



Community rail in the Midlands and the East



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

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

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

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



“

Community rail can have a real impact on and beyond the railway. It brings a sense of pride and enables people to come together to make a difference at their local railway station and benefit their community. Helping to improve gateways to towns and villages, it can create a community support network which in turn delivers economic and social benefits.”

Donna Adams, East Midlands Railway

The Midlands and the East in numbers:

14
community
rail
partnerships
(CRPs)

Working along railway lines, with industry partners, to engage local communities. Partnerships stretch from North Lincolnshire down to Bedfordshire.

160
station
groups

Voluntary groups bringing stations into the heart of communities. In the Midlands and the East, more than 60% of the network is 'adopted' by local volunteers.

Each Year

1,000
Volunteers

Giving

46,000
Hours

Worth
£3.9m

Community rail partnerships in the Midlands and the East:

North Staffordshire CRP - covers the line from Crewe to Derby via Stoke-on-Trent. Priorities include engaging local communities in innovative projects to improve the route for passengers, delivering station improvement projects, and promoting rail as sustainable, accessible and healthy travel for work, education, and leisure. The CRP recently supported the installation of environmentally-friendly waiting facilities at Uttoxter Station, and ran 'The Railway in Autumn', an online junior art competition.



Barton Cleethorpes CRP -

covers 14 stations on the line between Barton-Upon-Humber and Cleethorpes. The CRP act as a voice for passengers, communities, town and parish councils, and businesses along the line, seeking to improve services, develop community projects, and promote rail as a greener way to travel. The CRP has been active in promoting the heritage attractions along the line, creating and distributing marketing information to encourage sustainable tourism by rail.



Derwent Valley Line CRP - covers the line from Matlock to Long Eaton. The CRP's vision is to improve rail services for a growing passenger market, meet the needs of residents and visitors, and to support the economy of the Derwent Valley. Recently the CRP has supported the transformation of the old booking hall at Matlock Bath Station into a café and education centre, and created a new line guide and activity book for families.



Marston Vale CRP - covers

stations between Bedford and Milton Keynes. The CRP encourages local groups, organisations and businesses to become more involved in improving the passenger experience at stations and on trains, including promoting upcycled Class 230 trains and the heritage centre and tearoom at Ridgmont Station. A recent major project has seen the CRP create 'Symbol Spot', a sightseeing trail for children that promotes rail safety and attractions along the line.



Poacher Line CRP - covers 19 stations on the line between Nottingham and Skegness. The CRP's aims are to engage with local communities to improve stations, support economic and social development, promote diversity, equality, and inclusion, and encourage rail as a sustainable travel option for all. Major projects over the past year have included the creation of a community allotment at Sleaford Station, and the installation of a 27-metre mural to brighten up Boston Station.



Heart of England CRP -

covers 36 stations over three lines between Tyseley in Birmingham, Coventry, Nuneaton, Leamington Spa, Warwick, and Stratford-Upon-Avon. The CRP's aims include promoting employment, education, leisure, and tourism opportunities accessible via rail, improving station facilities and engaging communities in station partnerships, and integrating rail with other forms of public transport and active travel. The partnership is currently looking to establish new community hubs at Nuneaton and Coventry stations, and a Shakespeare Garden at Henley-in-Arden Station.



North Nottinghamshire and Lincolnshire CRP - covers lines between Lincoln, Barnetby, Gainsborough and Worksop. The CRP's aims are to promote and increase community involvement in its lines, integrate and coordinate local transport to encourage modal shift to rail, improve stations and services, and boost tourism and local economies. It is currently supporting a feasibility study to restore regular passenger services between Gainsborough Central and Barton-Upon-Humber via Kirton in Lindsey, Brigg, and Barnetby.



Worcestershire CRP - covers 18

stations from Hagley and Redditch in the north of the county to Great Malvern and Honeybourne in the south. Priorities include integrating rail with other forms of public transport, promoting sustainable travel for recreation, leisure, and tourism, and developing station adoption and stations as gateways to local communities. Formed in late 2019, one of the CRP's first projects was the creation of the 'Stitch Train', a large-scale community tapestry project.



“Community rail is of tremendous value and benefit both to the rail industry and the communities the railway serves. It provides vital links and local knowledge which, in turn, creates an increased awareness of rail.”

Alan Neville, Greater Anglia

Hereward Line CRP - covers the line from Peterborough to Ely. Priorities include engaging communities to have a say about their local railways, making improvements to stations and supporting station adopters, and encouraging sustainable tourism by rail. A recent major project saw the CRP facilitate online consultations to engage the public and encourage communities to choose their preferred improvements to facilities at Manea, Whittlesea, and March stations.



Wherry Lines CRP* - covers 14 stations from Norwich to Great Yarmouth and Lowestoft. Priorities for the CRP include promoting use of the line and sustainable tourism by rail, supporting local attractions and businesses, encouraging walking and active travel, and developing station adoption projects. A major project has been the transformation of the old parcels office at Lowestoft Station into a new community exhibition space, reconnecting the station to the town centre.



Meldreth, Shepreth, and Foxton CRP - covers the line from Meldreth to Foxton. Priorities include engaging communities with their local line, promoting sustainable travel by rail, enhancing station environments via green projects, and supporting local businesses. The CRP actively engages with children and young people, and has run 'try the train' trips for groups with learning disabilities and autism, a youth befriending scheme, and young carers, often providing their first experience of rail travel. During the COVID-19 lockdown, the CRP ran gardening, art, and writing competitions for local school children.



East Suffolk Lines CRP - covers lines from Ipswich to Felixstowe and Lowestoft. The aims of the CRP are to promote sustainable travel by rail and increase passenger numbers, engage communities with their local railway, enhance stations to make them more welcoming and inviting, and develop a local integrated transport network. Recent projects have seen new wildlife gardens created at Westerfield and Derby Road stations, and the adoption of Ipswich Station by Suffolk New College.



Bittern Line CRP* - covers ten stations from Norwich to Cromer and Sheringham. As well as helping to promote rail usage, the partnership works closely with volunteers, local authorities, and rail partners to enhance stations and support events and businesses along the route. Recent projects have included developing new maps and line guides to promote tourism by rail, and work with schools and Network Rail to design posters for stations promoting the safe use of level crossings.



Beds and Herts CRP - covers eight stations between Bedford and St Albans. Priorities include showcasing the heritage of the line and attractions along the route, promoting sustainable tourism by rail, developing station volunteering, and opening up the CRP to a wider group of people. The CRP has supported Autism Bedfordshire to become a station partner at Luton Airport Parkway, giving adults supported by the charity the opportunity to work on gardening, art, and rail confidence projects.



* part of Community Rail Norfolk

Heart of England CRP – Positivity through communications

Being a new CRP, Heart of England were just starting from scratch with their website and social media channels when Covid-19 hit. They adapted to the crisis by focusing on promoting the railway and the CRP as positive, proactive, and community orientated. The website became an online hub of local information and support networks, including an inventory of smaller local businesses offering services during lockdown, listed by their nearest station. The CRP's social media emphasised rail-related support and messaging, alongside the fantastic work local groups were involved with to support communities through the pandemic. The CRP continues to use its communications to research and build links with local partners and businesses, and to encourage people to get in touch and get involved.



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

Providing a voice for the community

- Hereford CRP facilitated online community consultations to allow members of the public to have their say on planned improvements at local stations;
- During the COVID-19 lockdown, Heart of England CRP used its newly developed website and social media channels to continue supporting and advocating for local businesses and attractions;
- Beds and Herts CRP supported Autism Bedfordshire to become an official station partner at Luton Airport Parkway, giving adults with autism the opportunity to work on gardening, art, and rail confidence projects;
- East Suffolk Lines CRP worked with Suffolk New College to adopt Ipswich Station, creating a host of opportunities for students, from art and horticulture projects to work experience placements.

Promoting sustainable, healthy, accessible travel

- Derwent Valley CRP created an activity book for the line featuring guided walks for families from each station, and helps to facilitate discounted group travel for school and college trips;
- Meldreth, Shrepreth and Foxton CRP bid for funding to develop a cycle repair cafe and new cycle parking at Meldreth Station to encourage active travel and links between cycling and rail;
- The Bittern Line and Wherry Line CRPs run a successful guided walk programme, and have enhanced a number of stations with cycling facilities and maps highlighting local walking routes;
- East Suffolk Lines CRP worked with train operator Greater Anglia and commercial bus company First Eastern Counties to develop a through ticket combining rail and bus travel to the seaside town of Aldeburgh.

Community Rail Development Strategy

Bringing communities together and supporting diversity and inclusion

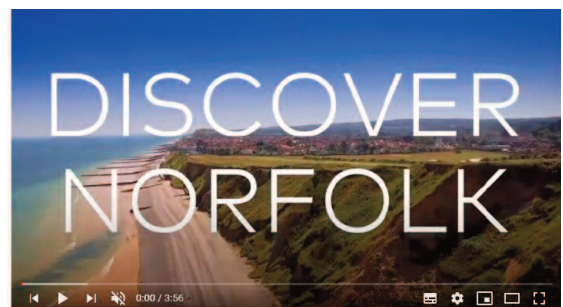
- North Staffordshire CRP is engaging with communities to consider potential access improvements to Stone Station, looking to remove barriers to travel;
- Poacher Line CRP works with the Lincolnshire Youth Offenders Service to identify opportunities for individuals to support station projects and community action days as part of their rehabilitation;
- Barton Cleethorpes CRP runs special 'themed' trains, e.g. at Christmas and Easter, to promote the line and help to engage families and local communities;
- Marston Vale CRP organised 'try the train' trips for the Khush Haal group in Bedford, set up to support vulnerable women and improve their wellbeing, and supports the station group at Woburn Sands, who work with a local church youth group.

Supporting social and economic development

- The North Nottinghamshire and Lincolnshire CRP is supporting the reintroduction of passenger services between Gainsborough Central and Barton-Upon-Humber to open up new employment, education, and leisure opportunities for local communities;
- Wherry Lines CRP has helped to transform the old parcels office at Lowestoft Station into a popular community events space, and also supports the town's heritage open days festival;
- Worcestershire CRP is working with stakeholders and rail partners to bring disused rooms at Great Malvern Station back into use for the benefit of local communities and the local economy;
- New CRPs are currently being established on lines from Nottingham to Sheffield and Worksop, opening up social and economic development opportunities for local communities along those lines.

Greater Anglian CRPs – 'A Room with a View'

CRPs across Greater Anglia, working with the train operator, made promotional videos for eight lines to attract more people to take days out on local branch lines. They wanted to showcase the amazing places within easy reach of the lines and promote a fleet of new trains as a more sociable and sustainable option for leisure travel than cars. Each partnership helped with scripts and footage for the films, ensuring the most appropriate locations were included. The campaign was a great success, with 17,700 people clicking through to a project landing page on the Greater Anglia website, offering help for people to plan their trips.



The Friends of Radcliffe Station

The station group at Radcliffe on Trent has around 25 regular volunteers, working on gardening and art projects and other schemes to improve the station for passengers. Last year, members had agreed plans for the design and planting of a large area on one of the station platforms when COVID-19 and lockdown hit. Undaunted, the group stayed in touch via WhatsApp and progressed the project as best they could. Supported by the Poacher Line CRP, the group are now eager to get back to their regular meetings, work with local schools and youth groups, and a new partnership with the village community garden group who are set to plant and grow vegetables on the station for the local 'community kitchen', set up during the pandemic to support those in need.



Station groups:

More than 160 stations across the Midlands and the East of England have been 'adopted' by their local communities, with around 1,000 volunteers helping to turn stations and their surroundings into welcoming, thriving, and celebratory gateways and hubs.

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

Reedham Station Adoption Group

The green-fingered group of volunteers at Reedham Station look after two platforms filled with tubs and planters, an embankment overlooking the station entrance, and a small wildlife area. The station houses a small railway heritage centre and the group distribute guides and walking leaflets, also helping to install two information plinths featuring station and railway history linking a new walking trail with various landmarks in the village. Members organise a range of events to engage the local community, including working with the local school, hosting tea parties to raise money for local charities, and holding a popular Christmas carols event.



‘Building back better’ post-COVID-19:

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

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

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

When Covid-19 first hit, East Midlands Railway worked with Derwent Valley Line CRP, North Staffordshire CRP, Poacher Line CRP, and the Friends of Beeston Station to donate £7,500 to food banks across the region to support families who were facing difficulties due to the pandemic.

As volunteers began returning to stations in the summer of 2020, the Heart of England CRP wanted to offer a small token of appreciation for all the fantastic work their station adoption groups are involved with, and for their commitment to supporting local recovery efforts. Each adopter received a special ‘Welcome Back’ pack, containing hand sanitiser, a reusable fabric face mask, and other goodies sourced from local independent businesses, while each station group was given a gift card for a local garden centre.

The CRP also launched their Coventry Acts of Kindness initiative, designed to make people feel welcome at stations and encourage them to not view train travel as something to be intimidated by. Those taking part were given the opportunity to focus on their mental wellbeing and discuss any concerns over the economic or social impacts that COVID-19 had left on them.



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

“The positives of 2020, an increased sense of community and a willingness to help others, have been witnessed in abundance across our network. Existing volunteer groups have continued their efforts and new groups have been established, a remarkable achievement given the backdrop of national and local restrictions.”

Margaret Smith, Heart of England CRP



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