

# "Community and rail" or "Community Rail" or "Community and sustainable transport"?

**Locally community Lead? Local government lead? Government Accredited and standardised? Narrowly rail or mode agnostic?**  
... or can we harness the best of each of these? ... is this down to the Community Rail movement (CRPs and Stations Friends groups)

## **How can our community members, groupings and organisations best partner forward?**

- short term to learn immediate safe travel with sufficient capacity
- medium term to ensure the right services and facilities are available when we reach stable state
- long term to build a better economic, social and sustainable climate and user friendly network

The pillars of Community Rail are:

- \* providing a voice for the community
- \* bringing communities together, supporting diversity & inclusion
- \* promoting sustainable, healthy and accessible travel
- \* supporting social and economic development

## **Are they still correct or are we back to "bums on seats" and "save our line"?**

### **What do you do about?:**

A bus who took his first fare at 2 p.m. A train service conveying an average of just 2 passengers between stations  
A bridge where new safety barriers prevent social distancing and hamper cycling? (real GB examples - not all in the South West)

### **Let the experts do their job and help them make things better?**

BUT be aware of opportunities to cull inconvenient provision. Risk of failure and "no-one ever got fired for specifying IBM"  
Risk of excessive consultation and empire building – no JFDI

The experts who know are worked off their arses at the moment. **How do we avoid an opportunity to restart things better being wasted?** Experts have to deal with the short term like school runs, and are fielding a flood of "Crayonista" ideas from those of us confined to our armchairs at home and making suggestions that look good on the surface but are impractical as suggested.

Honourable mention – background topics to the items above:

- Funding, local government and bodies, and cross border co-operation, networks and consistency
- Is travel to meet existing needs, existing opportunities, or growing new needs and opportunities?
- Customer friendly (information, pleasant, safe, straightforward, reliable, frequent, clean, affordable, total journey connected)
- Issues of volunteers taking paid jobs - Protest turn to partner; poacher becomes gamekeeper

### **Suggestions?**

- \* Engage, support, be the candid friend and be clearly there for the whole process
- \* Provide really local information in a positive way. Even local authorities and TOCs are too big to have the truly local opportunity data.
- \* Beware the long grass and look for shared objectives and opportunities; minimise the risk and workload for specifying & implementing staff

More questions than answers – discussion seeding for TravelWatch SouthWest Webinar, 12<sup>th</sup> June 2020, via <http://www.passenger.chat/23607>

Times change.

A year ago, if I had boarded a train wearing a facemask and approached a member of the staff, I would have been asked to take it off. Yet now, were I to board a train without a face mask and approach a member of staff, I would be asked to put one on.

A year ago, if I had learned of a fellow community rail volunteer telling people not to use the train unless it was absolutely essential, I would have sought to help them understand why their advice was probably incorrect. Now I find it's the basis for short term advice I'm having to give out myself.

Rail is there to serve the communities it passes through. Over the years Community Rail has done so well at getting people on existing trains. So well that it's been a key player in moving us away from "carrying fresh air". And it's so much more than just for the train and the stations - it's for the economy, standard and life and pride of the places served. Volunteers have provided a love and a value that's hard to measure in financial terms, or indeed in how it could otherwise have been done without them.

The work done by the lead CROs - Keith, Richard, Nick, Sophie and Catherine and so many others in their teams Rebecca and Mark and Paul and Heather ... is second to none, and without question it's in everyone's interest to carry on with that. But what the work is has changed.

It WAS about marketing existing train services and stations. When TransWilts CRP asked to join, we were initially told "No" because we didn't have enough of a service to market. Only once we had worked so hard from the outside, but with quiet and willing advice from some of the small ACoRP (as it was) team were we in a position to take advantage of wider variety of what they offered and official blessings.

It IS now rather wider. Note the four pillars. Note the support of line and service improvement. Note also the very much heavier organisation in (now) CRN, a centralisation of "accreditation" and greatly increased paperwork and policies which end up bunching smaller local lines into regional groups.

Community Rail was described to me recently - by a CRN employee - as "a partnership between the rail industry, local authorities and the community" - Community now last in the list, I noticed.

Questions ...

There IS a place - but where?

Is the CRP / bureaucracy

Local? Regional? Wider services too? Trains or buses and all Sustainable?

Existing services, modest developments, or bigger schemes?

Should we be waiting to start promoting again? Maintaining visibility? Keeping volunteers / each other engaged?

Short term – Covid. Medium – rebuild and inclusion. Longer term – climate change?

Should we be ...

Developing pride?

Helping Marketing?

Be the eyes and ears?

Operational help?

Safety and customer advice help? (e.g. marshalls)

Which of these things do our members have the skills to achieve?

Should Community Rail be managing its own lines?

Is franchise funding right and what if there are no franchises?

Volunteers are keen to see the results of their work quickly ... but rail is long term.

Do volunteers and CRPs have a place in the strategy or should they concentrate on the tactics?



- Devon and Cornwall CRP
- TransWilts CRP
- Sevenside CRP
- Heart of Wessex CRP
- Three Rivers CRP
- Cotswold Line Promotion Group
- Blackmore Vale CRP
- Purbeck CRP

Station Friends groups ... cover nearly every station in the South West

