

News story: Rail Minister backs 'life-changing' community rail projects

- rallying call comes as updated Community Rail Strategy is launched
- train operators urged to put resources into new and existing community partnerships to strengthen links between the railways and local people
- strategy also aims to tackle loneliness as part of wider government plans

Rail Minister Andrew Jones has challenged train operators to step up their support for community rail projects across the UK as he launches the 2018 Community Rail Strategy.

On a visit today (15 November 2018) to the [Cumbrian Coast Line's 'rail journey to recovery'](#), one of the UK's most successful community rail projects, the minister saw how former alcohol and drug addicts are gaining skills through job placements and training which involves the station, supporting them in getting back into work.

Meeting with volunteers and members of the scheme, the Rail Minister urged train companies to commit more time, materials and resources to shaping the future of the grassroots strategy, ensuring local people and their priorities are put first.

Rail Minister Andrew Jones said:

Community rail projects are vital because they get everybody involved, from right across the community and give local people a say in how their rail network can serve their needs. This is why it is so important the train operators commit to supporting them.

Since the first strategy was launched 14 years ago, we have seen hundreds of successful projects spring up across the country, giving so many people a local lifeline to events, activities and initiatives that they would otherwise have no access to.

That is why it is so important for train operators to increase their support, opening up space and ensuring their stations become vital hubs in our communities.

'Rail journey to recovery' is just one of the projects run by 60 [Community Rail Partnerships](#) (CRPs) across the country. The CRPs have been set up by local groups, charities and councils working closely with train operators to help people get the most from their railways, promote social inclusion, support sustainable travel and bring stations to life.

Jools Townsend, Chief Executive of the Association of Community Rail

Partnerships, said:

Hundreds of community rail partnerships and station groups across Britain are working to help local people to get the most from their railways, and support industry partners to put communities at the forefront.

We welcome this strategy, which recognises the importance of community rail to mobility, inclusion, wellbeing and development, and provides a clear framework for partnership work between communities and industry, government and third sector partners. We hope it will inspire more people to get involved.

Carolyn Watson, Community and Sustainability Director at Northern, said:

We're pleased to support the launch of this updated strategy. Community engagement has been at the heart of Northern's approach since our franchise began. We support a wide range of projects, led by our community rail partners that are delivering real benefits for communities across the north of England.

The services and facilities we provide drive economic growth and connect people with each other and further opportunities. But it's the work and insight of our community partners that will ensure we're meeting the needs of the communities we serve.

The original Community Rail Strategy was launched in 2004 and was last revamped 11 years ago. Following a [public consultation](#) which concluded earlier this year, the updated strategy has now been officially launched.

Among the new measures in the 2018 Strategy are:

- a new accreditation scheme for CRPs, to act as a trusted mark of quality and reflect the community-facing role they play
- a commitment to play a pivotal role in the government's new [loneliness strategy](#), launched in October, by helping community groups make use of unused or under-used railway property to create a local hub and facilities for people, especially in isolated areas
- the creation of a transport network that boosts people's social connections and provides opportunities for new education, employment and life skills opportunities.

Find out [more about community rail and how to set up a local group](#).