



Community rail in Scotland



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Rail Delivery Group



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

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

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

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



“

Across the whole country, from the Scottish Borders to the Highlands, and within our major towns and cities, community rail is helping enhance the wider social value the railway brings to the communities it serves.”

Ros Houldsworth, ScotRail

Scotland in numbers:

**Nine
community
rail
partnerships
(CRPs)**

Working along railway lines, with industry partners, to engage local communities. Partnerships stretch from the Highland Mainline in the North to the Borders Railway in the South.

**260
station
groups**

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

Each Year

1,200
Volunteers

Giving

**55,000
Hours**



**Worth
£4.7m**

Scotland's community rail partnerships:



South West Scotland CRP - covers 17 stations from Ayr to Stranraer and Kilmarnock to Gretna Green. Key priorities include encouraging sustainable tourism by rail and promoting local heritage and history, and the CRP are currently working to develop community rooms at Girvan Station and 'Art at the Station' events.

6VT Youth CRP

- covers various stations and lines in and around Edinburgh. The CRP gives young people a voice in rail and transport development, increasing their rail confidence to broaden their horizons and travel options, with recent projects including young parents being taught how to travel safely with prams and buggies and the launch of 'Fearless' hate crime reporting number.



Borders CRP

- covers ten stations from Edinburgh Waverley to Tweedbank. The CRP works to communicate the benefits of the railway and encourage local ownership of the line and its stations, and are looking to promote active travel, e.g. walking/cycling along the line and use the line to help support and stimulate local economies.



Strathallan CRP

- covers Gleneagles, Dunblane, and Bridge of Allan Stations. The CRP aims to promote integrated sustainable transport by developing accessible rail and countryside networks, including downloadable walking guides for routes along the line, and is seeking to transform vacant space at Gleneagles Station for community use.



East Lothian CRP

- covers eight stations from Edinburgh Waverley to North Berwick and Dunbar. Priorities include the promotion of integrated and sustainable travel and the creation of fully accessible and welcoming station environments, with recent projects including a revised line guide encouraging people to visit local attractions by rail.



West Highland CRP

- covers all stations from Crianlarich to Mallaig. The CRP works to make rail travel attractive for both locals and visitors, bringing together community groups with a focus on sustainable transport, with recent projects including the Glenfinnan Viaduct footpath and interactive app, and 'Brief Encounters on the West Highland Line', a play written especially for performances in station tearooms and lineside venues.



South West Glasgow CRP

- covers six stations from Crossmyloof to Barrhead. The CRP aims to encourage active and green travel and tackle social deprivation and exclusion, with projects including supporting volunteers to help develop station travel plans and working with marginalised young people on activities such as gardening and graffiti art.



Rail 74 CRP

- covers six stations between Rutherglen and Hamilton Central. The CRP uses rail to help raise attainment and aspirations among communities along the line, seeking to alleviate poverty and social deprivation, and recent projects have included working with local businesses and social enterprises to develop station artwork and a focus on improving mental health.



Highland Mainline CRP

- covers eight stations from Dunkeld & Birnam to Carrbridge. Key priorities include promoting the history of the line and celebrating the heritage and culture of communities linked by the railway, and encouraging sustainable tourism by rail, boosted by recent projects such as a 'Highland Fling' at London Kings Cross to attract rail passengers to the area and the production of engaging line guides and maps.



“Community rail is an ideal vehicle to create positive change due to its ability to link groups and people together using the railway as a central focus.”

Suzie McCheyne, Rail 74 CRP

Community rail supports the four main aims of **Scotland's National Transport Strategy**, with a wide range of projects helping to:

Reduce inequality

- East Lothian CRP and Strathallan CRP have both worked to highlight station accessibility issues;
- Kilmarnock Station Trust has transformed disused station spaces for local enterprise, skills development and social inclusion projects, creating a 'community village';
- Rail 74 CRP and South West Glasgow CRP have worked with local school children and marginalised groups to help them feel empowered to use rail and other sustainable modes of travel;
- 6VT CRP draws on young people's interests and ideas to increase access to and use of rail among young people and develop rail confidence and sustainable travel behaviours.

Take climate action

- East Lothian CRP has explored and encouraged rail-bus integration;
- Borders CRP, South West Scotland CRP, Highland Mainline CRP, and West Highland Line CRP all promote sustainable tourism, showing how rail is part of the Scottish experience, linking lines to local cultures and identities;
- South West Glasgow CRP has arranged volunteer support for station travel planning, working with local partners to promote modal shift towards rail and active travel;
- A new community space is being developed at Stow Station on the Borders Railway, with a cycle hub set to complement walking and cycling provision from and between stations on the line.

How community rail contributes to Scotland's National Transport Strategy

Support inclusive economic development

- CRPs produce business cases for improvements at stations, helping them to better serve local communities and provide community space;
- Rail 74 CRP works with social enterprises and ethical businesses on artwork projects and pop ups at stations, supporting local economies;
- West Highland Line CRP is engaging partners to aid integration between rail and other travel modes, including buses and ferries to the islands;
- Various CRPs work with businesses/attractions along their lines on joint promotions and special rates/offers for rail passengers.

Improve health and wellbeing

- Kilmarnock Station Trust has an active travel hub, to help people use walking and cycling with rail, and runs a 'Moving On' project for people dealing with recovery from addiction and adversity;
- Rail 74 CRP holds 'conversation cafes' on trains to reduce social isolation, promoting rail as a form of sociable and sustainable travel;
- Strathallan CRP produces materials to promote walking/cycling to and from stations, encouraging active and sustainable travel;
- South West Glasgow CRP works with local GPs to facilitate physical activity referrals, i.e. 'social prescribing', using rail to promote physical and mental health.

Highland Mainline CRP – Heritage Line Guide and Map

Highland Mainline CRP recognises that tourism is the key driver for their line and developed a heritage map and line guide focused on promoting the unique historic attractions of each station and the community it serves. Over 50,000 were printed and distributed across all stations, local visitor centres, and tourist attractions, encouraging people to travel sustainably by rail to enjoy areas such as the Cairngorms National Park. Heritage panels, pictures, and information are also displayed at stations, and the history and importance of the line is also being incorporated in the partnership's new 'Travelling Classroom' project, aimed at engaging local school children and giving them a taste of rail travel.



6VT CRP

6VT CRP is the only youth-led community rail partnership in the UK. With a core of around 15 young members, the group's main aims are to connect young people along a range of railway lines serving Edinburgh and its surrounds, promoting health and wellbeing, inclusiveness, and rail safety. The partnership has young adults acting as chair and secretary, and every project the group works on is youth-led, tackling issues that members feel are important, such as hate crime and mental health. All group members are also enrolled on the Scottish Government's Saltire Awards programme, which celebrates, recognises, and rewards the contribution and achievements of young volunteers.



“

Community rail gives an opportunity to show young people how to overcome barriers and increase their confidence to travel. It gives them a voice, so they can be heard at strategic level and know people are listening.

Fiona Horne, 6VT CRP

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Station groups:

More than 260 stations across the Scottish network have been 'adopted' by their local communities, with more than 1,200 volunteers helping to turn stations and their surroundings into welcoming, thriving, and celebratory gateways and hubs.

At Kilmarnock Station, the Kilmarnock Station Railway Heritage Trust brought redundant railway offices back into community use to create The Kilmarnock Station Community Village, housing a gift shop, book shop, coffee shop, community meeting and office space, and an active travel hub. The station is also a base for projects offering volunteering and training opportunities for people affected by addiction, mental health issues, loneliness, and isolation.

Gardening and art projects can be found at stations across the country, including at Largs, where volunteers transformed an old siding into an accessible community garden that is now used by a host of local groups to improve health and wellbeing and enhance social inclusion. At Wemyss Bay, the 'friends of' group have restored the station's traditional floral displays using plants grown in a newly created station garden, and coordinate a bookshop and a permanent art exhibition celebrating the history of the station and the town.

Helmsdale Station

The old stationmaster's accommodation at Helmsdale Station had been empty for more than 20 years until Helmsdale Station CIC refurbished and converted it into self-catering accommodation. As a non-profit making community project to promote tourism in East Sutherland, all proceeds go to station improvements, promoting the line, and assisting community projects in and around Helmsdale. Discounts are given to those arriving by rail, other public transport, or walking/cycling, in a bid to boost sustainable tourism and active travel. Already one of the key community organisations in the area, the CIC are now leading the development of a new CRP for the Far North Line.

‘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.

During the pandemic, Borders CRP offered funding grants to four projects providing food and essential support to people being particularly adversely affected by COVID-19; including older people, young families, and isolated individuals. Their support helped the Edinburgh Food Social produce and deliver more than 55,000 meals, and the Gorebridge Community Trust to establish a new Gorebridge Cares Friendly Voice Service.



On the West Highland Line, where a limited timetable was in operation, the CRP worked with ScotRail to coordinate a special bi-weekly service train from Rannoch to Fort William, giving those living in isolated communities along the line the chance to travel to the town for essential purposes such as shopping. The CRP engaged with communities to ascertain their needs and worked constructively with the train operator to find an innovative solution.

All projects have been supported by ScotRail in the Community’s three-phased approach to the pandemic – Respond, Reset & Restart, and Recovery – and community rail groups will be working together with the ScotRail team and other partners to promote rail as a safe, inclusive, and sustainable form of travel, particularly for leisure and tourism, when restrictions allow.

“Community rail can act as a link between local communities, businesses and rail partners, sharing insights and aiding understanding...Once you have got something going on at a station, it’s warm, it’s welcoming, it’s part of the community.”

Sally Spaven, Highland Mainline CRP



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