

# Community Rail 2023/24





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Front cover:  
Year 1 students from Studley Green Primary School enjoy a train trip to Weymouth as part of Platform’s Next Stop... the Beach project

## Foreword

There is no doubt that this has been a challenging year which has stretched the ingenuity and innovation of all our community rail partners, their staff and station volunteers. Once again you have risen to those challenges and shown how resilient and creative you can be.



We work very closely with the Department for Transport (DfT) to produce an annual plan within the budget they set. This can take time to get right, and we know that the delay in confirming budgets this year added to the challenge for planning. Our focus, jointly with the DfT, was on doing all we could to protect community rail, and we were very pleased that together we were able to protect CRP Core Funding, however, as you know, there were reductions in our overall community budget, that will have meant changes in your plans and delays to some of your projects. Despite that, the following pages show some incredible successes and delivery of some really important changes.

That said, we know that the reduction in community budget was a challenge. Rail has received very significant levels of taxpayer subsidy since the pandemic, and those subsidies are inevitably decreasing. This does mean that all our budgets face scrutiny and review, and we are having to make some very difficult decisions.

This does not however mean that GWR does not value community rail, or our community rail partnerships any the less. We know how important you are to improving and sustaining rail services, and supporting those who depend on the railway for work, education and leisure. We will continue to do all we can to support and encourage you, and will continue to do our best to protect core budgets.

I should of course also mention that this comes against a background of reductions and even potential withdrawals of local authority funding. We don't want to lose those local council links, it isn't simply their financial support that is important, it is their engagement and recognition of the value added by community rail. We will therefore be continuing to work with you to support and promote all the hard work and success you are generating. We believe in the power of community rail, we know that it is a driver of sustainability, economic growth and wellbeing for local and regional communities, and we will do our best to make sure your work is celebrated far and wide.

This is why we were so proud to jointly host this year's annual Community Rail Awards with Transport for Wales in Swansea. Many congratulations to the winners from across our network, as well as those shortlisted. Well done to all and I look forward to more success next year!

We have to be realistic about funding, and I cannot predict how future budget settlements will go, but I can promise that community rail will always be part of our business, and that we will always be proud to support you and to do all we can to help you grow and prosper.

Best wishes, and thank you for all you do.

**Mark Hopwood**  
Managing Director

## Recognising the value of community rail

In tough financial times, with public spending feeling the pinch of inflation, it's really important we highlight the true value of the tireless work done by community rail partnerships all over the network.

And what better way to honour the efforts of community rail partnerships (CRPs) than to spotlight, in this publication, their incredibly successful projects from the last 12 months?

For everyone involved in community rail, this has been yet another remarkably productive year. Projects have exceeded expectations, actively promoting social inclusion and sustainable travel throughout the network. Initiatives have ranged from organising a treasure hunt train trip to boost off-season rail travel, to projects aimed at encouraging young people to travel safely.

Right across the network, CRPs have been helping break down perceived barriers to travel. From Oxford to Weston-super-Mare, CRPs are transforming how people access rail travel, encouraging those who might find the prospect of boarding a train or entering a train station a daunting prospect. And what a great thing it is too, as we firmly believe that everyone, whether they are young or old, should have an equal opportunity when it comes to public transport.

In June, the Devon and Cornwall Rail Partnership pioneered the digital transformation of the Devon and Cornwall Railcard, turning it into the country's first regional railcard accessible via your phone.

We're consistently impressed by the incredible skill set of CRP staff and volunteers. They've got a handle on everything their community needs, from boosting local businesses to connecting young people with job opportunities, not to mention getting to grips with important issues such as safeguarding and GDPR. To support CRPs as much as possible, Great Western Railway offers them access to some of our core internal training programmes, including useful skills like British Sign Language.

Last summer marked a significant expansion of our community rail network with the launch of the Oxfordshire Community Rail Partnership, the latest addition to our thriving family of CRPs. This brings the number of CRPs on our network to 11, each playing a pivotal role in harnessing local insights to foster sustainability, drive economic growth, and ensure equal opportunities within their communities.

CRPs such as Oxfordshire's are instrumental in bringing about change from the ground up, tailor-making initiatives that best suit the unique needs and aspirations of their regions. They stand as testament to the power of local involvement in shaping a more sustainable and inclusive future. Looking forward, we are excited to see the innovative approaches Oxfordshire CRP will employ to make a lasting impact on their community and beyond.

Finally, we must always recognise not only the invaluable contributions that CRPs make towards sustainable and community-focused development, but also the remarkable return on investment they represent. Equally important is our appreciation for the dedicated station adoption groups and volunteers who are the heartbeat of our stations. It's this recognition that drove us to co-sponsor the Annual Community Rail Awards held in Swansea in March, acknowledging the outstanding efforts and achievements of the Community Rail family.

This year, we had the pleasure of holding the event in Swansea and it was a vibrant celebration of the exceptional work CRPs accomplish across the network. A heartfelt congratulations to all the winners and those shortlisted! Your efforts exemplify the significant, positive impact that dedicated community and volunteer work can have on our regions. Thank you for your commitment, innovation and the inspiration you provide to us all.

**We look forward to hearing from you. If you have any questions, don't hesitate to get in touch at [community.rail@gwr.com](mailto:community.rail@gwr.com)**



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## Worcestershire Community Rail Partnership



We've had a busy year, launching several projects including a map aimed at visitors to Worcester, a tourist film and a drawing competition.

### Worcester Access Map

We were delighted to receive funding from GWR's CCI Fund for the creation of a Worcester Access Map. Working in partnership with the University of Worcester and Gloucestershire Community Rail Partnership (GCRP), we produced a valuable resource for visitors to the city. GCRP trained and guided university students on walking the routes and collecting data to be sent to the designer for inclusion in the map. The map contains information on the best walking, wheeling and cycling routes for people with disabilities. It is available either as a download from our website or in print. We hope the map will encourage Worcester visitors to use sustainable forms of transport – such as rail – to access and move around the city.

### Norton Juxta Kempsey Primary School

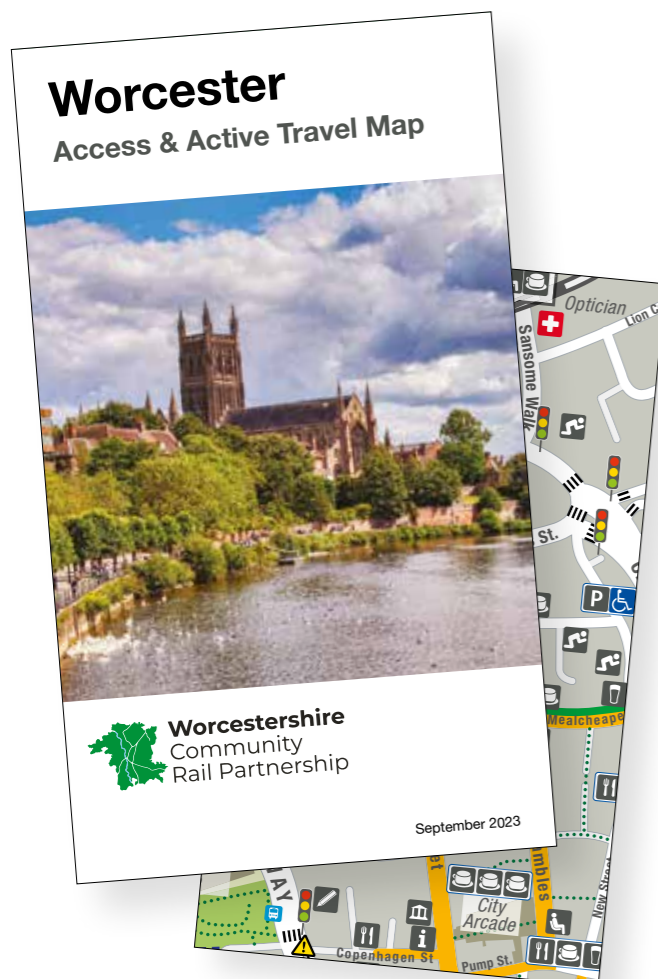
In October 2023, we joined with the rail education scheme, Platform, to work with pupils from Norton Juxta Kempsey Primary School at Worcestershire Parkway. The project supplies tools and a bus, bringing school children to the station for a morning of gardening and learning. The pupils – all members of the school's eco club – tidied up the wooden Bee Friendly planters at the station and walked the public footpath. Along the way, Imogen from Platform introduced the sustainable elements of the station and the wildlife habitats. We will be meeting up with the school again in spring 2024 and hope to be joined by the Bee Friendly team.



School pupils lend a hand at Worcestershire Parkway



Slugging away at getting the slugs away



### Tourist film

To further encourage visitors to use the train to Worcester, we commissioned a promotional film showcasing the city to young adults aged 25-30. Our models, Beth and George, together with the production company, Ottr, filmed in the city over two very sunny days in June. Beth and George excelled in their roles, and Ottr captured both the best and quirkiest aspects of Worcester wonderfully. GWR helped us all the way by providing expertise, ground support and, of course, the train! We also worked closely with Visit Worcestershire and Worcester Business Improvement District, who provided invaluable local knowledge of attractions for young people.



Promotional film showcasing the best of Worcester

### Drawing competition

We were delighted to take part in a Wellbeing Day hosted by GWR on 16 August 2023 at Worcestershire Parkway. We were joined by Imogen from Platform and together we offered a drawing competition to young visitors. The theme was 'My Dream Railway Adventure' and we had lots of imaginative and colourful entries. Councillor Mike Rouse chose the winner, who received a family rail ticket to London as a prize. The winning entry was drawn by Bethany (seven-years-old) and features a rainbow train surrounded by trees and flowers. Bethany and her friend had made a pact that if either one of them won, they would take the trip together. They all travelled to London Paddington on 28 December. Bethany's mum said everyone had a fab day! All the entries can be viewed on our website ([wcrp.org.uk](http://wcrp.org.uk)).



Bethany with her winning entry



Children enjoy the drawing competition at Worcestershire Parkway



Passengers get to work on their prize entries

## Gloucestershire Community Rail Partnership



Reflecting on a year characterised by collaboration, innovation and initiatives driven by the community, we are thrilled to share our journey of progress and impact.

Our partnership with GWR over the past year has significantly enhanced our impact across four key programme areas, addressing local transport needs. These initiatives are guided by our commitment to youth representation, diversity and inclusion, as well as our pursuit of sustainable rail solutions for a greener future.

After four years of actively engaging with and leading community-driven projects in Gloucestershire, we now feel confident in designing programmes that offer practical solutions for local communities. Our evidence-based approach has solidified our reputation for reliability.

Expanding into Oxfordshire this year marks a significant milestone, and we're eager to embark on this journey with the steadfast support of GWR and our dedicated community rail officer.

A highlight this year was showcasing our sustainable tourism and rail-for-leisure efforts at GWR's Community Rail and Stakeholder Conference. Focused on our case study from the Cotswolds and Gloucestershire, we emphasised the critical role of sustainable transport in promoting responsible tourism and equity, especially in engaging young people.

Participating in GWR's Poppies to Paddington event was profoundly meaningful for all. Collaborating with Stroud District Council and Stroud Town Council, we presented a hand-crafted wreath made of recyclable materials adorned with symbolic poppies – a tribute to the sacrifices of ethnic minorities in wars.

### Tourism and leisure

#### TrainTripper

Our TrainTripper platform champions sustainable tourism across Gloucestershire and Oxfordshire, showcasing local independent businesses and hidden gems.

Since its launch, the website has garnered over 2,500 visits and attracted attention from local media. This year, we expanded its reach to include locations in Oxfordshire, supporting a broader

tourism market and our community rail partnership's expansion into the region. Enhancements have been made to ensure accessibility and inclusivity, including the integration of access case studies showcasing best practices of local businesses, accompanied by inclusivity icons.

Furthermore, we've collaborated with destination marketing organisations to feature content from our website, promoting the platform's usage. To strengthen its sustainability credentials, we've introduced an integrated carbon calculator tool. The website has also undergone a refresh, featuring a vibrant new design, complemented by an integrated marketing campaign aimed at broadening TrainTripper's audience.

Explore TrainTripper at [traintripper.co.uk](https://traintripper.co.uk)



#### Taste for travel

This year, we introduced three new maps. The inaugural Gloucestershire Black history map promotes public and active travel to sites of Black historical interest, gaining national press coverage and attention from local media. Another map, a walking trail for Charlbury, encourages leisure activities as we expand into Oxfordshire. Additionally, a wellbeing walks map has achieved notable success among partner organisations. Our commitment extends with the development of an integrated transport map for Moreton-in-Marsh, reinforcing sustainable access to the Cotswolds.

#### Access all areas

With financial support from GWR, we commissioned Inclusion Gloucestershire, a self-advocacy organisation for individuals with learning disabilities, physical disabilities, autism or mental ill health, to conduct comprehensive access audits for 20 prominent destination attractions across the region. These audits included thorough examinations of accessibility from nine nearby railway stations. Our primary objectives were to raise awareness of facilities for individuals with disabilities, enhance the overall visitor experience, and aid destinations in improving their communication and marketing strategies to fully embrace inclusivity.

This year, in partnership with Visit Gloucestershire, we developed detailed case studies highlighting the innovative practices and initiatives adopted by these destinations to create a welcoming environment for all visitors. The aim is to educate and inspire other destinations to assess and implement necessary changes, thus fostering more inclusive and accessible tourism throughout Gloucestershire. Additionally, we conducted a social media campaign coinciding with Disabled Access Day, showcasing accessible destinations in Gloucestershire that can be reached by rail.

### Youth and education

#### Gateway to Independent Rail Travel

As the successor to our Getaway nature access programme, Gateway to Independent Rail Travel aims to boost the travel confidence and independence of young people from urban areas, facilitating their access to Gloucestershire's green spaces via train.

Our focus has been on providing tailored travel training sessions to youth and youth leaders, encouraging them to create their own rail travel itineraries. We offer a supportive environment for young people to discuss challenges and barriers they encounter when using train travel. Leveraging our Let's Talk Travel resources, we address common challenges such as ticketing issues, personal safety, and getting accustomed to the rail environment. We continuously refine our workshops to empower young people to become independent and sustainable travellers.

This year, we successfully organised 10 trips for 163 young people, allowing them to apply their training in real-world settings.



Young people take a trip to the countryside with Gateway to Independent Rail Travel

#### Sustainable travel communications

As an organisation dedicated to youth empowerment and the promotion of local tourism, this programme builds upon our past youth research findings. These insights will be translated into a toolkit to aid local businesses in adapting to the evolving needs of young people in the area. Through a focused workshop, we fostered collaboration between local businesses and young individuals, directly addressing pertinent issues. The result is a comprehensive resource aimed at encouraging a shift among young people towards sustainable transport, offering valuable guidance for businesses to meet these evolving needs.

Platform

Our rail education programme, in collaboration with four other community rail partnerships, continues to thrive, delivering exceptional rail education to schools across Gloucestershire and beyond. In 2023, over 900 students in Gloucestershire benefited from our workshops or familiarisation trips, with 20% experiencing train travel for the first time. Platform not only complements our existing programmes but also strengthens our commitment to making sustainable transport accessible to the next generation.

The skilled educators at Platform have developed bespoke curriculum resources specific to our area, available for download on their website. They have also launched a new competitive card game called Transport Takeover, focusing on sustainability.

Communities

Gloucester placemaking

We were thrilled to secure funding from GWR for our placemaking community engagement project, coinciding with the ongoing regeneration works at Gloucester station. This year, with a focus on station safety and hospitality, we orchestrated a community arts project involving over 40 local young people. Led by artist Aumuirah Hassan, a series of creative workshops enabled participants to envision the station's future. We posed the question: "Imagine a garden at Gloucester station. What would contribute to your sense of safety and welcome?" The remarkable artworks created in response to this prompt are currently exhibited at Gloucester station.

In addition to our creative efforts, we conducted a station-based community consultation to gather insights on station usage, safety, welcoming atmospheres, design approaches and meaningful improvements. We are sharing our findings with partners to ensure that local voices significantly influence the regeneration process.



Local children make art for Gloucester station

Station exhibitions

We're thrilled to continue curating exhibitions across our galleries in Stonehouse, Stroud, Gloucester, and now Cam & Dursley, providing local artists and groups with a platform to showcase their work. This expansion aims to represent underrepresented communities, young people, climate action and community voices.

During the summer, we showcased Hundred Heroine's Photography bootcamp, funded by GWR's Community Investment Fund. The project celebrated the success of participants who explored photography by women photographers through train trips across the GWR network.

On 1 November, we launched our latest exhibition, funded by Community Rail Network and the Department for Transport, themed 'Black History Every Month'. Featuring artwork by Rider Shafique, a multi-disciplinary artist from Gloucester, the exhibition celebrates the county's rich cultural heritage and links to the railway. The launch event, attended by the artist, community members, GWR staff and Community Rail Network, received press coverage from the BBC, both on radio and online.

Route2Work

Building upon the foundation of our Let's Talk Travel programme, Route2Work introduces customised travel training workshops for essential partners in Gloucestershire. These workshops assist job seekers in confidently and affordably navigating public transport. With Route2Work, our focus is on utilising our existing Let's Talk Travel resources through specialised workshops and community engagement. These workshops concentrate on enhancing travel confidence, journey planning and job search skills, tailored to individuals facing additional barriers to travel and employment, including young people, disabled individuals, and those experiencing substance misuse challenges.

Alongside workshops, we continue community engagement and outreach work at job fairs and community events, distributing resources and providing advice to help Gloucestershire job seekers maximise the benefits of local public transport networks.

Working closely with Young Gloucestershire, Change Grow Live and the Department for Work and Pensions, we've engaged over 100 job seekers in Gloucestershire across six job fairs, nine workshops and four train trips for first-hand travel experience. We've also facilitated nearly 150 professional engagements, highlighting transport-related challenges faced by these individuals.

Transport planning

Connecting Communities

Over the past year, the Connecting Communities project has advocated for local residents, promoting car-free, rail and active travel options in Oxfordshire and Gloucestershire. This has been achieved through organising events using our proven inclusive community engagement and consultation methods, supporting regional transport and sustainability goals. By representing hyper-local transport needs, we aim to reduce car dependency, contribute to planning processes, and foster community resilience by enhancing connectivity and encouraging car-free lifestyles.

Throughout the year, we have built relationships with residents and community organisations in targeted areas such as Matson, Great Oldbury and Didcot. At local events, we have shared valuable information about sustainable transport through digital and print formats. Using established methodologies, we have engaged with the community to understand their preferred journey types and routes, aiding in understanding local needs, influencing planning processes, and encouraging a shift towards more sustainable transportation choices.

Drawing insights from previous pilots in Gloucestershire, we are now engaging with residents, planners and community partners in Oxfordshire, offering value-added benefits from our experience. To complement this work, we have created two new access maps for Didcot and Banbury and distributed over 2,000 access maps.

Access maps

Expanding on our previous efforts in creating access and connectivity guides, we have developed 11 access maps. These maps serve as valuable tools to assist individuals in making informed travel choices and meeting their access needs when travelling to and from railway stations across Gloucestershire.

These maps cover Stroud, Gloucester and Cheltenham, among others. Recently, we created new access and active travel guides for Chepstow and Moreton-in-Marsh, involving local stakeholders in the process.

Furthermore, we continue to review and update our existing maps. We adapted our access map and the Walking and Cycling Trail map for display on new boards at Stroud station. The town-facing side of the board provides handy information for visitors, while the canal-facing side includes inspiring walking and cycling routes in the local area. Additionally, Brockworth Parish Council has displayed 10 large printed maps at the community centre and on noticeboards.



The new map at Stroud station



Interacting with the community to gain deeper insight into their local needs

## Severnside Community Rail Partnership



During 2023, we saw a healthy growth in the number of journeys taken on all routes on the network covered by Severnside Community Rail Partnership, with most exceeding pre-Covid numbers.

Throughout 2023, our primary focus was on aiding community members facing perceived barriers to rail travel, fostering confidence to 'try the train' and identifying opportunities to promote integrated, sustainable transport. We continue collaborating with community partners to identify and deliver projects to brighten up local stations. Typically, these projects involve innovative artwork and support for dedicated volunteer station adoption groups. Additionally, we are proud members of the highly successful Platform. This initiative, led by a team of qualified teachers, engages with local schools to inspire the next generation to travel safely and sustainably.

We were delighted to attend the opening of the first new station in Bristol since 1927. Portway Park and Ride provides direct rail services to Bristol Temple Meads and Weston-super-Mare, enabling travellers to bypass the Clean Air Zone and frequently congested sections of the M5. The station has already become an engaging destination for school visits as part of the Platform scheme. This allows young people to learn about transport integration and understand the environmental impact associated with the establishment of a new station.

Other 2023 highlights include:

### Confidence-building days out

The Days Out by Train initiative assists individuals facing perceived barriers to rail travel by providing them with the opportunity to experience an accompanied trip. This is aimed at building their confidence and increasing their awareness of local rail travel options. Financial backing from the GWR Community Fund, Community Rail Network and the Quartet Foundation ensures that these visits can be provided entirely free of charge. The 2023 scheme supported four targeted groups:

- The deaf and hard of hearing community
- People with dementia and their carers
- Refugees and asylum seekers
- Elderly isolated people

Prior to an excursion, we visited each group in their community setting. During these visits we addressed any concerns they might have and selected a suitable destination.

Example excursions include groups from Weston-super-Mare journeying to explore Bristol city centre and visiting the Bath Spa Christmas Market for festive enjoyment. Groups of older people have enjoyed trips to Weston-super-Mare for fish and chips, with several visits to the Strawberry Line Café at Yatton station.

*"Staff have made it [travelling by train] easier than I expected. Thank you for organising. We really enjoyed it. It was great to have a change of scene and to learn that going on the train is not so difficult."* **Days Out by Train participant**

**175 people participated in Days Out by Train during 2023**

**100% of participants said they enjoyed themselves on the trips**

**78% of participants felt more confident to use the train after their experience**



Building confidence



Find out more



Days Out by Train

Similar to Days Out by Train was our project, Movement, with its focus on young people aged 16-24. Participants enjoyed a series of accompanied rail trips to explore nearby rural and coastal settings, immersing themselves in the wellbeing benefits of spending time outdoors. These excursions provided ample opportunities for socialising, leading to heightened confidence in using public transport and the formation of new friendships. Movement was one of three pilot community rail schemes implemented nationwide under the Department for Transport's Tackling Loneliness with Transport Fund. This particular arm of the project involved trips across Severnside and Gloucestershire CRP areas.

*"We've been looking for the right way to bring some of our most isolated young people together and this was just the ticket. We would like to build the partnership and build young people's experience of being active and out there."* **Carl Bowen, Creative Youth Network**



A short film about the Movement Project

### Community artwork

Enhancing stations with community artwork has been a longstanding core area of activity for Severnside Community Rail Partnership. In spring 2023, we fulfilled a long-held ambition by establishing an arts trail that showcases the many splendid murals and community creations located in and around local stations. Network Rail generously provided display space in the new station reception area of Bristol Temple Meads for a permanent exhibition to promote the trail. This was complemented by an adjacent display board with illustrated maps of three key routes for healthy walks from local stations.

In 2023, we embarked on our first venture into augmented reality. Collaborating with Seed Sedgemoor and securing funding from Arts Council England and Community Rail Network, and with support from GWR, Hidden Station was unveiled at Bridgwater in July. The project saw artists David McMillan and Jayde Perkin commissioned to meet with local community groups and station users to create a series of stories celebrating

their connection to the station. Artists illustrated the stories, and augmented reality filters were incorporated, allowing visitors at the station to animate the artwork in a fun and interactive manner using their smartphones and devices.

### Enhancing stations with the support of volunteers

Volunteers have formally adopted 80% of the unstaffed stations in the area, dedicating numerous hours to crafting floral displays and enhancing the stations' biodiversity. Bradford-on-Avon, Keynsham, Bedminster and Parson Street station adopters must be congratulated for their success in the South West in Bloom It's Your Neighbourhood Awards.

Some stations have also benefitted from larger one-day volunteering events. Volunteers from Network Rail, Mitie and the Samaritans came together to freshen up 100 meters of fencing at Severn Beach station in readiness for the Severnside Festival in July. Network Rail volunteers once again rolled up their sleeves to help 'onboard' the volunteer group at Oldfield Park station, clearing weeds and restoring and re-planting some of the feature floral displays.

### Growing for the community

The Secret Garden at Avonmouth station, managed by Edible Bristol, continues to thrive, offering produce to the local community, serving as a tranquil space for wellbeing sessions, and acting as an inspiration for similar projects. Over the year, the Open Return Garden at Weston-super-Mare station has seen significant development under the stewardship of Grow Feral. A new partnership has been established, aiding vulnerable individuals in the local community to cultivate food and refine their culinary skills.



The Secret Garden at Avonmouth

### Carnival train

In August, we collaborated with two staff networks dedicated to diversity and inclusion – GWR REACH and Network Rail Cultural Fusion. Together, we extended an invitation to local community groups, providing them with the opportunity to immerse themselves in the sights, sounds and aromas of the Notting Hill Carnival. The project provided complimentary train tickets to groups travelling from Bristol and Bath to London, offering individuals the chance to celebrate their cultural heritage at the carnival. This initiative aimed to overcome financial and other constraints that might otherwise make participation prohibitive for these individuals. Members of Bristol Black Carers, Bath Black Families Education Group, Bath Ethnic Minority Senior Citizens Association and St. Nicholas of Tolentine School were treated to Caribbean snack boxes and onboard activity packs specially created by Bristol artist Abbi Bayliss. To make the day extra special, a steel drum band played on the concourse of Paddington station, and the whole group danced with joy!

### Integrated transport

In addition to organising forums dedicated to identifying opportunities for enhancing the integration of rail with other forms of active and sustainable transport, we took the initiative to commission a recent graduate. This graduate conducted a study of the existing provision of onward travel and wayfinding information at stations, while also exploring potential options for improvements. The final report, funded by GWR and Community Rail Network Integrated Transport Fund, can be viewed at [shorturl.at/nsySW](https://shorturl.at/nsySW)

We have collaborated with SevernNet and Bike Bristol to promote active travel between Central and East Bristol and the Avonmouth Severnside Enterprise area. This is accomplished through direct engagement with employers, providing free-of-charge travel confidence building sessions to encourage the use of trains and walking or cycling. Additionally, loan bikes are made available to facilitate trial journeys, fostering the development of healthier travel habits for the commute to work.

### Bus, rail and the unicorn trail

In the summer of 2023, Bristol hosted a unicorn statue trail to raise funds for the charity Leukaemia Care. The distance between the most northerly and southerly statues was 53 miles – a distance too great to be reasonably completed on foot. We actively participated in the trail by sponsoring a unicorn statue proudly positioned outside Bristol Temple Meads station. Additionally, the partnership brought together bus and rail industry representatives, along with community partners, to



All aboard the carnival train!

collaborate on creating a map. This map, beautifully illustrated by artist Olivia Brotheridge, outlined how the trail could be completed using integrated public and active transport.

Short videos were created documenting car-free journeys to conveniently access each statue. These were uploaded to the Severnside Community Rail Partnerships' Facebook, Instagram and X (formerly Twitter) accounts, with an emphasis on reaching families. We also launched a TikTok account to promote the trail to young people. Collectively, the videos attracted over 21,000 views.



The Unicorn Trail

## Devon and Cornwall Rail Partnership

### Devon & Cornwall RAIL PARTNERSHIP

We facilitate collaboration among local authorities, GWR and other stakeholders to bolster support for the rail network in the two counties, with a particular emphasis on the branch lines.

In the past year, our efforts have been concentrated on enhancing the Tamar Valley and Looe Valley lines. Additionally, we played a role in the launch of the digital Devon & Cornwall Railcard.

### Tamar Valley line

Recognising that passenger numbers on the Plymouth-Gunnislake line were slower to recover after Covid, compared to other areas in Devon and Cornwall, we gave special attention to this line during this past year.

Bringing together our specialisms in community engagement and marketing, we got local people involved in their branch line, helped make stations more attractive and inspired more trips on this scenic route.

In a collaborative effort at Bere Alston station, the local scout group joined forces with volunteers from Rolls Royce to construct and bed out six new planters. These were crafted using sleepers generously donated by Network Rail. GWR facilitated the addition of extra planters on the opposite platform, which are now tended to by volunteers from Bere Alston in Bloom.

We coordinated a train excursion for the scouts to Calstock, where they explored the Festival of Blossom at Cotehele National Trust and made paintings with a local artist. The resulting artworks now serve as the focal point for a new welcome sign at Bere Alston station.



Bulb planting at Gunnislake

Building on this, we are working with Community Rail Network to develop a national project to get scout groups across the country involved with their local station.

The Festival of Blossom featured a diverse array of activities, including guided walks, open gardens, craft sessions and more, spanning destinations along the Tamar Valley line. We actively promoted these events through social media, station posters, and by giving out information alongside National Trust volunteers on the commuter train from Plymouth.

Meanwhile, Friends of Gunnislake Station teamed up with GWR to create bee-friendly planters, helping the village collect a Gold award from Britain in Bloom.

To encourage new audiences to try the line, we ran a pair of music trains in June, with bluegrass and traditional tunes attracting an audience of 70 people on both occasions. What is more, to help increase the line's profile on social media, we produced a video line guide, showing off the best activities, shops, attractions and places to eat in Bere Ferrers, Calstock and Gunnislake.

All these efforts helped journey figures to grow 12.6% year-on-year – progress we look to build on in 2024 and beyond.



Festival of Blossom on the Tamar Valley line

Looe Valley line

To attract more families to visit the seaside resort of Looe, we worked with local shops to run a swashbuckling family treasure hunt – the Looe Pirate Trail.

Families picked up a free trail booklet from dispensers at Plymouth and Liskeard stations, took the scenic journey on the branch line and then set off to find the pirate crew lost in Looe. By following the clues, children could hunt each of the nine characters, found on window stickers in local shops and eateries, before collecting a bag of chocolate coins as their prize from the RNLI shop.

More than 300 children took part, boosting journey figures and helping to support the local economy. Comments from participating retailers included, “It’s been wonderful to be part of. It’s drawn people in and brought income into the business.”

To promote the line to audiences on TikTok, we worked with green travel influencer Sarah Marks on a video promoting rail getaways to Cornwall. The video reached more than 40,000 people and received more than 3,000 Likes, with comments including, “Stunning – definitely on my list.”

We also produced our own soon-to-be-launched video guide to visiting Looe by train, featuring our top tips including the scenic coastal walk from Looe to Polperro.

In addition to these promotional activities, our long-running volunteer initiative at Sandplace station has been thriving, with students from the University of Plymouth contributing significantly to the local community by engaging in station gardening projects.

We finished our year on the Looe Valley line with a pair of very popular Santa trains. Some 140 people joining us to travel the line and meet Father Christmas on the train.



Ahoy! The Looe Pirate Trail

Tackling loneliness

This year, a standout in our community engagement efforts has been the launch of our on-train CreativiTea events. These gatherings are designed to combat loneliness and foster connections among individuals of various ages. This initiative is a part of Devon County Council’s Connecting You project, with funding support from the Department for Transport.

The events – run with poet and author Sally Crabtree – used art, poetry and song to engage various groups on the train, including:

- Waymakers, a Barnstaple charity that supports young women with autism
- Exeter City Football Club Community Trust and their group of older people who attend a weekly café
- Tavistock Youth Café, who took part in an intergenerational train trip
- Turning Tides Project, who support adults with learning disabilities

Some of the older participants hadn’t been on a train for over 20 years, and feedback from the events was excellent: “I’ve never seen the group so happy,” said Exeter City’s wellbeing lead.

Digital Devon and Cornwall Railcard

To bring it into the modern era, we helped fund the digitisation of the Devon & Cornwall Railcard – now the country’s first regional railcard to be available on your phone. Passengers have the choice of downloading the railcard to their devices, ordering a plastic card online or buying the railcard from a station ticket office in the traditional way.

To promote this new flexibility, we worked with GWR on a launch campaign spanning local PR, press adverts, social media, video, door-to-door leaflets and more. Sales of the railcard have jumped by 34% year-on-year so far, with promotion ongoing.



Launching the digital Devon & Cornwall Railcard

Pay-as-you-go Cornwall

We helped GWR and Cornwall Council to promote the launch of tap-in, tap-out ticketing in West Cornwall by creating an explainer video showing how easy it is to use. The video reached nearly 100,000 people on our Great Scenic Railways channels, with 1,300 likes on TikTok alone. GWR embedded the video on their Pay-as-you-go Cornwall webpage, and promoted the film to their social media followers.



Video to promote new ticketing in West Cornwall

Marsh Barton

To support the opening of Marsh Barton station, we produced a door-to-door leaflet delivered to 10,000 local homes. We also created a digital version of the leaflet, which we promoted on social media, and a video showing a canal-side walk from the station and a pub lunch.

Rail-bus videos

Working with GWR, we filmed a trio of rail-bus social media videos, promoting onward travel from Bodmin Parkway to Padstow, Okehampton to Bude, and Redruth to Helston and the Lizard. These completed a suite of 10 such videos created in the past two years. The videos have reached more than 500,000 people on social media and were shortlisted for the Community Rail Awards.



One of ten videos promoting onward travel in Cornwall and Devon

## South West Wales Connected Community Rail Partnership



We had an extraordinary 2023, delivering outstanding outcomes across numerous projects, all rooted in our dedication to improving regional connectivity and advancing sustainable travel.

Through collaborating with local communities, our partnership successfully implemented several projects, including holding shared vision meetings at railway stations, publishing family-friendly station walks, championing community projects and promoting sustainable travel options. As the year unfolded, our partnership's impact really took hold, fostering a sense of pride and shared responsibility as we continued to stride towards a more connected and sustainable South West Wales.

Our collaborative efforts and unwavering commitment in 2023 lay the groundwork for an even brighter future. We look forward to advancing our positive impact and fostering stronger community bonds.

### Changemakers 2023

One of the noteworthy projects of 2023 was our highly successful third round of Changemakers. We are proud to have delivered this amazing project once again. It supports community groups and projects, encourages placemaking, and helps build relationships with diverse groups and exciting worthwhile projects.

This initiative received a staggering 91 applications for funding from diverse projects across the region. As a result, 26 projects were selected to receive funding ranging from £300 to £1,000.



The Shared Garden Project from Swansea

The Changemakers funding has assisted The Shared Garden, which educates local children on growing fruit and vegetables, alongside offering arts and crafts. This financial support has enhanced community involvement, attracting more families to participate and volunteer.

Another of this year's Community Changemakers Fund grant recipients was Will Evans, the incredible 16-year-old who runs his own petting farm. Will's animal therapy and education project gives people the chance to experience alpaca walking. He also takes his animals to visit nursing homes and schools, as well as community groups who struggle with social isolation.

Will applied for a South West Wales Connected Community Changemakers grant and was awarded £986 to fund a portaloo and pay for improvements to his farm, making it less muddy and more wheelchair accessible.



Will Evans at his petting zoo on the Gower

### Joy of the Journey

Our Joy of the Journey project involves reaching out to diverse community groups across the region. We organise hosted train journeys to illustrate the simplicity of rail transport for a morning or day out, offering fun activities and light refreshments. The aim of this project is to bring people together, improve rail confidence, tackle social isolation and loneliness along with promoting sustainable, healthy and accessible travel and tourism across our region.

We took a Carmarthenshire youth group by train from Carmarthen to Swansea, engaging in discussions about the benefits and sustainability of train travel en route. This journey significantly boosted their travel confidence and the group thoroughly enjoyed the experience. Once in Swansea, they used our Swansea station walk leaflet to explore the area.



Joy of the Journey

### Station walks

A definite highlight of the year was the publication of three engaging station walks in Swansea, Neath, and Port Talbot, featuring the beloved character Selwyn the seagull. These walks not only encourage physical activity but also serve as educational tools, distributed to schools to inspire a sense of wonder about our local rail stations.



Guided South West Wales walks

### What next?

The year ahead holds the promise of new projects and initiatives that align with our core values. We are excited to delve into more community-led events, from poetry projects to celebrating historical rail.

Adding an extra layer of excitement to our 2024 calendar was the Community Rail Awards. Held at the illustrious Swansea Arena, this event was a celebration of our collective achievements and the positive impact Community Rail continues to make. We always look forward to meeting the award winners and recognising their exceptional contributions to community rail projects.

The essence of Community Rail lies not only in the outcome of our projects but also in the wonderful sense of community spirit it instills. As we navigate the challenges and opportunities that lie ahead, our focus remains on championing local interests, strengthening community bonds, and promoting a vision of sustainable travel that extends far beyond the tracks.

Anticipating a year marked by ongoing progress, collaboration with communities, and positive transformation across the region, we look ahead with enthusiasm.

## South Wessex Community Rail Partnership



Stations in bloom was once again a huge success, with most of the stations on our line getting involved. Collaborating with Blackmore Vale Community Rail Partnership (CRP) and local communities, the project not only beautified public areas but also promoted a sense of community pride. Increased footfall and positive community feedback were clear signs of the success of this initiative. It was great to reward each station not only on their presentation but also on their hard work and dedication throughout the year.

### Adoption groups

We have such dedicated volunteers on our line who work incredibly hard to keep our stations looking great. At Yeovil Pen Mill, Fairmead School has now joined and has some fantastic ideas for brightening up the station. We are currently working with Yeovil Men's Shed and they are helping restore our train planter.



Tending planters at Yeovil Pen Mill

### Chetnole art project

Given the limited space on Chetnole station's narrow platform, which rules out the possibility of adding planters or a bench, we came up with the exciting idea to enliven the space with artwork created by local artists. They have generously offered to create six pieces that will be displayed on the platform. Centred on the theme of Chetnole, we eagerly anticipate the unveiling of their work.

### Video

In the summer, we worked with GWR to produce a video that promotes train and bus integration, featuring Yeovil Pen Mill and Weymouth stations. It was such great fun to make it. We look forward to the video's launch in spring.

With the great success of our last video, made in collaboration with Purbeck CRP, we have now secured funding for a new video. This upcoming project will highlight Dorchester West and Dorchester South stations, showcasing the ease of traveling between them. We aim to attract new users and promote Dorchester as a destination, providing essential tourist information often lacking at smaller stations. We'll highlight the importance of clear signposting and wayfinding for these connections. This promotional video will serve as a directional gateway to the town, showcasing its attractions. Our goal is to illustrate the social value of using public transport for a day or evening out in Dorchester. Filming is scheduled for February 2024, and we plan to launch the video just in time for Easter.



From a video promoting integrated travel in Weymouth

### Platform rail education

Our biggest project yet launched in May 2023, and we are very excited to be a part of such an amazing initiative.

Our rail education programme, in collaboration with four other community rail partnerships, continues to go from strength to strength, delivering exceptional rail education to schools across Dorset, Somerset and beyond. In 2023, Platform facilitated rail education workshops or familiarisation trips for over 254 students in Dorset. Remarkably, 20% of these young people had never taken a train journey before. Platform not only complements all our existing

programs but also underscores our commitment to making sustainable transport accessible to the next generation.

The highly skilled and experienced team of educators at Platform have created eight bespoke curriculum resources on their website specific to our patch and available to download. Platform has recently launched a new card game called Transport Takeover, which aims to highlight sustainability. The game explores and compares the different factors one could – and should – consider when making choices about travel.



Success at Stations in Bloom



Platform launch



South Wessex CRP's annual meeting



A volunteer prepares flower beds at Frome station

## TransWilts Community Rail Partnership



Last year marked a significant milestone for the TransWilts Community Rail Partnership as we celebrated the 10th anniversary of the enhanced train service between Swindon and Westbury, initiated in 2013.

Starting as a one-coach service, it has evolved into a two-coach and, at times, a three-coach service. Before the pandemic, it stood out as the fastest-growing service in the GWR area. In December, key contributors from the inception gathered at Westbury to commemorate this landmark date and to eagerly anticipate the future.

Throughout the year, we've been actively engaged in various initiatives. Notably, we've installed artwork at stations along the line to celebrate the pivotal role of women in the rail sector. These installations aim to spotlight the increasing impact women have had in the industry and the significant positions they now occupy.



Celebrating women in the rail sector at Swindon station

Along with other local stakeholders, TransWilts celebrated the installation of a lift on the north side of Chippenham station. This now provides step-free access from the rear car park to the existing footbridge and the front of the station.

As schools have started to reintroduce outdoor trips, we collaborated with Studley Green Primary School in Trowbridge to organise an educational excursion to Weymouth for a group of children in April. For many of the students, it was their first journey by train – and for some, their first encounter with the sea as well!

The rail education initiative Platform, jointly run by TransWilts and the partnerships for Severnside, Gloucestershire, Worcestershire and South Wessex,

continued to run classroom events and 'try the train' days. An unexpected highlight occurred for a group of Warminster children returning from a day out in Bath. While waiting for their train, they had the opportunity to briefly meet the Princess of Wales, who was passing through the station.



The Princess of Wales at Bath station

During the summer holidays, families were not overlooked, as we arranged for a group from Trowbridge to spend a delightful day in Weston-super-Mare. The children had a fantastic time playing on the famous beach and enjoying fish and chips. There were some tired but happy little ones on the train home to Wiltshire.



Trowbridge group enjoy a day out in Weston-super-Mare

Closer to home, we focused on local stations, with volunteers helping to tidy up and litter pick at Swindon, Trowbridge and Chippenham stations. Dozens of bags of rubbish were collected and safely disposed of.

The TransWilts train service continues to face challenges with reliability, affected by infrastructure issues as well as difficulties related to rolling stock and staffing. Partnership officers have regular meetings with GWR and Network Rail to explore ways the situation could be improved, but there are no easy fixes. One notable innovation has been the introduction of a year-round late-evening service. The last weekday train from Westbury now leaves at 21:16 and returns from Swindon at 22:30, allowing people to attend events in Wiltshire's largest town – including midweek football matches.



Cubs try a train with Platform

During the year, we bid farewell to a steadfast member of our team. Paul Johnson stood down as chair after many years guiding the partnership. As he prepared to move out of the area with his wife Rosemarie, he felt the time was right to hand over the reins. We aim to build on the foundations he built. We also remembered the work of Roger Newman over many years in West Wiltshire, and a bench was named in his honour at Trowbridge in February 2023.



Paul Johnson steps down as chair of TransWilts CRP

The coming year will be filled with optimism, as we look to overcome the challenges of reliability on the line, foster closer links with the community and work with stakeholders to improve the service.



Studley Green Primary School in Trowbridge enjoy an educational excursion to Weymouth

## Southeast Communities Rail Partnership



The North Downs line has experienced a year of fresh starts. We are delighted to welcome Hannah Godfrey, former Senior Surface Access Manager at Gatwick Airport Station, as our new Line Chair.

Her enthusiasm and relevant expertise contribute valuable insights to our team. Sara Grisewood started as the new Line Officer, together with Cath Reed, who will work as Education Officer on the line for one day a week. Together, they will make a good team, working in partnership and building new connections.

In October 2023, at a well-attended meeting in Reigate, Hannah, Sara and Cath discussed the important aims of community rail: to reach out to and support local groups, enhance the environment around our stations, encourage and increase access to rail travel, and work in partnership with local stakeholders.

In the summer, we helped plan a walk with Active Inclusion's Muslim Hikers. On a sunny day in August, a large group from all over the country arrived in Guildford and travelled on the train to Gomshall. From there, they enjoyed an uphill hike along the North Downs Way to Newlands Corner, stopping for a picnic at the Discovery Centre, and then returned on foot to Guildford station. The successful event was the fruitful result of working in



Hannah Godfrey, Sara Grisewood and Cath Reed

partnership with Active Inclusion, who liaised with volunteers from the Surrey Hills Society, the charity arm of Surrey Hills National Landscape. The trip was enjoyed by over 100 walkers and was a great way to promote access for all to the wonderful countryside and heritage of the Surrey Hills. Importantly, it also served to highlight rail travel as the premier environmentally sustainable transportation option.



Over 100 walkers took to the Surrey Hills as part of Active Inclusion's Muslim Hikers event

## The Great Mince Pie Giveaway at Farnborough North

Mike Knott is a very helpful and dedicated volunteer at Farnborough North station. He is the person behind the founding of Reg's Garden and is now leading on plans to transform the Stationmaster's House into a community hub. Mike came up with a fantastic idea to ensure everyone stayed informed about the December timetable change and also Network Rail's progress on the new footbridge. He organised a Great Mince Pie Giveaway in the lead-up to Christmas. Starting at 7am, to catch the many hundreds of students who use the station daily, the initiative was a great demonstration of community kindness.



The Great Mince Pie Giveaway

## Other news

The dynamic and beautiful mural, which was completed in 2022 for the underpass at Guildford station, has very deservedly won an award for public art at the 2023 Guildford Society Design Awards. Artist Julie Hoyle collected the award, together with Liz Collins from The Arts Society Guildford. This year, a ceremony will be held for the unveiling of the plaque by the mural.



Artist Julie Hoyle in front of her award-winning mural

## Upcoming

Surrey Hills National Landscape, in partnership with SCRP and with funding from GWR, is commissioning a new poster design to promote the Rail to Ramble walks in the Surrey Hills. The design, a linocut by local artist Diana Croft showing the much-loved St Martha's church, will bring a new, lively touch to the posters on display at stations along the North Downs line, promoting the beautiful countryside.

An upcoming joint event will be hosted in collaboration with the Blackwater Valley Conservation Trust and Surrey Hills National Landscape. Emphasising the significance of the North Downs line in connecting these regions, the event will feature a train journey with activities onboard between stations in each area. Participants will observe variations in landscape, flora and fauna, and discover hidden areas of natural beauty and local heritage visible from the train. The event aims to encourage accessible exploration for all.

## Three Rivers Community Rail Partnership



Over the past year, Hampshire Community Rail Partnership, encompassing Three Rivers Community Rail Partnership (CRP), Hills to Harbour CRP, Reading Basingstoke CRP and Wey Valley CRP, has seen ongoing development. This includes the establishment of a Community Interest Company, serving as a legal umbrella for our diverse partnerships spanning beyond the county into Wiltshire, Berkshire and Surrey.

The formation of a CIC has enabled us to lease redundant station buildings – we currently hold 10 leases – and to employ six staff members. Additionally, it facilitates the administration of a few other CRPs outside Hampshire that lack formal constitution.

Furthermore, in 2023, we achieved Accreditation Status through the Department for Transport and Community Rail Network's evaluation and assessment process.

### Station building refurbishments

We are leasing and refurbishing redundant spaces at stations across the SVR network in order to create centres for community use. Special thanks must go to First Group's SVR subsidiary, who have developed this idea with us and provided peppercorn rents to help community activities establish and flourish.

The leases include a variety of spaces across the network: Bitterne station's former booking office, Crewkerne Pump House, Netley History Room and Volunteers Toilets, the Platform 2 Waiting Room at Netley station, Petersfield Hub, the café at Romsey station, Shawford station's café, the Free Shop at Swaythling station and Woolston's signal box garden. These spaces serve multiple purposes, including heritage exhibitions, community gardening, arts and crafts, community cafés and free shops, which distribute spare food from supermarkets and private donations, aiming to reduce food waste and provide barrier-free access to food.



Shawford station café: in need of a makeover



The revamped Platform One Coffee House and Gelateria

### Free shops

Building on the success of the free shop introduced at Petersfield Hub next to Petersfield station three years ago, we established a similar facility at Swaythling station. Operating every Saturday morning from two leased rooms and the station's booking office, any surplus food at the end of each session is donated to the local St Denys Sunday Lunch Club. This initiative prepares dinners for vulnerable individuals the following day, ensuring minimal food waste.

Recently, this provision has been supplemented with a 'baby bank' in one of the station's leased rooms, full of toys, clothes, equipment and baby food. We have even tried out a table of bric-a-brac as well to push the concept of recycling and reusing further.

### South Downs Rambler rail bus integrated tourist bus

In 2023, in a further attempt to promote tourism by rail and bus in Hampshire, the Three Rivers CRP reintroduced the popular South Downs Rambler bus between Winchester and Petersfield stations on Sundays in summer. Funded by Cross Country Trains through their Customer and Communities Improvement Fund, and operated by Bluestar buses, this service offers a superb ride adjacent to the South Downs Way. Passengers have the flexibility to hop on and off to explore parts of this famous long-distance footpath, or to enjoy the numerous tourist attractions and picturesque villages along the route. We were delighted that nearly 450 people used the bus throughout Summer 2023.

We also continue to expand rail-bus tourist opportunities across our CRP area, including the popular bus service connecting Southampton Airport Parkway and Eastleigh stations with Marwell Zoo.



The South Downs Rambler

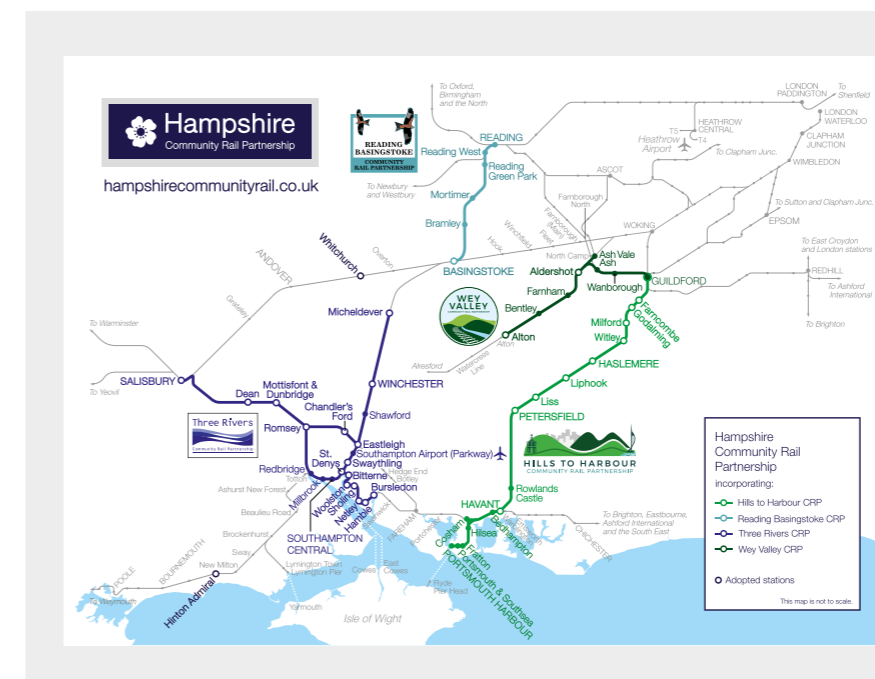
### Swaythling station art

The Drawing on the Outside project, run by local artists and part-funded by the Three Rivers CRP, culminated in the installation of artwork on previously unsightly, boarded-up windows at Swaythling station. This nine-month programme included fortnightly workshops aimed at local men experiencing social isolation, encouraging them to draw, reconnect with their community, and engage with public spaces.

They have already been receiving very positive feedback from members of the local community, who are delighted that the art has helped brighten up the station.



New artworks at Swaythling station



The Hampshire Community Rail Partnership encompasses Reading Basingstoke CRP, Three Rivers CRP, Hills to Harbour CRP and Wey Valley CRP, covering a broad segment of the rail network. Since GWR only serves at stations for Reading Basingstoke and Three Rivers CRPs, these are the only two included in the booklet.

## Reading Basingstoke Community Rail Partnership



This past year has been an exciting one, with some fantastic new contacts made. It is great to have the opportunity to showcase the wide variety of projects we've achieved on a line that serves only six stations.

Through developing new station-to-station walks, we've found how seamlessly one can transition from the vibrant city life of Basingstoke and Reading to the tranquil beauty of the surrounding countryside, just a few stops away. Our expert volunteer walk leader Malinka Van Der Gaauw led a station-to-station walk during the inaugural Reading Walking Festival, which took place in May 2023, attracting over 20 walkers. Owing to the festival's success, another is being organised this year, giving us the opportunity to promote further walks.

### Winter Warmer at Reading Station

Following Network Rail's offer to use an empty retail unit in the Brunel Arcade at Reading station for the benefit of the local community, Lucy Lomax, Rail Officer for Reading Basingstoke Community Rail Partnership (CRP), came up with the idea of collecting and giving away coats and accessories. As a result, in February 2023, we delivered a highly successful Winter Warmer event.

Lucy worked closely with Sarah Gardner from Reading Borough Council's Community Safety Partnership to deliver the Reading event, which highlighted what can be achieved and how many people can be helped with even short-burst collaborative efforts such as this one.

At least 800 'as good as new' surplus coats, hats and gloves were handed out during a two-day period. Over 90% of the donated items were distributed, going to those most vulnerable in our society. The donations not allocated were taken to the Cowshed, a local charity that supports people in crisis across Berkshire and works with over 200 other organisations.

The event was a great success, thanks to the generous donations received from local businesses and charities. Particular thanks go to staff at BDO, No.5, Launchpad, St Mungos, Reading Refugees, Cowshed and RVA, who volunteered at the event. Also, John Lewis lent us some clothes rails and hangers and donated some jumpers. Meanwhile, St Mary's Minster loaned us some tables. One of the funniest sights was seeing staff from John Lewis wheeling clothes rails through the town centre!

In January 2024, we offered more winter warmers in the same location. Furthermore, the Winter Warmer concept was extended to the Hills to Harbour CRP's community outlet at Petersfield station. It is hoped that it will become an annual event at a number of stations using the successful template now in place.



Winter Warmer volunteers at Reading station



Handing out coats and accessories at Reading station

### Reading Green Park station opened

Hampshire CRP were delighted to be involved with the opening of Reading Green Park station on Thursday 25 May. It was exciting to be among the first passengers to arrive at the station.

Working to a tight deadline, and with the support of the CRP Marketing Manager at GWR, we produced a leaflet to welcome travellers to Reading Green Park, and also to encourage local residents to make use of their new station.

The leaflet highlighted the ease of reaching various destinations within an hour by train, along with providing guidance on the best method for booking train tickets. The leaflet went out to all local businesses and residents and was also made available at libraries in Reading.

Station staff have been keen to get involved with the local community. Therefore, we worked with staff to create a spooky Halloween event. Families were invited to visit the station for treats (no tricks). There were activities to keep them amused, including creating their own ghost train and playing some spooky games. We look forward to scheduling further events in the future.

### Reading Amnesty Art

Thanks to funding from GWR, we had the privilege of working with a number of Reading's community groups to create a lasting legacy for young people who face the ongoing issue of knife crime.

The sculpture, which was designed and installed by local artist Stuart Melrose, who himself experienced knife crime as a young person, aims to symbolise peace, serenity and hope. He aspires for it to be a focal point to trigger conversations that will, in turn, challenge the narrative surrounding knife crime in Reading. It will not only commemorate those who have lost their lives or been injured due to knife crime, but also educate the public and offer support pathways. The public sculpture, produced by community-based engagement art project #ReadingAmestyArt, has been installed outside the Oracle Centre in Reading. Materials used to make the sculpture included amnesty weapons from both police and community knife bins.



Unveiling the Armoured Heart in Reading



Spooky fun at Reading Green Park

Thames Valley Violence Reduction Unit coordinated the project, working with a number of stakeholders, including ourselves, Reading Borough Council Arts and Culture, Thames Valley Police, Reading's Knife Crime Forum, Reading University, Berkshire Vision, Reading College, Starting Point Reading, Number 5, RFC Community Trust, the John Sykes Foundation, and the Oracle Reading.

*"We need to find creative ways through which we can educate young people on the impact and consequences of knife crime. Also, to do it in a way that doesn't raise the fear of crime or glamorise weapons. Through this project we worked to create a positive way to reach young people and to challenge the culture and existing narrative around carrying and using knives."* **Inspector Kelly Reed, of the Thames Valley Violence Reduction Unit**

*"This is a really exciting project for the people of Reading because the public art installation has been co-produced with members of the community, it means something to them and has become part of Reading's art history, but ultimately contributes to making Reading a safer place for all."* **Donna Pentelow, Assistant Director of Culture at Reading Borough Council**

*"Working on this project has opened doors to us that we would otherwise not have access to. There is such a wide range of groups to work with and create projects. Already we are looking at creating an exciting project at Reading West station as the new ticket office opens. We are also able to find groups who will benefit from using the Try the Train project and we are also planning a family fun day again working with local groups."*

**Lucy Lomax, Reading Basingstoke Community Rail Partnership**

## Oxfordshire Community Rail Partnership



In September 2023, building on our dedication to community-led projects and sustainable approaches for enhancing community connectivity, we officially launched the new Oxfordshire Community Rail Partnership (OxCRP).

This launch followed a comprehensive year of feasibility studies in 2022, generously funded by GWR. Covering 22 railway stations across the county, OxCRP hit the ground running, engaging and collaborating with community organisations, local government and transport operators.

Our primary focus is on implementing a strategic framework that incorporates rigorous research, inclusive consultations, and community-led engagement and development activities. Operating across four key program areas – Access and Inclusion, Social Value, Leisure and Tourism, and Stations as Places – OxCRP is dedicated to making a meaningful impact in the region. Our approach is needs-based, aiming to develop sustainable travel solutions while establishing a robust evidence base to support collaborations with partners and stakeholders.

In the coming year, we are thrilled to unveil three new community projects, made possible with invaluable support from GWR. These initiatives are not only designed to address immediate needs but are also strategically crafted to pave the way for sustainable, long-term opportunities within the communities we proudly serve.

### Gateway to Independent Travel

We are delighted to have expanded this programme to Oxfordshire, building upon three years of experience supporting young people from underrepresented backgrounds in Gloucestershire to access natural environments. Working closely with community groups and services in some of Oxford's more disadvantaged areas, we have already facilitated four days out by train for 60 young people from underrepresented communities to connect with nature, learn new skills, and bond with their peers.

Participants expressed their satisfaction:

*'The train journey was the highlight of my day because of getting to talk and chill with everyone.'*

*'The train journey was amazing!'*

Working closely with our new community partners, we identified places the young people want to visit and have supported them to design and build suitable itineraries. Visiting sites including the Malvern Hills and Beale Wildlife Park, we have supported 60 young people, some of whom had little to no experience using the train, to build travel confidence and independence. In this first year of delivery, we are focused on understanding what the biggest barriers and needs are for young people living in Oxfordshire, working closely with youth groups and our community partners, including Youth Ambition, Leys Community Development Initiative and Family Arena, to understand how we can continue to support young people to get the most out of sustainable transport.



Building young people's travel confidence



Connecting with nature and learning new skills

### Route2Work

Following on from our Let's Talk Travel programme in Gloucestershire, we have adapted our existing travel confidence materials to fit the unique Oxfordshire context. These bespoke resources have been developed and distributed throughout the county to assist job seekers in Oxfordshire in accessing sustainable transport more confidently and affordably, thereby enhancing life opportunities and fostering independence. With support from local community groups, Job Centres, local government, and NHS, these resources have enabled us to raise awareness among professionals about the common transport-related barriers faced by job seekers. Additionally, they provide a collection of practical tips and tricks to support individuals in making more confident journeys by bus and train.

These materials will be utilised as engaging resources for future workshops. We are committed to working closely with communities that encounter additional employment- and transport-related barriers, and plan to activate this by utilising our new resources to support tailored travel training workshops and 'try-the-train' experiences in the future.

### Connecting Communities

We are delighted to be building on the Connecting Communities project, developed by Gloucestershire Community Rail Partnership (CRP), focusing on developing access and active travel maps that support wayfinding and integration around stations in Oxfordshire. In this first phase, we have developed new access maps for Banbury and Didcot Parkway, ready for community engagement and stakeholder consultation in both areas. Adopting a place-based approach that acknowledges the distinctive needs and contexts of each community, these maps will function as wayfinding resources and engagement materials. They aim to support community voice and influence transport planners in areas experiencing new housing growth, socioeconomic deprivation and health inequity.

We've created a survey for Oxfordshire residents to gain insights into the community's opinions, experiences and motivations concerning sustainable transport. With the support of county and district councillors, community groups and transport

operators, we've circulated the survey broadly to capture diverse viewpoints. A key objective is to understand how OxCRP can facilitate a shift towards more sustainable transportation options for the county's new residents.

Looking back over this first year of activity at Oxfordshire CRP, we are excited to continue to develop these projects and our relationships with the community partners who make them possible. This first year has demonstrated that there is a significant appetite and commitment for a modal shift towards sustainable transport in Oxfordshire. We look forward to continuing our work with GWR and other partners to support these aims and enable meaningful outcomes for our communities.



CRP launch event at Oxford Parkway Station

GWR CRP Route Map

- Yate    Black station name - managed by GWR or NR
- Iver    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

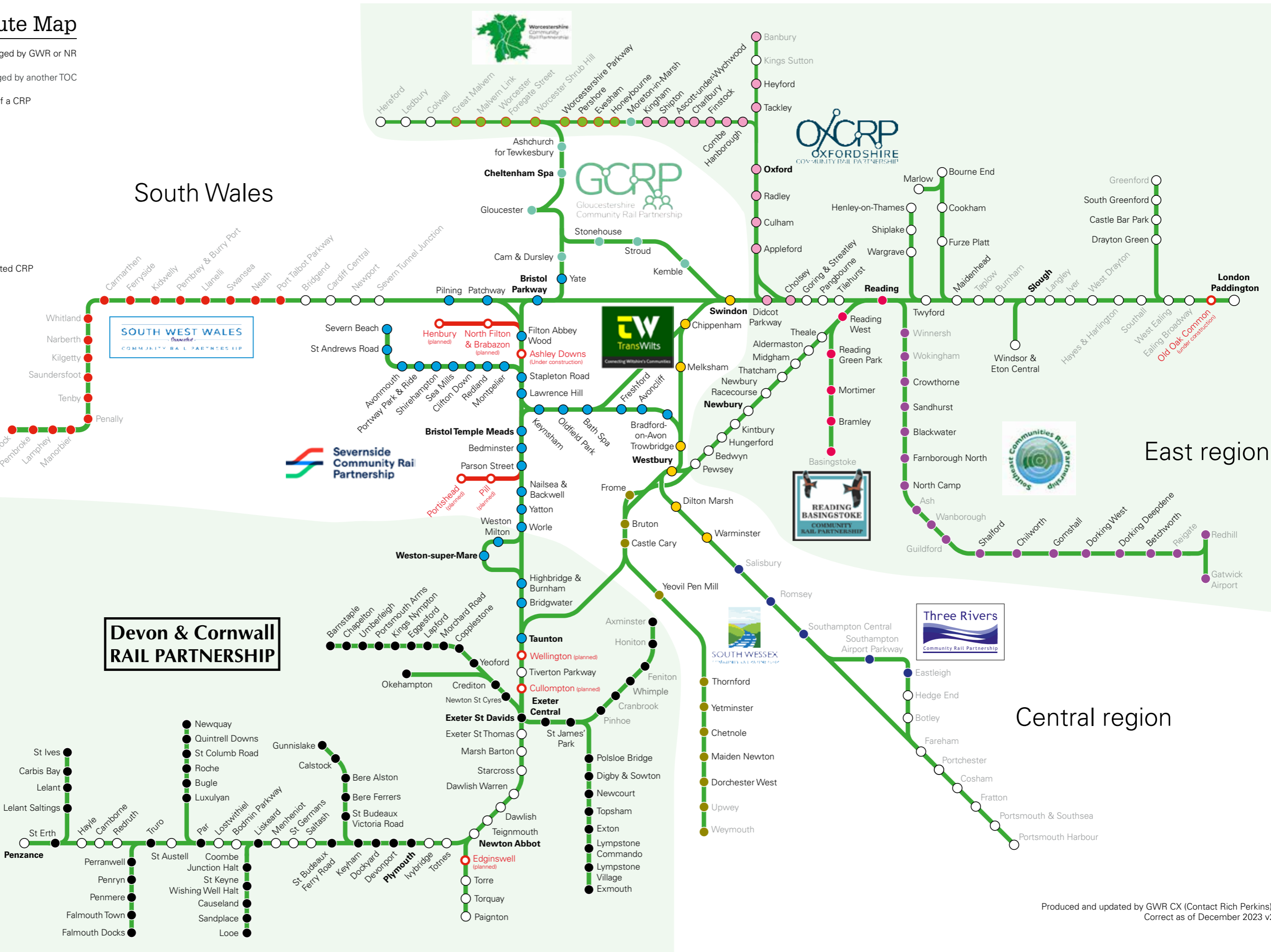
West region

Devon & Cornwall  
RAIL PARTNERSHIP

South Wales

East region

Central region



## Community Rail Awards



The gala presentation evening for the 2024 Community Rail Awards took place at the magnificent Swansea Arena on Monday 18 March. This event served as a platform to spotlight and honour community groups, partnerships and volunteers, acknowledging their diverse contributions and the positive impact they bring about.

### Outstanding Contribution to Community Rail



Winner

Gloucestershire Community Rail Partnership (CRP)

From tourism and heritage to youth engagement and sustainable travel, Gloucestershire CRP has been making its mark since it launched in 2021. The CRP's impressive Impact Report reveals how they're empowering local communities and connecting people to their railways and the opportunities they offer.

Gloucestershire CRP has led several projects and initiatives over the years, including:

- Running a service helping people to gain continued confidence and travel skills when using rail and buses to access work and leisure, successfully engaging over 300 participants and 60 local organisations.

- Forging a strong, evidenced track record in empowering young people, especially from more marginalised communities, breaking down barriers, and opening up social connections and life opportunities. Gloucestershire CRP was one of the partners in the Tackling Loneliness with Transport project, engaging nearly 100 young people and delivering profound benefits.
- Creating an integrated travel map promoting sustainable and inclusive leisure journeys across modes and working closely with the tourism sector.
- Celebrating diverse cultures and histories – several of their stations showcase work by local Black and Brown artists, while their Black History Map shows how the railway can be used to explore Black art and history across the county.

## Board's Special Recognition Award



Winner

Heather Cullimore, Severnside Community Rail Partnership (CRP)

Heather Cullimore is the recipient of our 2024 Board's Special Recognition Award, recognising her exceptional service to, and the championing of, community rail. In her role as Partnership Manager, Heather Cullimore has led the development of Severnside CRP since early 2011. With a strong background in community outreach, Heather has encouraged the drive, determination and experience that has transformed the partnership into what it is today.

As Partnership Manager, Heather has overseen a more than fivefold increase in income through a range of successful grant applications. She has shown strong commitment to enrich the lives of those who live around the stations, with a passion for breaking down barriers, engaging diverse communities and enabling everyone to enjoy the benefits and freedom of rail travel.

*"I have watched with great interest and admiration how Heather has developed and grown Severnside CRP over the years. Many of the innovative projects she has led have won awards and indeed Severnside CRP itself won the overall award for Outstanding Contribution to Community Rail at the 2018 Community Rail Awards. I think she is a very worthy recipient indeed of this year's Board's Special Recognition Award."* **Richard Burningham MBE, Manager of the Devon and Cornwall Rail Partnership**

## Empowering Diverse Groups



Winner



Platform: A Joint Community Rail Education Programme for This Mighty Traveller

Recognising that accessing the railways is particularly complex for young people with disabilities, Platform worked with teachers and their students in specialist settings to create bespoke packages that help break down perceived barriers to rail travel and empower people with disabilities to use the railway.

The Platform team held meetings to gain an understanding of students' needs before preparing appropriate and accessible workshops. For some, this involved journey planning, which helped address barriers to travel. For others, such as groups with non-verbal students, it involved play-based activities, where safety messaging could be delivered through dressing up and role play. The workshops served as the precursor to train trips, empowering the students to shape their experience by choosing their own destinations.

Over 300 students from 16 special schools and day centres enjoyed 24 fantastic days out by train that included journeys to Gloucester Cathedral, a paint

festival, and the beach. There was even a trip to a restaurant of the students' choice to help them practise ordering food.

Platform will continue its initiative This Mighty Traveller, further enhancing the connection between people with disabilities and special needs and the railways. This effort aligns with their goal to highlight the positive experiences and possibilities that train travel can offer.

*"The work of the Platform team is simply outstanding, and they are professional in all they do. The school-based sessions were very skilfully adapted to children with special needs and the resources and 'hands on' activities made the sessions as fun as they were educational. All my staff reported how much the children learnt about railways and rail safety and then to experience a train trip in 'real life' was wonderful. I can recommend this wonderful organisation and essential life skill intervention to all schools without reservation."*

**Kevin Day, Headteacher at Belmont Special School**

## Small Projects Award (under £500)



Winner

Reading Basingstoke Community Rail Partnership (CRP) for Reading and Petersfield Station Winter Warmers

Hampshire CRP worked with a host of different partners including Network Rail, Great Western Railway, South Western Railway, British Transport Police, local businesses and university students to spread the reach of the Winter Warmers project. Demonstrating how the community rail movement supports some of the most disadvantaged people in our communities, the Hampshire CRP provided local residents the opportunity to donate their surplus coats, hats, scarves and gloves for reuse.

Through three pop-up shops at stations, over 1,000 pieces of pre-loved clothing were redistributed to those in need. No funding or extra money was required to deliver the project, as it relied on community generosity and resources and drew on in-kind support from local partners and media. John Lewis in Reading provided clothes rails, a local church offered up their tables, and Petersfield Winton House acted as a donation point.

The Winter Warmers project established the rail network and its stations as places that are warm, welcoming and inclusive, and exist to serve the whole community. There are now plans to host Winter Warmer events at the same locations next year, as well as share good practice with other community rail partnerships looking to set up similar projects.

*"A really well delivered and readily repeatable project that involved so many people, all at no cost, to bring benefits for those in society who need it most."* **Andy Savage, Chair of the Railway Heritage Trust and CRA24 Judge**

## Best Community Engagement Project



Winner

Sevenside Community Rail Partnership (CRP), GWR REACH and Network Rail Cultural Fusion for Carnival Train

Great Western Railway REACH and Network Rail Cultural Fusion staff networks are dedicated to the advancement of diversity and inclusion in their areas of the rail industry. Both networks wanted to play a part in celebrating Caribbean culture at the world's largest community-led event, the Notting Hill Carnival. They collaborated with Sevenside CRP to help make this happen.

The project involved providing free rail travel from Bristol Temple Meads to London Paddington to help reduce barriers to rail travel. It offered a chance for underrepresented communities, who might not have had the opportunity, to participate in the diverse and celebratory event. This included members of Bristol Black Carers, Bath Black Families Education Group, Bath Ethnic Minority Senior Citizens Association and St Nicholas of Tolentine School.

To create a carnival atmosphere on the train, Bristol artist Abbi Baylis was commissioned to create art packs for those attending and to decorate the carriages with carnival-themed artwork. Glen's Kitchen, a Caribbean Café in Bristol, was selected to provide Jamaican snacks, and a steel band greeted the passengers at Paddington Station.

This first-of-its-kind event provided a fantastic opportunity for Sevenside CRP to collaborate with the rail industry, investing in positive travel experiences for local communities and showcasing their shared commitment to promoting diversity and inclusion.

*"This is a strong project that was interactive, built on community engagement and shared local perspectives. It looked like great fun too!"* **Dominic Lund-Conlon, Accessibility and Inclusion Manager at Rail Delivery Group and CRA24 Judge**

## Involving Children and Young People



Second

Worcestershire Community Rail Partnership (CRP) and Platform for Interchange

The Interchange project was developed in response to the growing number of young people being coerced into dangerous criminal activity such as 'county lines' drug trafficking. With the National Crime Agency citing the rail network as being used for 40% of the movement of illegal drugs across the UK, Worcestershire CRP and Platform recognised the importance of providing a toolkit of resources for young people to know how to seek support.

The 'Which side of the tracks?' film is the most visited resource on Platform's website, and train operating companies are starting to use the film for training frontline staff on how to detect and deal with signs of exploitation. The film was shown at Worcester City Council's Safer Communities Day in June 2023, where over 250 school students took part in discussions around the themes presented in the film.

*"We were very pleased to see young people being taught a very unique and important topic,"* **Ade Ayoola, Community Rail Lead at the Department for Transport and CRA24 Judge**

## Tourism and Leisure Award



Second

Devon and Cornwall Rail Partnership for Bus branch line videos

The Bus Branch Line video project brought together Devon and Cornwall Rail Partnership, GWR, local authorities and bus operators to produce and promote a series of 10 travelogue short films. The films aimed to inspire visits to leisure destinations across Devon and Cornwall using integrated sustainable transport, showcasing the ease of combining bus and train travel. After a successful film premiere-style launch, complete with red carpet and popcorn, the videos were promoted through social media. The videos reached 500,000 people across Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, Twitter/X and YouTube.

*"It is great to see such a creative promotion of integrated travel. It made me want to leave my desk and get out there!"* **Nicky Forsdike, Independent Railway Consultant and CRA24 Judge**

## Influencing Positive Change and Sustainability



Second

Gloucestershire Community Rail Partnership (CRP) for Connecting New Communities

The Connecting New Communities project was designed to engage with residents in Gloucestershire’s new housing developments, promoting car-free and sustainable transport choices. Gloucestershire CRP worked with partners to design and deliver seven community events that enhanced awareness of active travel connections in the area, including free bike servicing, interactive surveys and information for job seekers. As a result, transport planners involved in new developments have acknowledged the significance of this local initiative. They are now requesting engagement tools from the Gloucestershire CRP to include in welcome packs for new residents, recognising the value of promoting sustainable transport.

*“It’s a great example of partnership working, with community rail using skills and experience to benefit the wider community. This ticks all the boxes – sustainability, inclusion, community.”*  
**Nicky Forsdike, Independent Railway Consultant and CRA24 Judge**

## Most Effective Communications Campaign



Second

Southeast Communities Rail Partnership (CRP) for Community Rail Coronation Connections

Wanting to tap into the huge potential the national Coronation celebrations offered for promoting sustainable leisure travel, Southeast CRP created a social media campaign to highlight the green credentials of train travel. During the six-week campaign, the Southeast CRP quantified the environmental benefits of choosing train travel over car trips from London to 13 attractions with royal affiliations, across each of its nine lines. The event’s social media posts garnered over 13,000 impressions on Twitter/X alone, with tags and mentions from train operators, destination organisations and local media, leading to wider sharing and organic growth. In a wonderfully imaginative way, the Coronation Connections project captured the spirit of the celebrations by harnessing the influence of our rail network and the relevance of community rail.

*“Rail travel is a key mechanism for visitors to Brighton, particularly from London. The Coronation Connections campaign was imaginative and innovative and a great example of partnership working that definitely brought us new visitors. It reminded visitors that the Royal Pavilion was a royal palace and has a great story to tell.”* **Hedley Swain, CEO The Royal Pavilion and Museums Trust**

## Most Effective Communications Campaign



Third

Gloucestershire Community Rail Partnership (CRP) for The Slimbridge Shuttle

Gloucestershire CRP took a hyper-local approach in their marketing campaign for the Slimbridge Shuttle bus. They aimed to guarantee that the advantages of the shuttle service were widely known throughout the local community, both for its role in providing access to the well-visited wetland centre and as a reliable and accessible means of community transport for any stops along its route.

PR, social media and focused leaflet and poster distribution was conducted in collaboration with Slimbridge Wetland Centre to maximise the

communications reach. Over the three-month trial period, the campaign reached over half a million local residents, resulting in over 500 people using the shuttle service. It got a rating of 4.9 out of 5 in terms of overall satisfaction.

*“This service is absolutely fantastic for someone like me with a child but no car. It means we can reach places like Slimbridge and that’s made all the difference.”* **One of the service users**

A big thank you to everyone who participated. It’s fantastic to see your hard work paying off, and the awards truly showcase the real-world impact of your efforts. We can’t wait to see the projects you present at next year’s awards. Until then, keep up the good work!

## Station Adoption Fund

GWR's Station Adoption Fund has been instrumental in fostering community engagement and enhancing local railway stations and their surroundings.

With contributions totalling £88,627 towards funding requests from community rail partnerships, the fund has supported a wide array of initiatives aimed at improving stations across the network.

Station adoption plays a vital role in the community rail ecosystem, with more than 1,000 station adoption groups or 'station friends' groups actively involved, covering over a third of Britain's stations. These groups not only beautify stations and their surroundings but also transform them into vibrant and inviting hubs, enriching the communities they serve.

The benefits of station adoption are numerous, ranging from the improved health and wellbeing of volunteers to the promotion of sustainability, development and cohesion within the wider community. Additionally, station adoption contributes to the overall success of the railway in effectively serving its passengers.

The Station Adoption Fund has fulfilled 70 fund requests, supporting items such as notice boards, memorial plaques, gardening tools, bulbs, plants and compost bins, among others. Moreover, the fund has backed various projects including creative literacy workshops, heritage initiatives and biodiversity enhancement efforts at select stations.

Furthermore, the fund has collaborated with organisations such as Samaritans and Crimestoppers to promote wellbeing and create safe spaces at stations. It has also partnered with the Bee Friendly Trust to improve biodiversity, further enhancing the environmental impact of station adoption initiatives.



Friends of Yatton

## Go Train – an education service on the North Downs line



Go Train is now in its third year on the North Downs line. The programme is aimed at Year 6 pupils and includes the following workshops: Planning your Journey and Staying Safe, Sustainable and Healthy Travel, and Railway Careers.

We also offer free station visits and train rides to Reading. This year, we were able to offer visits to Guildford station for the first time. Pupils from Walsh C of E Junior School in Ash visited Guildford in May. We also offered our Try a Train programme of workshops, station visits and train rides to young people aged 16+ with additional needs. All our workshops can be adapted to suit the needs of the participants.



County Care trip to Guildford in August

This year we have been able to work with community groups including Alana House Women's Refuge in Reading, the Patchworking Garden Project in Dorking and numerous County Care groups across Surrey. Several of our Try a Train trips have included visits to Reg's Garden at Farnborough North station. Groups were welcomed with refreshments and a tour of the garden. One group managed to visit the day before the garden plant sale and bagged a few bargains to take home on the train!

We've worked on creating two new films this year. The first, an in-house production called 'Try a Train', shows Becky taking the train from Horsham to Crawley. It was filmed and edited by the team and is used during our workshops to show anxious participants what to expect when they travel with us on the train. The second film is about busting myths on the railway. We've been lucky enough to support the Platform team in this myth-busting project and are looking forward to the film's premiere in 2024.

Our biggest project of this year has been developing our new treasure hunt app. After the success of last year's paper treasure hunt, we wanted to make one that was more sustainable and didn't involve printing off a paper activity booklet. We secured extra funding from the Community Rail Network and collaborated with a local app developer, Really Quite Something, for this project. It was tested by children and their families at the end of 2023, and we hope it will go live in early 2024.



Reading depot tour in July

The team has been fortunate this year, participating in several educational activities. In July, we attended a tour of the Reading depot with the Platform team. This was followed by a GWR sign language course in November. Our year of learning concluded with a visit to the Postal Museum in London in December, which included a ride on the Mail Rail train. These experiences have not only enriched our collection of photos and videos for future workshops with school and community groups but have also broadened our knowledge. We are grateful for GWR's support in our ongoing learning journey.



Maddy and Cath and the Mail Rail train in December

We are really proud of the Go Train programme and the feedback has been amazing. "All of our staff were so thrilled with both experiences (even in the rain!) and so were the children! ... I personally haven't had such a well-planned/organised/engaging school trip out with an external provider in a long time and I loved how patient and engaging you were with our children – it was like you were one of our teaching team. Life-long memories were definitely made this week, particularly for those who it was their first time on the train, and we can't wait to book you in again for next year's cohort. Hopefully see you again in a year's time!" **Deputy Head at St. John's C of E School, Reading**

## Platform

Platform was established in 2022 to deliver rail education on behalf of Worcestershire, Gloucestershire, TransWilts and Severnside Community Rail Partnerships (CRPs), and 2023 has seen the scheme grow from strength to strength.

We are delighted to have welcomed three new members to our delivery team and to have expanded our area to include the South Wessex CRP. This expansion has enabled us to offer our rail education opportunities to a wider audience of children and young people. Some of the highlights of 2023 have included:

### Worcester's Wonderful Waterways

In March 2023, the Platform team travelled with two Year 3 classes from Beech Green Primary School on a geography field trip that explored rivers, canals and – of course – trains. On the travel days, students arrived prepped, knowledgeable and travel-ready, following their rail safety workshop. There was joy in the air as they boarded the train from Gloucester to Worcester Foregate Street.



Worcester's Wonderful Waterways

The Wonderful Waterways fieldtrip took the eager students on a tour to see the River Severn and Diglis Basin Locks. Several activities were delivered on the walk, exploring the different parts of a river, the problem of flooding and the differences and similarities between rivers and canals.

Before setting off to catch the return train, students had a packed lunch at the Historical Pod, accompanied by story-time featuring Arlo, the team's favourite rail safety badger. As a delightful treat, each student received their own copy of the book, coinciding with World Book Day celebrations that week.

## Platform

*"The day was planned around our own specific requirements, following on from topic work in class, in which the children had the opportunity to revisit their learning and see things in 'real world' contexts. I was especially impressed with the thoroughness of the planning for the day's tasks, and how directly relevant and engaging all the tasks and activities were."* **Ben Dawson, Beech Green Primary School**

### Next stop... the beach!

South Wessex Community Rail Partnership officially joined Platform in April 2023. To celebrate, the team took Year 1 students from Studley Green Primary School on a train-trip to Weymouth in May.

All aboard at Trowbridge! The students settled into their seats and embarked on their journey. Despite the length of the trip, the picturesque views of the Somerset and Dorset countryside kept them thoroughly entertained. This enjoyment was further enhanced by Platform activity booklets distributed during the journey.

For many students, this marked their inaugural beach visit, and the excitement was palpable as their toes touched the sand and, later, the water. Buckets and spades were distributed, shoes were discarded, and hours of joy ensued. Weymouth, a curriculum topic at school, provided not just fun but also opportunities to observe and identify differences between Weymouth and Trowbridge. The students keenly spotted examples of human and physical geography while immersing themselves in the seaside experience.

A visit to the beach wouldn't be complete without an ice-cream, so the Platform team treated everyone to a Mr Whippy before heading back to the train for the return journey. The day concluded with the tired, excited – and very sandy – students bidding farewell at Trowbridge station.

*"The children had the most fantastic time and have had a very memorable experience all thanks to Platform. From a teacher's point of view, all of the planning, resources, itinerary, risk assessment and running of the trip was so organised and seamless. I felt completely at ease and it was a stress-free day."* **Charlotte Broadhead, Year 1 teacher at Studley Green Primary School**



Primary school children enjoy a trip to the seaside with Next Stop... the Beach

### This Mighty Traveller

Platform's This Mighty Traveller programme is specifically designed for specialist provisions, aiming to break down barriers and empower young people to become confident rail users, whether travelling independently or with support.

In 2023, the team worked with over 650 students from 15 special schools and took over 480 students on 27 train trips.

Before travelling, the team delivered in-school workshops to all students, focusing on accessibility in addition to their usual focus of rail safety, confidence and behaviour. Specific travel planning is also embedded into the scheme's special-school offer, providing information about the Passenger Assistance App and clear instruction on how to utilise it.



Empowering young people...



Throughout the spring, students from Belmont School in Cheltenham visited Worcester's History and Heritage Pod for some activities. The trip allowed students to practise their life skills. This included visits to shops and food venues, where they learned to place orders and purchase their lunches, which were then eaten in the beautiful Cripplegate Park.

*"The work of the rail education team is simply outstanding and they are professional in all they do. The school-based sessions were very skilfully adapted to children with special needs and the resources. The hands-on activities made the sessions as fun as they were educational. All my staff reported how much the children learned about rail safety. To experience a train trip in 'real life' was wonderful. I can recommend this organisation and essential life skill intervention to all schools without reservation."* **Kevin Day, Headteacher at Belmont Special School**



...with This Mighty Traveller

Confidence, careers and commuting

In the past year, the Platform team collaborated with South Bristol Youth Charity (SBY) to develop a comprehensive learning package. This initiative aimed to deepen understanding of local career opportunities and how to pursue them in a manner that is not only healthy and sustainable but also economical.

Across seven trips, a total of 92 students from seven secondary schools in Bristol benefited from the package, designed for maximum impact each day.

Students started their day by meeting Mark Nixon from SBY in Bristol City Centre, with sessions kindly hosted by either the law firm Burges Salmon or professional services company PwC on different occasions. Shortly after, a member of the Platform team joined them to conduct a pre-travel workshop focused on safety, confidence and behaviour, preparing students with the knowledge needed for making safe decisions on the railway.

The groups then walked to Bristol Temple Meads station to familiarise themselves with navigating a busy station environment. They learned how to

read departure boards, locate their platforms, and purchase tickets. The practical lesson culminated in boarding a train to Avonmouth, offering the students a real-world commuter experience.

After arriving at Avonmouth, the groups proceeded to Avonmouth Community Centre to delve into the careers aspect of their trips. There, they participated in a career workshop facilitated by the Platform team. On many occasions, they were fortunate to host representatives from local businesses, including Bristol Port Company, Severnet, Nisbetts and GWR, who collaborated with the team to present valuable insights into career opportunities in the area.

We are really excited this partnership has been so successful and we have many more trips lined up for 2024.

*“The team at Platform provided the perfect package for our students on the SBY Insight into Apprenticeships programme. The blending of safe travel awareness, commuter experience and overview of the rail sectors apprenticeship opportunities was just the ticket!”* **Mark Nixon, Project Coordinator from South Bristol Youth**

Direct, in-person delivery to **6,244** students

Over **4,500** unique website users

Rail-familiarisation trips for **3,177** students

Over **830** lessons downloaded

Parent voice from **644** parents

**100% of surveyed teachers** feel their students benefited from working with us

Accessibility Mentors

The accessibility mentor team has enjoyed a hugely successful twelve months, as we continue to find new ways of helping to make the railway more accessible.

Nominated for three separate awards, two national and one internal, it has been encouraging to have our work recognised by both our colleagues and the wider transport/rail industry. Whilst such recognition is always welcome, perhaps our biggest sense of pride came from achieving accreditation from the National Autistic Society. We can now proudly display that we are ‘autism friendly’, being the first train operating company to achieve such recognition.

Sensory packs that help people with autism relax whilst travelling have been made available, and increased staff training has played a part in achieving the accreditation. We have also introduced, on our YouTube channel, a series of videos called ‘sound bites’. These short videos help prepare anxious or unfamiliar travellers for their journey by introducing them to the sounds they might expect to hear when at the station or onboard.

To further assist people in preparing for their journey, a series of station tour videos have been created. These short videos allow people to view the station before they travel, helping passengers feel more familiar with what can be a challenging environment for unfamiliar travellers or those with sensory impairments.

Our Try a Train and travel training events have seen a huge increase in popularity. During our first year, we delivered sessions to over 300 people. For the year 2022-23, this number had increased to 2,300. By the end of this financial year, we expect to have delivered travel training to 3,000 people. As well as continuing to work with Special Educational Needs schools and colleges, we are pleased to have formed good working relationships with groups such as Alzheimer’s Society, Headway, Macular Society and the Department for Work and Pensions. We have also collaborated with our community rail partners, such as Severnside Community Rail Partnership, who have invited us to work with them on several projects throughout the year.

Another key aspect of our work is to promote accessibility within GWR. To that end, we have formed a new coalition of colleagues from across the business and created The Accessibility Working Group. By drawing on the experiences of staff, we hope to not only increase awareness of accessibility, but also drive innovation and progress that will aid our passengers and increase customer satisfaction and confidence in our services.

GWR employs an external company to monitor customer satisfaction in relation to passenger assistance. The overall satisfaction score varies between 86% and 92%, meaning we still have plenty of scope for improvement. A package of initiatives will collectively contribute to raising those scores, including our newly formed Accessibility Working Group, a heightened awareness around hidden disabilities (as exemplified by our accreditation from the National Autistic Society), and an ongoing commitment to enhanced staff training.



Helping make the railway more accessible



We hope to increase awareness of accessibility

The final word should be left to some of the groups we have worked with throughout this past year. Here is a selection of the feedback we have been fortunate enough to receive:

*"I used to take train travel for granted before my stroke, thank you for giving me back something that used to feel so normal."*

*"My confidence has been rebuilt and I'm going to take a trip on my own soon. I fancy a trip to Weymouth."*

*"You mentioned these trips are all about building confidence – you've certainly achieved that, thank you."*

#### **Stroke Society, Bristol**

*"I am writing to thank you for the guidance you have given me and the sensory pack to help ease future journeys (this is a quality fidget spinner). You have really opened up my possibilities for work and travel. I feel reassured that, should anything go wrong, I would have lines of action to take, instead of not knowing what to do, or doing the wrong thing. I am now excited at the prospect of having enjoyable train journeys, instead of being afraid they'd all go wrong."*

#### **Maximus Employment**

*"We wish to evince our heartfelt appreciation for your politeness and excellent, caring compassion and your kindness. As many of the Access Group's members feedback afterwards: we all have been very impressed at the level of professionalism exhibited by you and your teams and the tremendous standard of information and care you provide."*

#### **Action Disability Kensington and Chelsea**

*"Thanks so much for making it a memorable day for all of us. It was one of those days that reinforced why I came into teaching. Is there someone up the chain I could make aware of how great a day you put together for us?"*

#### **Exeter College**

If you would like to contact us, we would be delighted to hear from you:  
**[accessibilitymentors@gwr.com](mailto:accessibilitymentors@gwr.com)**



GWR is committed to the continuous improvement of services and facilities for disabled people

## Equity, Diversity and Inclusion

**We are delighted to join GWR and lead on Equity, Diversity and Inclusion. We look forward to developing and building new partnerships in our railway communities, collaborating to deliver impactful and meaningful work with passion.**

Within GWR, our vision is to create a truly diverse and inclusive business where colleagues, customers and communities feel a genuine sense of belonging. We want everyone to feel they can thrive and progress regardless of who they are and without fear of judgement. We believe passionately that this in turn enables us to deliver great experiences.

Since joining GWR, our headline message to colleagues and community groups has been that we recognise that we are all at a different stage in our inclusion journeys! Some of us might be focused on diversifying our social media or the books we read to broaden our awareness. Others might be engaged in a more internal process of thinking. And then there are those who are just beginning their journey. Every step, regardless of its nature, is valued and welcome. The key to inclusion is in starting the conversation with each other, making sure those conversations include all voices – both underrepresented and those already heard – and to be open to gaining new insight through these human experiences.



**The Carnival Train**

Our Learning and Development team hosted a day of Inclusion, Diversity and Unconscious Bias Training for the Board of South Devon Railway at GWR HQ in Swindon. Here, we discussed and workshoped all themes surrounding inclusion, with a focus on equity and leadership. It was a thoroughly enjoyable and inspiring day with a passionate and open leadership team.

In August 2023, the REACH network at GWR, a staff-led group aiming to improve the Black, Asian and ethnic minority diversity within GWR, collaborated with Network Rail's Cultural Fusion and Severnside Community Rail Partnership to run the incredible Carnival Train, taking passengers from Bristol Temple Meads to the Notting Hill Carnival in London. Their hard work has since been nominated for a 2024 Community Rail Award. We wish them luck!

This year, as with previous years, GWR's Employee Networks have excelled in working to deliver a host of diverse colleague, customer and community focused events. In the summer, GWR's ASPECT network proudly marched in Bristol LGBTQ+ Pride, not only highlighting our commitment to inclusivity but also serving as a powerful symbol of unity, love and acceptance.

In the first week of December our Disability Working Group invited colleagues across our network to wear purple in support of International Day of Persons with Disabilities which was received with great enthusiasm. And in rounding the year off, our Christian Rail Network held a beautifully festive and well-attended Christmas Carols at Paddington event, alongside the Great Western Railway Paddington Brass Band.



**Celebrating Wear it Purple Day**

GWR has deepened its commitment to Equity, Diversity and Inclusion by forging new community partnerships. These initiatives are aimed at empowering underserved groups by enhancing their employability skills, boosting their self-confidence and offering support as they navigate their future career paths.

In London, we proudly support Fair Shot Café, an exceptional organisation that provides young adults with learning disabilities and/or autism the opportunity to acquire valuable real-life work experience. Through a year-long hospitality program, we contribute to nurturing the next generation of skilled baristas and expert café assistants.

Following the theme of customer facing skills, we are excited to announce our continued investment in the Prince's Trust Campaign. In March 2024, GWR will be offering a group of 12 young people from diverse backgrounds a bespoke two-week Get Into Customer Service programme at GWR. This unique opportunity allows participants to earn critical qualifications in emergency first aid and food hygiene – key competencies for customer service roles within the railway industry. Moreover, through shadowing experiences at stations and onboard, we aim to inspire a new generation of talent dedicated to customer support at GWR.

In Wales, we've teamed up with Llamau, the leading homelessness charity in the region. They specialise in supporting the most vulnerable young people and women, many of whom have experienced domestic abuse or faced challenging and disadvantaged lifestyles. Llamau's invaluable work will help their community groups to gain the skills necessary to live independent and purposeful lives.

In Bristol, we're proud to support Babbasa, an organisation dedicated to inspiring and empowering underrepresented young people in the area. Through initiatives such as skills training, professional

mentoring, events and recruitment support services, Babbasa is making a meaningful impact on the lives of young individuals, helping them pursue their ambitions and build a pathway to success. We are excited to see how Babbasa offer support programmes that create a pathway for young people – working at their own pace – to build confidence, develop skills, connect with employers and mentors, and access workplace experience.

Our most recent partnership is with Future First, a social mobility charity dedicated to working with schools and empowering young people with the skills and confidence to reach their potential, regardless of their socio-economic background. We're excited about the opportunity to directly engage with early talent from diverse populations, encouraging them to develop their potential irrespective of their economic background. This collaboration aims to improve outcomes for young people in the communities we serve.

With all of our partnerships, established and new, we are keen for all our GWR colleagues to get involved in their local community. There's so much potential to do great work together and we encourage our community rail partners to get in touch if they would like to speak to us further about equity, diversity and inclusion. We would be delighted to hear from you.

**Geoff Sutton and Vicky Jones**  
Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Managers

[inclusion@gwr.com](mailto:inclusion@gwr.com)



Celebrating Pride with GWR



## Network Rail

Harriet Sergent is the Network Rail lead for all things community rail on the Western Route, having taken over from the wonderful Máedóc Ellis in October last year.



Harriet comes to community rail after working in infrastructure maintenance for eight years. She collaborated with local communities and lineside neighbours in her previous role as Maintenance Protection Coordinator in the Thames Valley area.

Harriet is keen to get to know all the incredible groups of volunteers and community rail partnerships across the route. "I am so looking forward to getting to know all the amazing groups and working alongside them," said Harriet. "Community rail activities and events make such a tremendous difference to the communities we serve and in making travel more sustainable and accessible to everyone."

With her experience in maintenance, Harriet hopes to use her contacts to help the groups with various Network Rail processes and issues that might arise. "I have had the pleasure of getting to know many of the lineside neighbours and communities, as

well as colleagues all over the business," she said. "So I hope to be able to bring this experience to the community rail world."

"I am hoping to work alongside groups and projects in the Thames Valley area. I am currently exploring a potential art project close to London Paddington station. My goal is to generate more interest and activities in the area while maintaining our ongoing support for the established, and often historic, groups along the route."

Harriet is also looking forward to arranging more volunteer days. "Network Rail staff are given five days to use for volunteer leave each year, and I know that everyone is keen to use them," she explained. "They just find it difficult when seeking opportunities. I am very excited to extend an invitation to them for volunteer days throughout the year. It really helps individuals employed by Network Rail who typically don't have direct interaction with the public, fostering a connection with passengers and those residing near our infrastructure."



Network Rail volunteers and Grow Feral clearing vegetation for the new garden at Weston-super-Mare

## Community Rail Partnership Case Studies

### 2023/24

This section presents a series of case studies showcasing the achievements of Community Rail Partnerships (CRPs) over the past year. Each case study provides an overview of individual projects, explaining how they were carried out and the positive effects they had on local communities. These stories highlight the dedication and teamwork that define CRPs and show how they continue to improve and benefit the areas they serve.



## Bridgwater Community Room

Project delivered by:



Grant awarded: £21,000

### General Overview of the Project

The purpose of the project was to turn the semi derelict former Model Shop at Bridgwater Station into a warm and welcoming community space with a meeting room, kitchen, toilet and storage area, to include full redecoration in line with the approvals received from the Listed Building Officer at Sedgemoor District Council.

### Project Delivery

Sevenside Community Rail Partnership liaised closely with a representative of Amey TPT to ensure all legal documentation, including listed building consent and a tenancy agreement were prepared and signed before any works commenced. Western Rail Services were the contractor instructed to carry out the conversion in line with a design prepared by AHR Consultants. Works included plastering, decorating, laying new flooring, electrical installation and fitting the kitchen and toilet. Works began in early February 2024 and were completed to following month.

The room is now ready for the installation of video conferencing facilities, furnishings and finishing touches.

An official opening of the room is planned for 22nd May 2024, after which it will be available to local community groups to hold meetings and small scale events.

### Project Impact

The impact of the project won't be fully understood until the room has officially opened and in regular use. However, there is already a list of community groups and industry partners wishing to use the space. Local councillors have visited the space and expressed their gratitude for the creation of a new community facility at a time of unprecedented cuts to local services in light of Somerset Unitary Authority reaching a significant deficit in its finances. An official opening event took place on 22nd May 2024 to co-inside with National Community Rail Week. Over 40 people attended, including the Mayor of Bridgwater and representatives of various local community organisations.



## Celebrating 175 years of Torbay Trains

Grant awarded: £7,995

Project delivered by:

**Devon & Cornwall  
RAIL PARTNERSHIP**

### General Overview of the Project

The railway arrived in Torbay on 18 December 1848 with the opening of the line from Newton Abbot to Torre station (then known as Torquay). Torre station is listed and has GWR style large running-in boards on both platforms. The one on the Down platform is under the canopy so protected from the elements. The one on the Up platform is on cast iron posts, out in the open. Unfortunately, in recent years it had greatly deteriorated and this had led to the remains being removed, leaving only the posts. In order to mark the 175th anniversary of the line and station opening, we bid to create and install a new top notch replacement running-in board for the Up platform.

### Project Delivery

Torbay Council agreed to handle the procurement of the running-in board which saved us nearly £3,000 in VAT. Additional funding was also secured from the Railway Heritage Trust and the Community Rail Development Fund.

Unfortunately there was a long hold up in Torbay Council being able to issue the necessary purchase order and the company producing the sign - Steelway Fensure, was not able to start work without it. Steelway Fensure also found obtaining the Accoya timber much more difficult than they had expected and it took longer to get it than they had planned. Unfortunately, in early March, Steelway Fensure advised that the running-in board was still some way off completion so the planned celebration event has now been postponed until after 22 April when the board should be delivered with installation following shortly afterwards.

### Project Impact

It is hoped that the new running-in board will be appreciated by all at the station and will be a fitting commemoration of 175 years of trains in the Torbay area.



## Connecting Central and East Bristol with the Avonmouth and Severnside Enterprise Area

Grant awarded: £10,200

Project delivered by:

**Severnside  
Community Rail  
Partnership**

### General Overview of the Project

The purpose of this project was to deliver a range of activities designed to promote and encourage the use of rail and active travel for commuting between inner city / East Bristol stations along the Severn Beach line to Avonmouth, St Andrews Road and Severn Beach stations for employment in the Avonmouth Severnside Enterprise area. It was preceded by two community rail-initiated funding packages to bring about improvements to the Avonmouth and Severn Beach. The first was the installation of CCTV in 2020 and secondly the installation of improved, sheltered cycle parking facilities in 2022.

Delivered in collaboration with SevernNet Ride and Stride project and Bike Bristol, activity included:

- The availability of loan bikes, to be made available for typically a 3-month period to allow users to trial the system before committing to their own bike
- Pop-up workplace travel events
- Pop-up community events
- Networking meetings
- Individual / group travel confidence sessions, including cycling and personal safety while commuting

### Project Delivery

SevernNet were able to utilise existing links with established and new employers in the area who hosted workplace travel events in addition to SevernNet's own regular networking sessions. This meant the project became widely known to employers who distributed resources such as maps and travel guides to existing and prospective employees.

Employer networking sessions and pop-up events took place on a monthly basis with the exception of December when warehousing and distributions centres were operating at their peak level of output. Dr Bike sessions took place at various community and station settings on a weekly basis.

### Project Impact

Employers are now well educated equipped to encourage their workforce from Central and East Bristol to travel into the area using rail and active travel. Dr Bike sessions will continue to be delivered by Bike Bristol and employers can book these or signpost to events taking place locally. The success of the project has been promoted at local networking events and at Severnside Community Rail Partnership stakeholder meetings and to Community Rail Network's Integrated Sustainable Transport Group.



## Connecting Communities to Rail

Grant awarded: £28,251



Project delivered by:

### General Overview of the Project

Connecting Communities aimed to promote car-free, rail and active travel choices through community engagement and consultation. This project supported regional transport and sustainability goals by representing hyper-local transport needs, influencing the reduction of car use, and building community resilience. The project involved collaboration between Gloucestershire and Oxfordshire local authorities, community organisations (Inclusion Gloucestershire, The Redwell Centre, Cam & Dursley Connects, Create Gloucestershire, Brockworth Parish Council, Great Oldbury Primary Academy, CoHSAT, Active Oxfordshire and more), transport operators, and residents in Oxfordshire and Gloucestershire.

### Project Delivery

The project began in August 2023 with planning and community outreach in Oxfordshire and Gloucestershire. We met with stakeholders, including transport planners, councils, community groups, and transport operators, to understand local needs and opportunities for transport integration in new and existing housing developments.

Between September 2023 and March 2024, we launched events and community engagement in Didcot, Banbury, Gloucester, and Cam & Dursley, gathering insights on barriers and motivations for using public transport. We scoped and shortlisted locations for new access maps in Oxfordshire, and had discussions with transport providers about opportunities for promoting integrated and active travel. We started work to refresh and update our existing access maps and looked at creating two new maps in Banbury and Didcot. We designed the Oxfordshire residents survey to gather insights on travel choices, local sentiment and motivations for modal shift. Community engagement events took place in Great Oldbury and Brockworth, and we completed research for the new access maps. The Oxfordshire survey was launched, with support from local groups to help share it far and wide around the county and we received over 900 survey responses from Oxfordshire residents. Drafts of new access maps were produced, shared with stakeholders in Oxfordshire for consultation, and finalised based on feedback. Our new evaluation report and toolkit was created.

Throughout the project, consistent engagement with communities, stakeholders, and transport providers ensured that local needs and opportunities for integrated, sustainable travel were addressed through tailored resources, events, and collaborative efforts.

### Project Impact

- Increased community engagement and consultation to understand local barriers, motivations and needs related to sustainable transport options across the two countries from 1000+ people. This helped tailor resources and efforts to address hyper-local issues.
- New access maps were created for Didcot and Banbury, along with updated maps for Gloucestershire areas including Gloucester, Cheltenham, Stroud, Stonehouse and Cam & Dursley.
- Rail confidence trips to four destinations to increase confidence in using trains and first-mile/last-mile connections for local communities benefiting 84 people.
- Informed the creation of an evaluation report and toolkit capturing best practices and methods from the Connecting Communities approach, and in turn promoted a replicable model and inclusive approach to community engagement able to be implemented in other locations.
- Distributed over 1,000 leaflets related to journey planning and travel confidence through events and digital channels.
- Laid groundwork for continued efforts like a regional transport group and including access maps in new resident welcome packs.



## 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 young black, brown people and other disadvantaged 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.*



## Go Train - Education Project on the North Downs Line

Grant awarded: £40,410

Project delivered by:



### General Overview of the Project

The Go-Train project educates young people about rail safety and low carbon travel through workshops and Try a Train trips. The project works with young people, schools colleges, youth organisations and community groups as well as GWR's Accessibility Mentors.

### Project Delivery

The project originally started in 2021 and has continued to be a huge success with many schools, colleges, youth organisations and community groups booking repeat programmes. This year we have undertaken the following:

April 2023 – March 2024

- Delivered 31 x Try a Train workshops for 348 people
- Delivered 35 x Try a Train trips for 380 people
- Delivered 32 x school workshops for 1,094 pupils
- Delivered 9 x school station visits for 370 pupils
- Worked with 34 schools and organisations

Other things we have achieved:

Following on from the success of our first paper-based Treasure Hunt we started working with 'Really Quite Something' in the summer of 2022 on our first app-based Treasure Hunt on the NDL called 'Lost on the North Downs Line'. It was due to launch in April 2023, but the project has taken much longer than anticipated with many revisions. It's hoped it will launch in April 2024.



We worked with the Platform education team to create a new film called 'Myth Busters' aimed at young people. It busts the commonly held beliefs of many young people including that you can hide in the holes under the platform if you end up on the track. The film was launched in March 2024.

We are now taking Try a Train community groups to Reg's Garden at Farnborough North Station for tours of the garden. Groups have included County Care and the Patchworking Garden Project.

We worked alongside Hampshire CRP to create the Reading Family Fun Day in February. We prepared a quiz booklet which included a quiz looking for answers around the station and a train spotting quiz.

### Project Impact

The overwhelming feedback from participants continues to be that they feel more confident to travel on the train. Younger pupils are more aware of the benefits of train travel on their own health and the health of the planet.

*All of our staff were so thrilled with both experiences (even in the rain!) and so were the children! I personally haven't had such a well-planned/organised/school trip out with an external provider in a long time and I loved how patient and engaging you were with our children - it was like you were one of our teaching team. Life-long memories were definitely made this week, particularly for those who it was their first time on the train, and we can't wait to book you in again for next year's cohort.*

**Cameron Purvis**  
Deputy Head at St. John's School Reading



## 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

We worked closely with Emma Cole and Rob Fairhurst at Surrey Hills National Landscape and the GWR Branding team throughout the process to ensure brand guidelines were met.

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

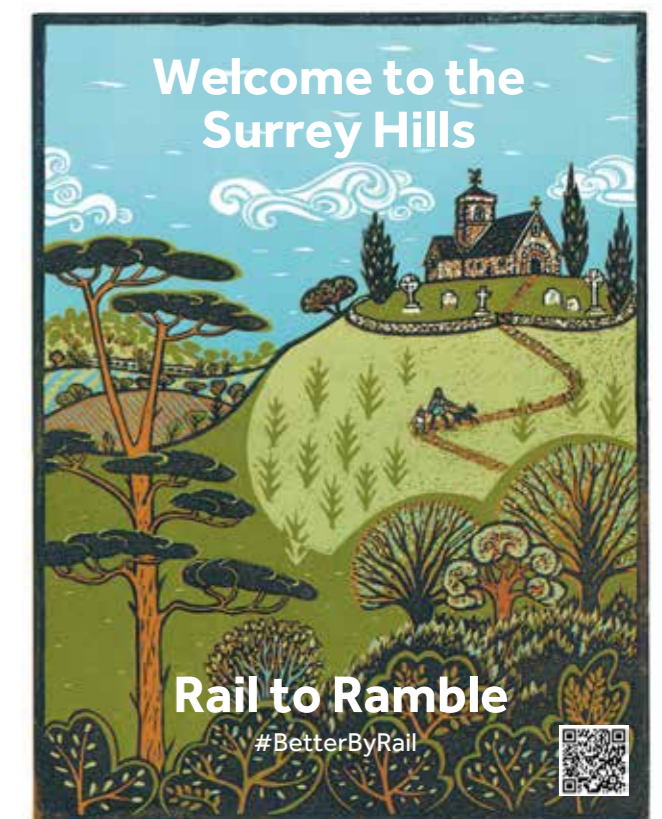
*The Customer and Community Improvement Fund is a fantastic opportunity for us to invest in projects that really make a difference to our customers and communities at a local level. These posters provide a perfect guide to the wealth of amazing walking routes within easy reach of the North Downs Line.*

**Eleanor Willis**  
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 an SSSI, 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.



Artwork by  
Diana Croft

# Platform Education Project

Grant awarded: £94,500

## General Overview of the Project

Platform is an award-winning rail education scheme that works with schools to empower young people to access the railway. Key aims of the project include:

- To provide a rail education programme for schools and young people across the combined CRP areas by delivering rail safety, rail careers and sustainable and healthy travel workshops and rail familiarisation visits
- To create an online hub for external resources, showcasing national and regional initiatives and content
- To produce curriculum-linked resources and lesson plans with regionally-specific content to support school-based learning and to support the delivery of the PSHE curriculum

The project is facilitated collaboratively between Severnside, Gloucestershire, Worcestershire, South Wessex and TransWilts Community Rail Partnerships (CRPs). The Platform scheme is hosted by Severnside CRP.



## Project Delivery

Platform started the year as a team of four delivering workshops and train trips across the five CRP regions named above. Many repeat bookings from schools with whom we had worked with previously were also received. These were allocated to the learning development officers to plan and deliver. Partnerships were developed with other organisations providing education opportunities for schools and young people, including the Egg Theatre (Bath), STEAM Museum (Swindon), Roman Baths (Bath) and Shire Hall Museum (Dorchester). These relationships have yielded significant interest in the scheme and we have had many schools get in touch via STEAM and the Roman Baths in particular since they now promote Platform as a sustainable travel option for school trips.

2023/2024 has also seen our partnership with South Bristol Youth (SBY) take off. This organisation works across Bristol and parts of Somerset to engage secondary school age children in thinking about their futures and providing careers inspiration. This year, Platform worked with 10 groups of approximately 15 Year 9 students selected by SBY and provided them with a comprehensive rail safety and confidence workshop before taking them on a 'commuter experience' on the train from Bristol Temple Meads to learn about railway industry careers and how rail travel can open up great career opportunities.

Platform also developed its 'This Mighty Traveller' programme for engaging with specialist provisions. This scheme sees Platform work with children and young people with special educational needs or disabilities to provide bespoke rail safety and confidence workshops and rail familiarisation visits with a focus on accessibility and inclusion. This programme has become increasingly popular and many of the schools we have worked with are making repeat bookings.

Outside of our workshops and trips, Platform's online resources continued to flourish and were then then launched on social media. This has included bespoke, locally focused history resources, such as our series of 'A Place in Time' lessons about Gloucester, Bristol and Frome, as well as a set of new Key Stage 1 lessons aimed at 5-7 year olds.



*The work of the rail education team is simply outstanding and they are professional in all they do. The school-based sessions were very skilfully adapted to children with special needs and the resources and 'hands on' activities made the sessions as fun as they were educational. All my staff reported how much the children learnt about railways and rail safety and then to experience a train trip in 'real life' was wonderful. I can recommend this wonderful organisation and essential life skill intervention to all schools without reservation.*

**Email from Kevin Day,  
Headteacher at Belmont Special School**

Project delivered by:



## Project Impact

Since April 2023 Platform has achieved the following:

### Delivery:

- Delivered 189 in-school workshops for 5,589 students including 828 students with special educational needs or disabilities (SEND)
- Delivered 130 train trips for 3,046 students including 31 trips for 378 SEND students
- In total, worked with 93 different schools and organisations including: 56 primary schools, 11 secondary schools, 23 specialist provisions, 3 uniformed groups

**Website and Resources:** <https://platformrail.org/about-us/>

- The website has been visited by 4,273 unique users
- The Platform website hosts 90 resources including 30 links to signpost to external resources and 60 downloadable Platform-produced resources for teachers
- 817 Platform-produced educational resources have been downloaded from the website
- Since April 2024, the Platform Team has produced 25 new online educational resources including:
  - 5 new resources released specific to the South Wessex region
  - 5 new resources for Key Stage 1 (ages 5-7)
  - A bundle of assemblies and lessons produced about the Shirehampton war horses for Armistice Day
  - Christmas lessons for each CRP



## Promoting Rail Across Severnside by Digital Media

Grant awarded: £15,400

Project delivered by:



### General Overview of the Project

Funding was secured to enable Severnside Community Rail Partnership to work with a digital marketing agency based within the area covered by the partnership, to create a digital media strategy and to develop and deliver autumn and winter marketing campaigns to encourage the use of rail and other forms of active travel on local routes radiating from Bristol. Some of these campaigns utilised assets already created by the Partnership, including:

- Discover the Severn Beach line Trail for families with young children (for October and February half term)
- A Rail Arts Trail to encourage people to travel to train to visit the spectacular community murals at local stations.
- Walks from the Railway, promoting pre-existing leaflets mapping walks from Severn Beach, Yatton and Bradford-on-Avon stations (for autumn and very early spring)
- Promote pre-existing Days Out By Train leaflets suggesting local train journeys to local open spaces and free of charge or low cost attractions.

Campaigns were used to support the local economy by promoting local, station-based businesses including Strawberry Line Café and Cycle Hire, KaffeKop at Keynsham station and the several White Feather Coffee outlets in the area.



### Project Delivery

A Taunton based social media management agency was commissioned. It was agreed that the agency would create content and post across three platforms – Facebook, Instagram and TikTok as this spread would reach older audiences and younger people. The package included days for video content creation, five posts per week across the three platforms and paid advertising on Facebook.

### Project Impact

The project has increased the number of people engaging across the three platforms, although TikTok has been the most challenging to grow and this is being reviewed. The statistics below show engagement across the three platforms compared to the same period in 2022/23:

#### Facebook [severnsidecommunityrailpartnership](#)

Reach - 657 000 (+2.3k%)  
Profile Visits - 2750 (+215%)  
Content Interactions - 1900 (+115.2%)  
New Followers - 54 (+220%)

#### Instagram [@severnsiderailpartnership](#)

Reach - 63500 (+928.8%)  
Profile Visits - 343 (+62.5%)  
Content Interactions - 998 (+669.5%)  
New followers - 57 (+50%)

#### TikTok [@severnsidecrp1](#)

Video Views - 6926 (+6900%)  
Reached Audience - 5926 (+5900%)  
Profile Visits - 48 (+999.9%)  
Content Interactions - 77 (+999.9%)  
New followers - 10 (+999.9%)

Thank you for featuring Bradford on Avon in your social media. The more we can do to encourage people to visit without bringing their cars, the better.

**Clr Emma Franklin, Bradford on Avon**

Its funny but since you did a feature about the coffee van on Facebook, lots of passengers suddenly know my name!

**Martin, KaffeKop, Keynsham Station**

## Railway Confidence and Independent Travel Storybook

Grant awarded: £12,820

Project delivered by:



### General Overview of the Project

To create a railway confidence book which would give Special educational needs schools and disabled groups confidence in travelling by train; delivering information in an interactive way to aid them through the customer journey. The story provides a series of information on available railway accessibility features; including but not limited to support with purchasing tickets, booking passenger assistance, navigation and way-finding etc presented in an interactive choose your own journey format.

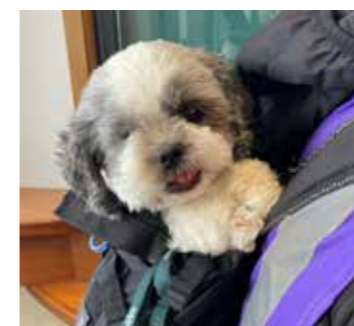
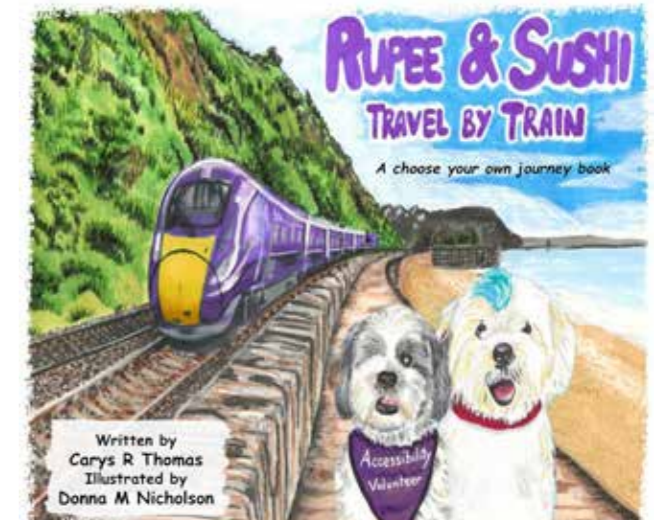
### Project Delivery

The initial book concept sought to follow the design and success of Arlo's adventures railway safety book, with an aim to better suit the needs of disabled and marginalised customer groups. Utilising the character Rupee who volunteers as an accessibility volunteer, the books would be used by both the Severnside community rail partnership and by the

GWR accessibility team who deliver try a train safety, familiarisation and confidence trips to community schools, colleges and groups. The books (which will be available in both print and electronic format) serve as an additional learning aid as well as supporting individuals with additional needs such as non-verbal passengers to retain some of the information delivered as part of the sessions.

A late change in circumstances and illustrator, led to the re-writing of the script in rhyme format and the book being amended to be centred around characters Rupee and Sushi (two dogs who were rescued by the author). It is aimed that this book becomes one of several in a series in the future.

The final version of the book will be available by the end of April with plans for soft launch early May and full launch during community rail week 2024.



# Route2Work

Grant awarded: £13,180



Project delivered by:

## General Overview of the Project

The Route2Work programme involved consultation and collaboration with key community partners who support young people and with mental health conditions and substance misuse disorders. This included working closely with Young Gloucestershire, The Churn Project, and Change, Grow, Live (Gloucestershire’s county-wide substance misuse service). By building trusted relationships with these partners in Gloucestershire, we were able to build capacity within these organisations to support their clients directly around travel confidence, while also designing and delivering bespoke travel confidence training sessions and trips for their service users. In Oxfordshire, we developed new travel confidence resources in collaboration with the local bus operating companies, and also liaised closely with the local authorities, including the Public Health team at Oxfordshire County Council, and partner organisations to ensure these resources addressed local needs and offered practical solutions to local issues.

## Project Delivery

The project commenced in August 2023 with planning and community engagement with our partners. In Gloucestershire, this involved initial partnership meetings with Change, Grow, Live (CGL) and Young Gloucestershire to identify how the programme could be designed around the needs of their service users. We attended team meetings with both organisations to raise awareness amongst staff working directly with vulnerable people of the transport-related barriers commonly faced by these communities, while providing resources that enabled them to have supportive conversations with clients around travel confidence. In Oxfordshire, we redesigned and developed GCRP’s existing travel

confidence and ‘cutting the cost of travel’ resources to accurately reflect transport options in the county. We engaged with 15 community organisations and local stakeholder groups in the development of this programme and resources, and in the process raised awareness of the transport related barriers often faced by young people, job seekers and those in recovery. We can confirm the following statistics at the end of this project:

- 250 engagements with professionals across 27 organisations around transport-related barriers for job seekers in Oxfordshire and Gloucestershire
- 123 job seekers engaged in travel training support and advice through workshops, job fairs, and trips
- 5 Gloucestershire job fairs attended, offering practical advice and information on transport options for job seekers and work coaches

## Project Impact

Professionals working in employability, health and social care, and youth engagement in Gloucestershire have an increased understanding of transport-related barriers for job seekers, particularly those experiencing mental health difficulties and in recovery from substance misuse. This programme has enabled GCRP to build its reputation as an organisation that supports local people to gain travel confidence, and our partners trust us to provide advice and information in this area. We have since been approached with more opportunities to circulate our resources and develop new partnerships. OxCRP has also developed its reputation in the county through this programme, with extensive opportunities to activate our new travel confidence resources to benefit job seekers and professionals in Oxfordshire.

“ I had no clue I could get a bus pass for being on universal credit. I’m definitely going to ask my Work Coach now. ”



# Severnside Virtual Station Tours

Grant awarded: £28,440



Project delivered by:

## General Overview of the Project

Funding was secured to commission video production company Venue View to create customer walk through and 360° ‘click through’ station tours of ten stations in the Severnside Community Rail Partnership area. Venue View had already created walk through station tours for GWR, including Exeter St Davids which attracted a considerable amount of views on YouTube. The stations selected for inclusion were those most frequently used by Severnside Community Rail Partnership’s [Days Out By Train Scheme](#) and the [Platform Rail Education Scheme](#), so the tours could be included in the teacher and Community Development Officer ‘tool kit’ to use in school and community settings as part of their pre and post rail familiarisation visits. The station chosen were Avonmouth, Keynsham, Yatton, Weston-super-Mare, Bridgwater, Patchway, Severn Beach, Stapleton Road, Clifton Down and Filton Abbey Wood.

## Project Delivery

Once funding was secured, Venue View were officially commissioned. GWR Accessibility Mentors were involved with preparing scripts and sharing drafts of the virtual tours internally in GWR to ensure the films were compliant with safety regulations and brand guidelines. Once filming was

complete, Severnside Community Rail Partnership were involved with the testing stage, ensuring voice overs and subtitles accurately describe visual content, and click through information points were straightforward to use.

## Project Impact

The project has helped build a suit of station tours that positively promote rail travel, especially to those with additional needs and for those who rarely travel by rail. It is becoming more usual for colleges, universities, and airports to have virtual tours of this nature and this is a worthwhile progression for rail. It is hoped such tours will eventually become industry standard.

“ My mother is 75 and it’s years since she has been anywhere on a train. Thanks to the YouTube link you sent me I was able to show her Patchway station before we set out on our journey to Cardiff. She could not believe how modern it was and had no idea we would be able to use a lift. Thank you, it helped us a lot. ”

**Alex Hayman, Severnside Community Rail Partnership Contact**



## St Budeaux Victoria Road Community Vegetable Garden

Grant awarded: £10,000

Project delivered by:

**Devon & Cornwall  
RAIL PARTNERSHIP**

### General Overview of the Project

This project was inspired by the great work done at Avonmouth station on the Severn Beach Line. The line through St Budeaux Victoria Road station was singled in the early 1970s. The platform abandoned then has long been unsightly and for years, we have aspired to find a sustainable long-term community use for the space.

### Project Delivery

Picking up the Avonmouth example, we found the Pioneers Project, a charity based in St Budeaux and Barne Barton which already runs community allotments. It just so happens that the project leader, Lisa Dawson, comes from Avonmouth and knows the project there. We discussed the idea with Lisa and she was keen to progress. A plan for the Community Vegetable Garden was drawn up, which we then put to Network Rail to get their agreement to proceed. Network Rail were very happy to do so and agreed to fence the site, provide a new access gate to the disused platform and redundant sleepers to construct the planters. Network Rail kindly agreed to fund both the sleepers and the gate.

Unfortunately procuring and installing the fencing got massively held up and the fencing was only finally installed on 21 March. The sleepers are to follow shortly. The Pioneers Project are already preparing the site behind the fencing and we are planning to organise at least one working party to assist them, particularly building and filling the planters, as soon as the sleeper delivery date is confirmed. We expect the project to be complete by early May.

### Project Impact

We hope this will provide a long-lasting project for the local community which will increase wellbeing for those involved and provide a sustainable garden where produce can be grown for the local community.



## Sustainable Travel – Behaviour Change Communications Programme

Grant awarded: £14,500

Project delivered by:



### General Overview of the Project

The aims of this project were:

- To understand the driving factors to behavioural change towards sustainable travel amongst young people in Gloucestershire (16 – 25) and develop a communications campaign based on those findings.
- To support modal shift for the younger generation of travellers including those identified as interested but needing support in making that change, through an evidence-based marketing campaign and to share these assets in the form of a toolkit with visitor economy businesses to support behavioural change.
- To increase access to visitor attractions by rail amongst young people aged 16 – 25 in Gloucestershire and Oxfordshire

### Project Delivery

The project started with a piece of consolidation work to compile key learning from our previous outreach with young people. There was then an outreach phase to speak to local businesses to get an understanding of their needs from engaging young people in relation to transport, travel and accessibility needs. This included a series of interviews with local businesses. Participation People were engaged to design and deliver the workshop and also to develop a youth workshop framework for us that we can use for future programmes. The workshop was the main event created to pull together local businesses with young people and discuss the key challenges raised and identify solutions to address these. The key learnings from the workshop and previous learnings associated with youth and transport behaviours were then compiled into a toolkit to share with local businesses. The toolkit was shared and we will follow up with the 5 businesses present at the event to ask them what changes they have made since the activities to make a difference.

Key learnings will also feed into ongoing GCRP marketing communications so that we can ensure we are communicating to young people how they wish to be communicated to.

### Project Impact

The project has resulted in a comprehensive toolkit which summarises our key learnings and insights from young people in and around Gloucestershire regarding their travel needs. The workshop also allowed us to engage with local businesses and cement GCRP as the go to people for youth insight related to transport across Gloucestershire. We had great feedback from the businesses that attended. We have also gained even more insight into the needs of young people across Gloucestershire and will collate these with our previous research findings; creating a valuable asset for us to share with local partners and building our knowledge of young peoples travel and transport needs and barriers so we can respond proactively.

*A big thank you to yourself and the rest of the GCRP team; the event was excellent, really well-run and we came out of it with a wealth of information to use going forward. Do keep us up to date with survey/toolkit progress; it's something we'd be keen to hear more about.*

**Benjamin Richards MSc MRTPI, Transport Planner, Transportation, AtkinsRéalis**



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

Grant awarded: £8,900

Project delivered by:



## 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 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.



# TrainTripper

Project delivered by:



Grant awarded: £22,000

## General Overview of the Project

TrainTripper is designed to promote local destinations and leisure experiences in Gloucestershire, using sustainable and active modes of transport. After a successful 22/23 launch, we expanded the portal into Oxfordshire's stations and locations, with an emphasis on representing inclusive experiences and attracting underrepresented leisure audiences.

To make the site more inclusive, TrainTripper showcases inclusive destinations across Gloucestershire and Oxfordshire, focusing on accessibility, diversity, equality, and inclusion.

## Project Delivery

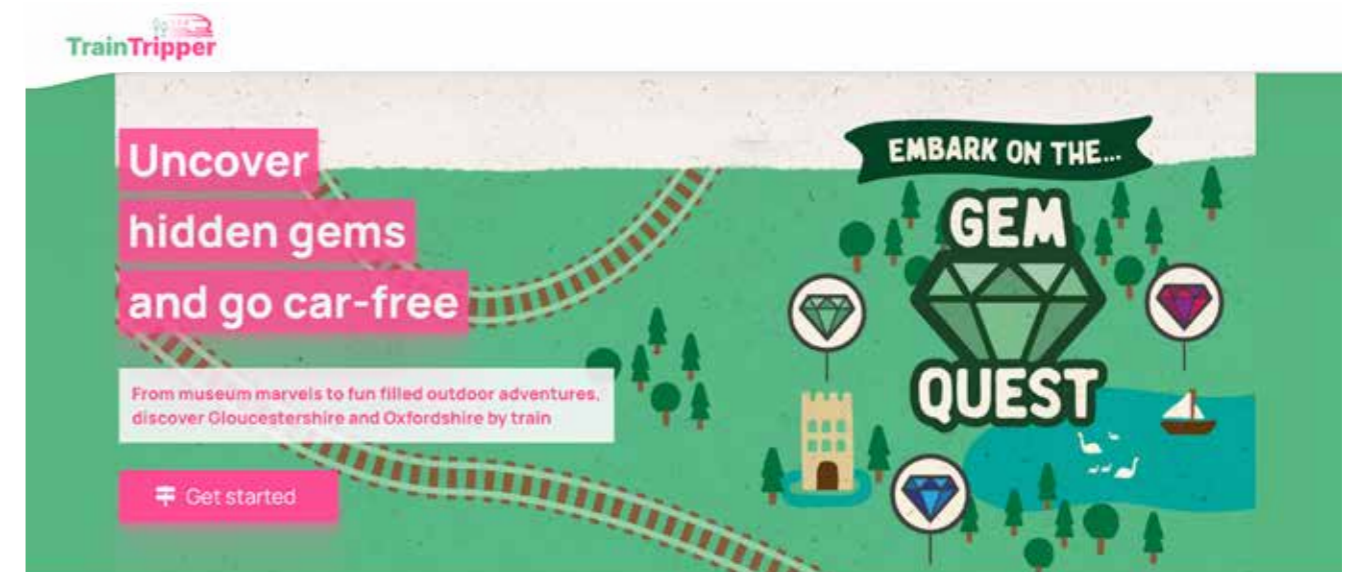
Working closely with Psand, we developed a working schedule and priority order of updates to the site. We also engaged with Level Studio a creative design agency to develop the marketing assets to promote the website and who came up with the campaign concept of Hidden Gems and the Gem Quest.

## Project Impact

The project has resulted in an exciting new campaign creative that will be rolled out over the summer months to maximise the potential to encourage people to use the train for their leisure adventures and to visit Gloucestershire and Oxfordshire. The project has also allowed us to forge relationships with the businesses featured on the website and resulted in cross promotion of the website.

*Working with the TrainTripper team has been an inspiring journey of innovation and collaboration. We've witnessed the platform's evolution from inception, continually embracing new developments to enhance user experience. We value how the team use their commitment to sustainability and accessibility to drive every decision to ensure TrainTripper remains inclusive and environmentally conscious.*

**Jenny Patton, owner Level Studio design**



## 1. Choose your station

Select your station starting point or the station you wish to travel to

One 30-mile train journey, could save 86% CO2 emissions than the same journey by car

Choosing sustainable travel is a great step in working towards a more sustainable future

Trains produce less noise, use less energy and are much

# Worcester Access Map

Grant awarded: £5,000

Project delivered by:



## 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

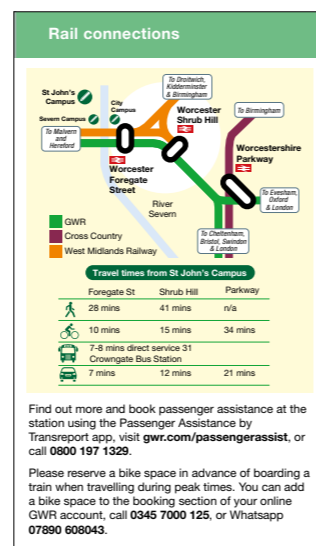
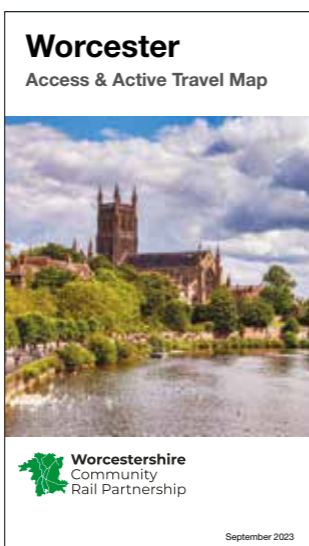
checked by the stakeholders and officers within Worcester City Council. Once design and accuracy was agreed we sent to print and also hosted map on WCRP and University websites for use by existing and prospective students of the University.

## 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**



Sustainable Travel – Behaviour Change Communications Programme



Surrey Hills Poster Project North Downs Line

