted to highlight the accessibility advantages of using rail services to travel to, from and through London for leisure journeys. The partnerships joined forces to create 'Countryside, Capital, and Coast'. This micro-site sits within Community Rail Network's tourism website ScenicRailBritain.com, linking it to an already established audience.

The goals of the online guide were to promote sustainable tourism and leisure travel by train, which in turn would support local businesses and economies. Content includes an interactive map with pop-ups showing journey times, destination pages and itinerary pages grouping attractions into themes. Pages also provide accessibility information, options to book tickets, links to partner websites and active travel options such as walking and cycle trails.

Outstanding Contribution to Community Rail



Joint first place

Southeast Communities Rail Partnership (jointly won with Friends of Buxton Station)

Southeast Communities Rail Partnership had another stellar year, with the addition of an extra line – the '1066 Line' from Hastings to Tonbridge – taking the partnership's coverage to eight lines across Sussex, Kent, Surrey and Berkshire. During 2020, volunteers from 73 station partner groups delivered thousands of work hours, connecting local communities with their railways.

Some highlights over the past year included:

- Continuation of the 'Go Learn' education project. Since its inception in 2015, more than 26,300 children have attended a rail safety or junior citizen event, more than 5,300 pupils have had a classroom workshop with the partnership's education office, more than 1,200 pupils have taken part in a station visit and train ride, and the partnership has worked with 740 schools across Sussex. This is alongside the 'Active Access for Growth' programme, which engages young people who face barriers to rail and sustainable transport use.
- On the Seaford to Brighton Line, the partnership worked with charity Culture Shift to create an

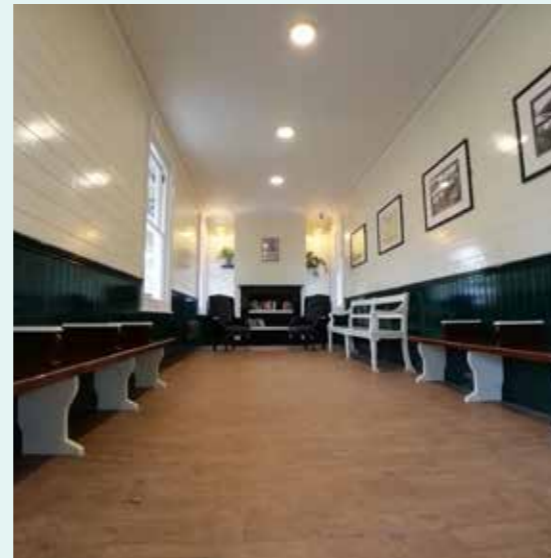
arts and heritage project, encouraging adults with additional needs to travel on the railway. The 'Get into Trains' programme helped participants overcome barriers to choosing train travel by gaining confidence, meeting new people and learning about railway heritage.

- In 2020, the partnership introduced its first Environmental and Sustainability Policy.
- The partnership was also active during the pandemic. It used its long-established relationships with local schools to get students back to school via train following lockdown, promoting active travel, running educational sessions via video conferencing, and providing a 'virtual schoolbag' – an online information service for parents and pupils. The partnership worked with rail partners to address station 'pinch points' and timetable arrangements, ensuring young people could travel safely.
- At the end of 2020, the partnership promoted 'I Missed a Train Today', a musical project celebrating the vital role that rail travel plays in people's lives.

Influence Positive Change and Sustainability



Second place



Southeast Communities Rail Partnership and GTR/Southern for the Passenger Benefit Fund vs Pandemic Lockdown – An Unexpected Journey

When the pandemic and lockdown struck, officers from Southeast Communities Rail Partnership (SCRCP) were determined not to see projects grind to a halt. Instead, they seized opportunities to make station enhancement plans more sustainable and inclusive. Working with the GTR Passenger Benefit Fund team, they engaged with communities connected with stations to take advantage of their local knowledge and ensure their wants and needs were realised.

In the 18 months to mid-2021, SCRCP officers covering six GTR lines worked with 19 different station partners on 29 separate projects.

These included:

- A wildlife project at Newhaven Harbour Station with the Bee Friendly Trust.
- Work to save and renovate buildings for community use at the Grade-II listed Bishopstone station.
- Art and heritage projects at Eridge station.
- Improvements at Amberley station including information panels, maps, artwork and floral displays.

Station Friends and Adopters at the Heart of Communities



Third place

Farnborough Street Residents Association for Reg's Garden at Farnborough North

Farnborough Street Residents Association (FSRA) set out to restore the large garden next to Farnborough North station, previously owned by Reg, a former station master. The intention was to rent the land from his descendants and turn it into a community farm and garden.

Despite the pandemic, the station group, led by Mike Knott, got to work, turning the overgrown area into a space that could be enjoyed by everyone. Members built planters and benches from unused pallets, restored a greenhouse, ploughed ground and sowed grass. In total, volunteers cleared more than 1,000 square metres of brambles and fallen trees.

Other additions included a bee sanctuary and beehives, ready-to-pick crops, allotments and a children's adventure trail. As the garden was taking shape, volunteers worked hard to drive the project forward, and its ambition has seen FSRA membership treble. What is more, local community groups are interested in using the space for their activities. The garden has not only improved the appearance of the station but instilled a sense of pride in what has been achieved.

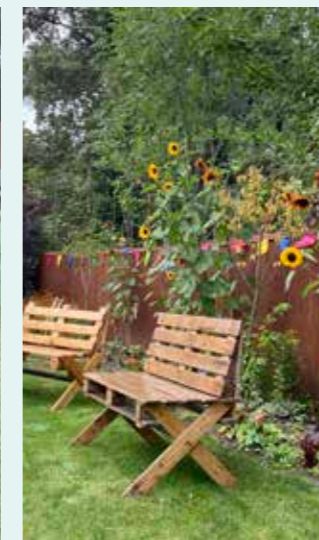


Photo Competition



Second place

Southeast Communities Rail Partnership for A Winning Entry for Glynde Station Metalwork Trains

Community Creative Projects and Station Arts

Shortlisted entries

- Severnside Community Rail Partnership – Community Artwork at Stapleton Road Station
- Worcestershire Community Rail Partnership – StitchTrain Worcestershire
- Devon & Cornwall Rail Partnership – St Ives Bay Line Art Competition



Board's Special Recognition Award



Kulvinder Bassi MBE

Kulvinder Bassi (known to friends and colleagues as Kul) joined the community rail team at the Department for Transport (DfT) in late 2006. He became Team Leader in 2010 and held that position for a decade, until moving on to become Stations and Accessibility Policy Manager in 2020.

Throughout those 15 years, Kul was pivotal in securing and maintaining departmental support for community rail, and through his chairmanship of the Civil Service Staff Network, he was able to introduce community rail to other government departments.

Kul was instrumental in setting up the Designated Community Rail Development Fund (later CRDF), through which Community Rail Network has distributed more than £2 million in project funding to support community rail partnerships across Britain. After the 2008 financial crash, it was Kul who was again instrumental in ensuring that funding for community rail was built into train operator franchise agreements.

And while the funding has been vital to the development of the movement, Kul also understood that community rail was all about people. He went to great lengths to visit as many community rail partnerships and groups as he possibly could, always keen to help. He was especially good at cutting through red tape, encouraging support for community rail, and being the face of the DfT on the ground.

Kul was awarded an MBE in 2012 and has also won civil service awards, including the Diversity and Inclusion award in 2017.

Richard Burningham, Chair of Community Rail Network, said: "There is no doubt that without Kul's enthusiasm, never-ending good humour, knowledge of finding a way through industry procedures, negotiation skills, and frankly bare-faced cheek at times, community rail would not be in the very good position it is in now. We are delighted that Kul is the winner of our very first Board's Special Recognition Award."

Education on the North Downs Line



Earlier this year, we launched the new education service Go Train, which encourages safe and independent travel among year six schoolchildren on the North Downs Line, connecting Reading and Gatwick Airport.

The launch of the Try a Train scheme, which helps people build confidence when travelling, has been so popular that all the groups taking part have booked multiple times, to make sure all their young people join in. The participating groups include HALOW, Surrey Choices and the Safe! Project.

Try a Train provides an ideal opportunity for those who lack confidence to visit a railway station and

experience a train journey. The initiative is aimed at young people (aged 14+) who have a disability or access needs and wish to build their confidence when travelling.

"I used to travel by train all by myself but after lockdown I stopped," said one young person from HALOW. "After the journey with Try a Train, I want to travel again."



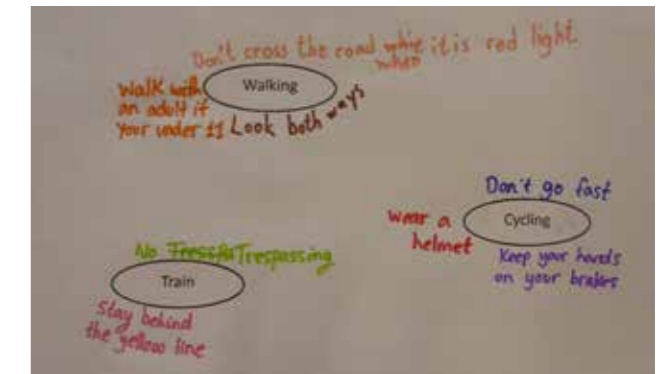
The Try a Train initiative helps young people build confidence when travelling by rail

We have also launched our new Sustainable and Healthy Travel workshop for year six primary pupils. It encourages schoolchildren to think about their transport choices and how those choices impact their health and the environment. It's a hands-on workshop with lots of activities to keep the pupils engaged and learning. We are expecting an increase in bookings when the government introduces its new Sustainability and Climate Change school curriculum later this year.

A satisfied teacher from a school in Wokingham said that among the workshop's highlights were the resources provided. "They were well organised," she said. "The tasks were very informative and well pitched at year six children."

Looking ahead, we will be launching our first Treasure Hunt on the North Downs Line for the Easter school holidays in April.

For more details, please visit our website: southeastcrp.org



Year six pupils enjoying the new Sustainable Healthy Travel Workshop



Accessibility Mentors

In 2021, GWR was proud to enhance its accessibility team with the addition of three new Accessibility Mentors. The new positions reveal the extent of GWR's dedication to improving access to the railway for disabled and older passengers. But what is accessibility – and how have the Accessibility Mentors helped to achieve it in the last year?

Accessibility is all about improving the ability of disabled or older passengers to use the railway. This includes a wide range of work, from looking at the physical nature of our stations and trains, to considering the processes and policies we have as a business, as well as providing tools and knowledge to help people travel confidently. We achieve this through new technology, best practice from other industries and new training for teams. We want everyone to be able to travel without worrying they might not complete their journey or that something may go wrong.

Our Accessibility Mentors have been specially recruited to work with local community groups and charities to help improve confidence in travelling on the railway. Although specialising in working with groups with disabilities, the mentors have participated in a wide range of confidence-building events with other groups.

These events have included travel training sessions, taking place at schools or at train stations, that focus on improving knowledge and understanding of travelling by train. The sessions allow groups to find out more about purchasing tickets, reading

station departure boards, as well as travelling safely and highlighting the kinds of people who can help if passengers run into trouble. Mentors have also taken groups out on the train to help them understand the train environment and how to be safe on the train, and to explore and look at other stations.



Students from Nancealverne School practicing independent travel



Young people from the Halow Project on a visit to Guildford Station

Over the last year the Accessibility Mentors have collaborated with local groups, schools and charities including Whizz-Kidz, the Halow Project, The Scout Association and Age UK. They have also worked with educational establishments specialising in disabilities, including Worcester New College for visually impaired students, and Hartmore School for children who have a special educational need and disability in the categories of social, emotional and mental health.

In 2021 we ran travel training and Try the Train events for nearly 300 individuals, seeing many of them

more than once. The feedback from the sessions has been great, with one attendee saying, "Thank you so much for your help this term. You have really helped me grow in confidence around trains and platforms, as well as meeting new people."

If any community rail partnerships have a local community group who are looking for travel training, or would like some support running travel training sessions, please contact our Accessibility Mentors at accessibilitymentors@gwr.com



A Beaver takes the driving seat of an Intercity Express Train during a visit to Bristol Parkway



Local Beaver Scouts question the driver



Staff show Beavers how the Help Point works

Window Seater

In June 2021, Window Seater partnered with the Community Rail Network to build a technology that draws on local stories from communities around the UK and shares them with passengers through an app. Window Seater connects rail travellers to the world outside their window, providing high-quality audio stories that bring to life some of the wonderful locations on the GWR network.

Window Seater stories are geolocated, meaning that when a point of interest is passed, the app will notify the listener and the audio will play. As passengers travel through scenic countryside, vibrant cities, quirky towns and picturesque villages, they will discover more of the stories behind these places. The guides feature information drawn directly from communities along the railway. That means passengers will hear from the people who know the area best, revealing the beating heart of localities and the hidden stories they hold.



Working in collaboration with Great Western Railway, and with the support, knowledge and enthusiasm of Severnside, TransWilts, South Wessex, Southeast Communities, Gloucestershire, Worcestershire and Reading Basingstoke CRPs, Window Seater audio guides are available on the following ten railway lines in the south west of England, for passengers to enjoy for free:

- Severn Beach Line (Bristol Temple Meads to Severn Beach)
- Heart of Wessex Line North (Bristol Temple Meads to Westbury)
- Heart of Wessex Line South (Westbury to Weymouth)
- North Downs Line (Reading to Gatwick Airport)
- Golden Valley Line (Cheltenham to Swindon)
- Cotswold Line (Oxford to Hereford)
- London to Oxford (via Reading)
- TransWilts Line (Swindon to Salisbury)
- Reading to Basingstoke
- Bristol to Worcester

The First of a Kind 2021 competition, and funding awarded by the Department for Transport and Innovate UK, allowed us to deliver the Window Seater community rail content platform in February 2022.

For more information about Window Seater, visit windowseater.com or download the app for Android or Apple devices.

Network Rail

A close working relationship with Network Rail is key to realising many of our community rail projects. And it's thanks to Vicky Clift, Network Rail's Customer Support Manager, that this strong alliance continues to thrive.



Vicky Clift

Vicky Clift has been the Community Rail lead on the Western route for the past two years. She helps facilitate community activity on Network Rail's land, such as gardening schemes and art projects, and acts as the interface between Network Rail and community rail partnerships and community groups. On top of all that, she coordinates internal stakeholders to help facilitate community rail activities. This has been improved by setting up the Western route Community Rail Panel which is a forum for internal stakeholders to review community proposals.

She also keeps everyone abreast of projects on the network, such as maintenance, especially where work is due to affect specific community rail partnerships (CRPs). She is the CRP point of contact when feeding back to Network Rail.

"Network Rail is a big organisation," explains Vicky, "so it's good that volunteers can contact me, and I can go and find answers on their behalf. And I can speed things up by following up issues and push for answers when necessary."

Over the past year, Vicky has worked alongside CRPs and GWR to realise some great new initiatives:

- A periodic Western route Community Rail Panel, with stakeholders and GWR attending.
- A Community Rail Working Group which engaged the directors and GWR.
- CRP involvement in a Western route listening exercise.
- Cross-industry Community Rail Volunteer Days.
- A Network Rail safety assurance process, including community rail access boards and model risk assessments.
- The creation of a Network Rail and GWR joint activity plan, setting out how they work together.
- The introduction of new GWR and Network Rail pink hi-vis vests for volunteers, instead of separate GWR and Network Rail vests.

It's often volunteers who bring important rail matters to Vicky's attention.

"On Sunday past, I got an email from a community rail group saying that some of the trees in their scheme area looked unsafe," says Vicky. "I shared their concern with a colleague in Network Rail's Off-track team who visited the trees the following day and identified that 15 trees in the scheme area needed cutting down. This highlights how community groups are the eyes and the ears of the railway."

Meanwhile, Vicky hopes to see the partnership between CRPs, Network Rail and GWR grow stronger, building on the successes of the past year.

