

# Customer and Community Improvement Fund 2025/26



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**Front cover image:** West Somerset Railway. In 2025, Railway 200 celebrates the 200th anniversary of the modern railway - a once-in-a-generation opportunity to explore rail’s crucial role in national life.

# Welcome

GWR is delighted to announce we are inviting funding bids for customer and community projects that relate to rail. This year we are asking that bids celebrate Railway 200, marking 200 years of rail travel.

In 2024/25, we supported 69 projects across the GWR network, supporting customers, charities, community groups and voluntary organisations to deliver benefit in the communities we serve. We're pleased to open the bidding for the next financial year 2025/26 and have shared some more information here about what we can support and how you can make a successful bid.

This handbook outlines what the Customer and Community Improvement Fund is, the type of projects we can support, what we can't support, the application process and how to contact us should you have any questions.

We look forward to seeing a wide range of bids for rail related projects from across our network.



**Windrose Rural Media Trust** is a Dorset-based charity which uses the media – television, radio and the internet – to portray the past of rural communities in the south west and to give them a voice in the present day. Their archive film project explores local life as it used to be, allowing customers to travel into the past via a QR code link on posters displayed at stations, which can be scanned into phones while waiting for the train.

# About the Customer and Community Improvement Fund

Great Western Railway's Customer and Community Improvement Fund supports rail related projects that have a customer and community benefit or address an area of social need, in a community we serve.

Social need is defined as having a benefit or providing support to wider society or specific groups that promotes health, wellbeing, equality or opportunity in ways which are not primarily for the commercial gain of either the promoting organisation or the railway.

Our Customer and Community Improvement Fund is designed to support small and medium rail related projects that can be completed over the course of the 2025/26 financial year. We are particularly interested in schemes that benefit customers, increase rail travel, encourage carbon reduction, connect communities, people and places, support economic growth, promote inclusion and diversity, and educational programmes that support careers in rail or increase awareness and experience of public transport and rail safety. A good bid will show a strong level of community involvement and support and the proposal will have benefits that last beyond the duration of the project.

**Mumbles Railway** completed a trail project to install replica station signs at 11 points along the railway route and at key points on the trail, along with information boards, posters and murals.

The use of QR codes has helped to bring alive the trail, providing smartphone access to video footage, audio and historical information.

GWR's funding also allowed for the development of an Augmented Reality mobile application, including the ability to "walk around" a 3D Mumbles Railway train.





# Railway 200

A 200-Year Journey: 2025 marks the 200th anniversary of the modern railway. A British innovation that's continued its journey across the globe. There will be national celebrations and to mark the anniversary this year we are asking bidders to reflect on Railway 200 in their bids.

Since 1835, Great Western Railway has led the way in developing the country's railways. We want that to continue, and we will be focussing on projects that build on the past and how rail shaped Britain.

That does not mean we are looking only for heritage projects. We want you to show us how your project lives up to the achievements of the past. How it connects communities or opens new opportunities for disadvantaged groups.

How it encourages more people to take the train or how it invites the next generation of pioneering talent to join the railway and become the history makers of tomorrow.

[railway200.co.uk](http://railway200.co.uk)



**Cornwall Heritage Trust** works closely with local communities and, together with Cornwall Council, wanted to connect a wider audience of visitors to the rich cultural and natural heritage of the stunning Luxulyan Valley in south east Cornwall, close to Luxulyan railway station.

Central to their plans was to link nearby communities outside of the Luxulyan Valley, which suffer from high deprivation and poor health. Community events and learning opportunities were created to enhance a sense of belonging and cohesion, whilst social prescribing activities were offered to help promote people's health and wellbeing.

This project was also designed to highlight the accessibility of the Valley from the nearby Luxulyan railway station

and promote train travel as attractive option for walkers, cyclists and those wishing to explore the Valley's many wildlife, historic and natural treasures.



# What makes a successful application

We welcome a wide range of applications, particularly from organisations who haven't worked with us previously or who propose innovative projects.

This could be a Local Authority, a registered charity or community interest company, school or college or a community or voluntary group. We would very much like to see applications from every corner of our network.

**PLEASE NOTE Bids must be related to the railway and proposals which don't relate in some way to customers (or potential customers), stations, railway property, rail services, rail education or careers in rail will not be considered.**

The list below identifies some of the categories of projects we are looking for.

## Educational

Programmes which deliver safety education, promote the rail industry as a positive career choice, reduce crime, support vocational skills training for young people or other marginalised groups, or increase awareness of local public transport. A good bid will contain details of how the project will continue in the years following the funding provision if required.

## Promoting rail travel

Promoting train services or providing information that will help marginalised groups use rail services. A good bid will encourage further use of public transport and make it easier to access and use train services. This could include holding events or community activities that promote the use of rail travel.

## Great Western history and heritage

Enriching the community through developing historic links with the Great Western network. A good bid will show how the project links to GWR's heritage and increases educational awareness of our rich history.

## Underrepresented groups

We are looking for any projects that promote inclusion and diversity, including activities to promote groups who are typically underrepresented in the rail industry workforce, including women and girls and those from an ethnically diverse background. A good bid will show how the activity will help GWR to be a more diverse and inclusive employer.

## Research

Feasibility surveys or studies - to support future bids or to show ways to support customers, promote rail travel and careers in rail. A good bid will show how the feasibility study will support future development.

## Accessibility

Aiding groups who may feel unable to use train services as part of daily life, to reduce social isolation and to showcase rail. This includes both infrastructure and non-infrastructure projects that improve the rail experience of people with disabilities and other specific needs. A good bid will demonstrate the ongoing positive impact on individuals from participating in the project or the impact the proposed changes will have.

Please note GWR runs Try a Train activities for individuals and groups, building confidence with rail travel. There is more information at [GWR.com](https://www.gwr.com).

## Disused buildings

Bringing back into use a building, on or near the station, for the benefit of our customers and the community. Good submissions will consider the building's future potential, how it will assist the community, and how the maintenance and upkeep of the facilities will be managed in the years to come.

## Walking and cycling

Promoting walking and cycling links to and from stations. A good bid will detail convenience, potential numbers of users and how the facility will be maintained in years to come.

## Public transport integration

Encouraging integration between public transport modes to benefit customers and communities. A good bid will aim to quantify benefits, explain how this will benefit the local community and have identified other relevant public transport operators and stakeholders to integrate with.

## Promotion and wayfinding

Improving information to make using rail easier for customers and promoting services through signs, posters, social media, film and music. A good bid will identify the issue being addressed and show who will be benefit.

## Seed funding and new projects

Providing start up funding for new charities, social enterprise or community groups to deliver customer or community benefit.



**Swansea MAD** are a local grassroots youth and community charity who seek to better people's lives, by providing inclusive safe spaces for people to access services, projects and support which create a meaningful effect in their lives, bring fairness and belonging and influence change for the better. Their project brought people together and provided accessible opportunities for them to creatively explore the history and heritage of Swansea station through activities and workshops, contributing to increased belonging and wellbeing and new/improved digital skills.

### Projects must;

- Be delivered by your organisation. This fund is not to finance projects that will be delivered by GWR.
- Be within our network area, please see map on page 10 - for the purposes of the Customer and Community Improvement Fund projects must be in a local authority served or passed through by GWR.
- Deliver a benefit to customers or the community and be aligned to one of the categories above. Projects can address more than one of the categories and those that do will be judged positively.
- Have an organisational bank account.
- Consider the time it will take to deliver the project. When reviewing your delivery plan, please factor in appropriate time for project initiation including start up agreements. We strongly suggest your project is deliverable within a 6 month window from initiation.
- Have all permissions required for project delivery, this might include permission from the Station Manager, Network Rail or Planning Permission. Please contact us to talk through what you might need.
- Any projects at railway stations i.e. artwork or installations must have gained appropriate permissions from GWR/Network Rail before bids are considered.



**West Somerset Railway** is a 23-mile long steam heritage railway running through the heart of West Somerset. Started in 1871, the railway is one of the largest tourist attractions in the area bringing around 200,000 visitors each year. Their project was created to support local disadvantaged groups by offering free specially planned day trips on the heritage railway. These complimentary trips included activities such as a ride on a heritage steam locomotive, a historically based talk, a photo walk between the 10 stations on the line, refreshments, and trip to one of their museums. These visits allowed the West Somerset Railway to share their heritage knowledge and experiences, educate people about the railway and the impact of steam on the local area. The organised walks element also supported people in breaking the cycle of loneliness, helped people make new friends, improved physical health, supported mental well-being and shared local history.



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### Projects must not;

- Request more than the maximum value of £50,000. Most bids awarded are under £25,000 and the average bid awarded last financial year was £12,500.
- Duplicate existing projects already funding by GWR or the rail industry, including Try a Train confidence building activities or training for GWR staff.
- Use funding to support organisational overheads, including ongoing salary costs, which are not directly related to project delivery.
- Require ongoing funding beyond March 2026, unless committed from elsewhere.
- Generate commercial benefit for the organisation bidding or directly for GWR.
- Request funding solely for Rail Travel.
- Apply for sponsorship of events/ teams (including kit and/or equipment) or award evenings.
- Apply for funding for building renovation work (unless it is at a station), solar panels, kitchens, roof repairs, furniture or major equipment.

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### Projects could;

- Have matched funding, this would be beneficial but is not required. Any supporting funding should be clear about conditions associated and whether this has already been committed.
- Be less than £1,000 in value – it would be great to see a variety of small-scale projects providing local benefit across our network.
- Be delivered by Schools, Colleges or Universities; projects working in education can be delivered until the end of the academic year - July 2026.

# Gateway to Independent Travel

**Grant awarded: £25,818**

Project delivered by:



## General Overview of the Project

The Gateway to Independent Rail Travel project aimed to improve rail confidence and independence of underrepresented youth (age 8-25), through travel planning and supporting journeys to nature spaces in Gloucestershire and Oxfordshire.

## Project Delivery

We co-designed itineraries and delivered travel planning sessions to youth and youth leaders, building confidence in creating personal travel by rail itineraries through: reading departure boards, buying train tickets, conversing with station staff who will facilitate safe and supportive journeys, building familiarity with the rail environment. We delivered a travel confidence session in a faith school setting which was very well received, collating information regarding barriers to rail travel from young people from underrepresented minorities. We gathered youth impact and outcomes through surveys and other creative methods on how to encourage other youth to travel via rail travel ie surveys, postcards, observations, drawings, sustainable travel book. Our new Sustainable Travel booklet was extremely well received, with young people doing the activities on the train and being curious regarding train layout and the sustainability aspect of train travel.

In Gloucestershire we completed 8 rail trips to nature spaces for 135 young people with 4 community partners, delivered 5 bespoke travel training sessions for ages 8-25. In Oxfordshire we facilitated 4 days out by train with 3 partner organisations, supporting a total of 57 young people to access new experiences and opportunities.

## Project Impact

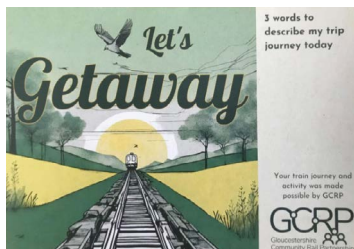
Underrepresented youth had increased social confidence and self-esteem through nature experiences accessed via rail, improving health and wellbeing and creating better life chances. Partners and transport operators have a better understanding of barriers for youth from under-represented backgrounds to accessing rail and leisure activities. Youth reduced their carbon footprint via rail travel. Young people gained a better understanding of the sustainability aspects of train travel through using our Sustainable Travel booklet.

*I loved all transport but today going on the train, from the outside it looked really scary and the possibility you could die, but I overcame this today and I had a lot of fun.*

*I loved being in nature especially after my exam stress.*

*I enjoy taking trains, it is a convenient way of transport. Taking trains often helps build my confidence.*

*Being out in nature was extremely insightful and educational. It was very peaceful and I enjoyed the journaling session.*



# Surrey Hills Poster Project North Downs Line

**Grant awarded: £1,572**

Project delivered by:



## General Overview of the Project

The project was initiated to create a new poster for the Surrey Hills Stations on the North Downs Line which promote Rail to Ramble routes along the scenic line. The new poster was produced in collaboration with partners Surrey Hills National Landscape. It was decided to commission an original piece of artwork by local artist Diana Croft for the poster.

## Project Delivery

Throughout the process, we worked closely with Emma Cole and Rob Fairhurst at Surrey Hills National Landscape, along with the GWR Brand team to ensure brand guidelines were followed.

*Surrey County Council celebrates the recognition of the pivotal role that sustainable travel has in preserving the landscape of the Surrey Hills. This project demonstrates the importance of working together to ensure that visitors by train have a warm welcome on viewing the beautiful new posters and can enjoy a great experience visiting the outstanding countryside.*

**Katie Stewart**

**Former Executive Director for Environment, Infrastructure and Growth at Surrey County Council**

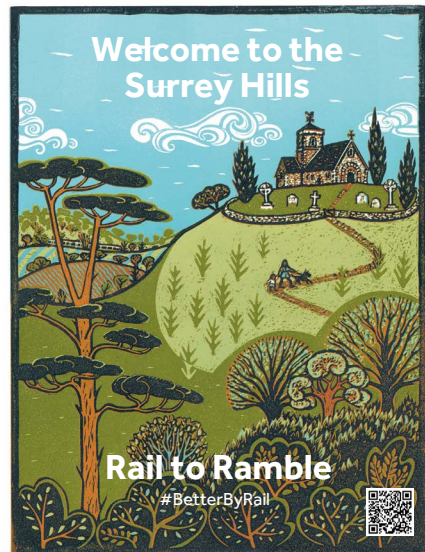
*The Customer and Community Improvement Fund is a fantastic opportunity for us to invest in projects that really make a difference to our customers and communities at a local level. These posters provide a perfect guide to the wealth of amazing walking routes within easy reach of the North Downs Line.*

**Eleanor Wills**

**GWR Regional Development Manager**

## Project Impact

The posters have now been installed along the North Downs Line and will make an impact for station users, encouraging the use of the train for Rail to Ramble walks. It is also intended to install them at larger stations such as Guildford. A launch event to celebrate the new poster took place at Chilworth Station on 23rd April. This was followed by a guided walk to the little-known Gunpowder Mills, both a listed monument and a Site of Special Scientific Interest, easily accessible from the Station. It is hoped to work with Surrey Hills and Guildford Borough Council to further improve the existing footpath to encourage rail users to visit the site. Eye-catching and unique posters such as these, help promote the heritage and landscape of the beautiful Surrey Hills.



# Tackling Myths and Misconceptions on the Railway – A Film for Schools and Young People

Project delivered by:



## Platform

**Grant awarded: £8,900**

### General Overview of the Project

This project came about as a result of the experiences of the education officers for Platform and Southeast CRP: a recurring theme during workshop delivery was of the dangerous myths and misconceptions young people have about the railway, which range from inaccurate and unhelpful to incredibly dangerous and potentially life-threatening. One common example being the many children who ask us about the 'safe place' under the platform where they can hide.

The plan for the project was for the Platform team and Southeast CRP education officers to work together to produce an engaging, innovative and informative film that would highlight the key myths and misconceptions, and explain why they are wrong, with the hope of showing this to a wider audience than just the schools being visited by the two teams. By knowing the truth and information behind these misconceptions, we hope to educate a wide audience and help them dispel these for future safety.

### Project Delivery

The education officers from both Platform and Southeast CRP collaborated on pulling together all the key myths to bust in the film. Woven Films agreed to do the filming and produced a script. Between them they managed the casting, permissions for the filming locations, script editing and liaison with the filmmakers. The filming took place over two days in October and the filmmakers then shared drafts in December and January. Consultation took place with the GWR Branding and Safety teams to ensure that the film aligned with their requirements. The final signed off films were completed at the start of February and were launched online during the first week of March. A small social media campaign was also launched to promote the film. The official launch event to showcase the films was held at St Paul's Catholic Primary School in Yate on Monday 4th March. We showed the film to all the students from Year 3-Year 6 as part of a Platform pre-travel rail safety workshop. Since March, the series of short films have been incorporated into our standard rail safety workshop.

### Project Impact

This project has met its aim of producing an engaging, innovative and informative film that highlights the key myths and misconceptions, and explains why they are wrong. Both Platform and Southeast CRP education officers are making use of the film to support with promoting key rail safety messages. Platform has embedded the film in their regular rail safety workshops for Key Stage 2 and above (ages 7+). It has also been shared widely online to increase the audience and we know that many of our wider colleagues in community rail are using it too. The film, in its full and short versions, has been viewed more than 2,400 times online, across YouTube, TikTok and Facebook.





# Worcester Access Map

Project delivered by:



Grant awarded: £5,000

## General Overview of the Project

Whilst there was some mapping and sustainable transport/city trail information available for Worcester as a whole, there was a gap in terms of the ‘access map’ provision and connectivity to the University campuses. Possessing one of the highest percentages of students with a disability attending any UK university (over 10% of learners have accessibility needs in some form) this project has not only benefitted the University’s community (10,000) but the city too. The access map is constructed based on the tried and tested Gloucestershire Community Rail Partnership suite, and we have deployed the same model and design team to support the production of this tool for Worcester.

## Project Delivery

The main stakeholders (Worcestershire Community Rail Partnership, Gloucestershire Community Rail Partnership and Worcester University) met initially to map out the project including timescales and resource management. We sourced students who could walk the routes and provide key information for the map maker and employed students through the University’s employability service to produce the maps ready for the two-week Welcome Festival in September 2023. This was used as a soft launch to test out the maps and their effectiveness and enable a revised digital version to be provided for Spring 2024 if needed. The resulting map was

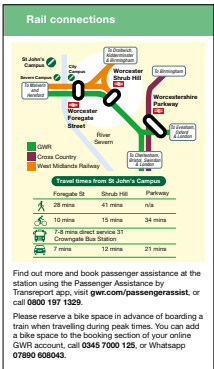
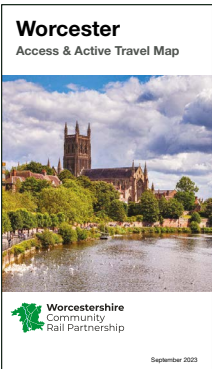
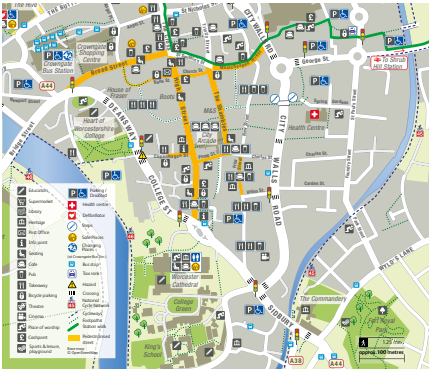
checked by the stakeholders and officers within Worcester City Council. Once design and accuracy was agreed we sent to print and also hosted map on WCRP and University websites for use by existing and prospective students of the University.

## Project Impact

There is now an accessible map of Worcester City centre available digitally and in print for use by visitors including students, parents, and other visitors to the area. The printed map has been distributed to several outlets across Worcester including the Tourist Information Centre.

*The Worcester Access Map project undertaken by the students of the University of Worcester, is a lovely project incorporating both inclusivity and sustainability. It brilliantly guides individuals with both visible and hidden disabilities through the city’s most accessible routes for walking, wheeling, and cycling. This map not only enhances the mobility experience for visitors but also serves as an invaluable resource for students and staff, and prospective students visiting us for Open days. It’s a testament to the power of student-led initiatives and their potential to create impactful, real-world solutions.*

**Katy Boom, Director of Sustainability, University of Worcester**



Find out more and book passenger assistance at the station using the Passenger Assistance by Transport app, visit [wcrp.com/passengerassist](http://wcrp.com/passengerassist), or call 0800 197 1329.

Please reserve a bike space in advance of boarding a train when travelling during peak times. You can add a bike space to the booking section of your online GWR account, call 0345 7000 125, or WhatsApp 07890 608043.

# How to apply

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Applications must be made online through [GWR.com](https://www.gwr.com).

We have kept the application form as simple as possible, with strict word limits. If we need more information, we will contact you. Please make sure your answers are targeted on the question asked and support the criteria set out in this guidance. Our team are available to help with questions on bidding and the process.

The two key points you must address in your application is **how your project relates to the railway**, bids that have no connection to the railway are not eligible, and your project **must be deliverable before 31 March 2026**

unless a bid by a School, College or University where projects must be completed by July 2026.

If you would like a copy of the application questions and/or the opportunity to speak to someone about your bid before you submit it please contact **Community.Fund@GWR.com**.

We very much want to receive bids from everyone who wants to apply so we will also accept video or audio bids. These bids can take longer to process so please get in touch with the team if you'd like to submit a bid in this format.

## What happens next

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Bids will be accepted up until 2359 on Friday 31 January 2025.

Once you have submitted your application it will be reviewed and considered for funding.

### Projects will be classified as:

#### Successful

The project is one we would like to fund. We will contact you to confirm some more details and get things moving.

#### Potential

We like the project; however, we have some reservations and would like you to answer some further questions before we can consider its potential for this year.

#### Unsuccessful

The project is not successful. We will try and tell you this quickly and explain why we could not support your application.

We will be back in touch with bidders as soon as possible after the deadline. We may need to arrange a visit to site, ask for more information or clarifications to help with the decision process.

Successful bids will need to sign a funding agreement with GWR, provide their financial details and provide regular updates on delivery during the project. There is also a contractual requirement for an end of project report.

# Scoring of bids

Projects must relate to the railway and reference Railway 200 and bids will only be judged against the information provided on the application form. Bid criteria include:

- **Alignment with Customer and Community Improvement Fund categories** – Does the project deliver a benefit for one (or more) of the categories in the guidance. Projects will need to identify a primary category.
- **Addressing Social Need** – Bids should identify who in the community will benefit and how their project will deliver social benefit.
- **Level of Community Engagement** – Bids should identify how well supported the project is from members of the community and its beneficiaries. Bids that can evidence strong support from the community will be highly scored. Where bids can demonstrate excellent engagement in delivery this will also score well.
- **Deliverability** – All projects must be completed by 31 March 2026. Bids should have clear objectives and a plan of action outlining how the objectives will be met and how the project will be delivered within this funding period. Bids that can demonstrate a robust delivery programme, and where risks are known and managed, or where there are no significant barriers to implementation will be scored highly.
- **Availability of matched funding** - Matched funding is not essential however, bids which have secured match funding will be prioritised.
- **Legacy** - Bids should identify, where possible, any lasting benefits to the community or individuals involved. Projects which result in demonstrable lasting benefits will be most highly scored. Examples might include help securing a job or saving a life.



**Exeter UNESCO City of Literature (ExCoL)** created their project to refresh and revitalise artwork at Exeter St Davids station in a way that celebrates Exeter's literary history and heritage and UNESCO status,

working with local communities to decide what they would like to see reflected in the artwork and where on the station they would like it to be, given the restrictions of space, safety, and feasibility. This project was designed to build on the links between St Davids and Exeter's literary heritage and add to the promotion of rail travel in the region by revitalising the station based on community feedback, further positioning Exeter as a tourist destination for book lovers and readers everywhere.

We often receive a lot of high-quality bids, unfortunately we can't support them all with the funding we have available. All bids will be scored on the above criteria and there will be a review process to ensure projects are distributed across the GWR network and across the different areas we are supporting. Decisions will be communicated as soon as reasonably practical and will be final.

# GWR CRP Route Map

Yate    Black station name - managed by GWR or NR

Iwer    Grey station name - managed by another TOC

○    Station not currently part of a CRP

●    Devon & Cornwall CRP

●    Gloucestershire CRP

●    Oxfordshire CRP

●    Reading Basingstoke CRP

●    Severnside CRP

●    South East CRP

●    South West Wales Connected CRP

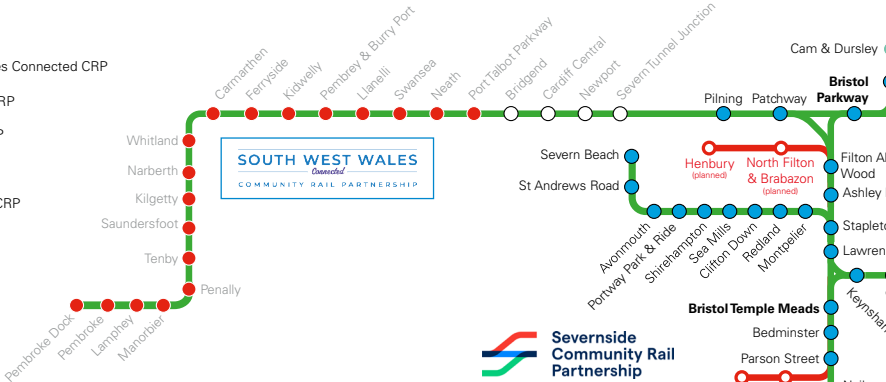
●    South Wessex CRP

●    Three Rivers CRP

●    TransWilts CRP

●    Worcestershire CRP

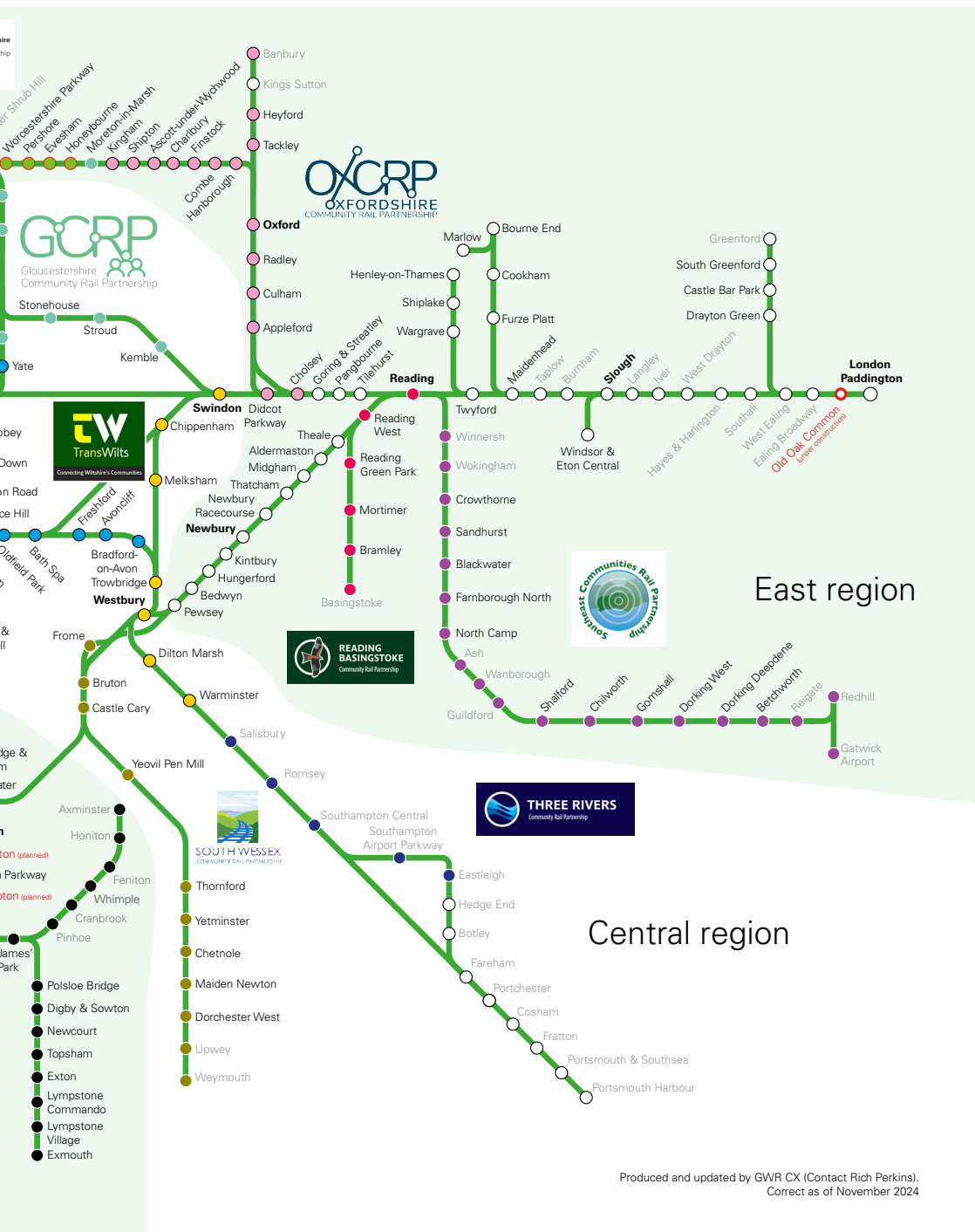
## South Wales



## West region







# Community Rail and Station Adoption

GWR works with, and supports, 11 Community Rail Partnerships across our network and welcomes and encourages station adoption.

If you would like to join an existing station friends group, or you would like more information about setting up a group at your local station, please contact us on **Community.Rail@gwr.com**.

You can also find out more about the community rail movement on our website here: **[GWR.com/CommunityRail](https://www.gwr.com/CommunityRail)**



Gloucester station



Gunnislake station



Saltash station



Barnstaple station



Parson Street station



Redland station



Seamills station



Shirehampton station

