



Annual Report April 2023 - March 2024



Community Rail Development Strategy

A short insight into Community Rail and its strategy

Community Rail focuses on connecting communities to the railways through local partnerships, groups, organisations, social enterprises and volunteers. The Community Rail concept initially developed from grassroots organisations, before being adopted as a government strategy in 2004 and supported more broadly by the rail industry. It plays a leading role in the government's vision for civil society (individuals and organisations that undertake activities whose primary purpose is to deliver social value and which are independent from state control).

On 16 Nov 2018 the DfT published an updated Community Rail development strategy, 'Connecting communities with the railways'. Partnership working is essential to the delivery of this strategy and so government works closely with Community Rail Network (CRN), train operators, Network Rail and others.

A report published by CRN in April 2019 revealed that a hidden army of 8,500 Community Rail volunteers give nearly 400,000 hours a year to bring local railway lines and stations back into the heart of their communities – promoting sustainable, healthy and accessible travel. Community Rail volunteering alone is calculated to be worth £33.2m annually, through work contributed to local stations and communities, and the social value to the volunteers themselves through improved health and well-being. Comparing data from a 2015 report Community Rail Partnerships have increased by over 50% to approximately 85 and station groups have more than doubled in number to well over 1,000 groups.

Jools Townsend, chief executive of CRN, said: "Community Rail empowers local people to have a greater stake in their local railways and stations, and to access opportunities that may otherwise be out of reach, through sustainable and healthy means. There are now more than 1,000 Community Rail partnerships and groups across Britain, and thousands of volunteers benefiting their local communities. Our research shows not only that their numbers have grown, but that they are working with passion to help local people get the most from their railway lines and stations, and they are delivering all sorts of benefits. Community Rail is playing a unique role, working at a grassroots level so more people can get around through sustainable travel, and helping people to connect with their locality and those around them."



The 4 community rail strategy pillars under which all Community Rail Partnerships plan their activities.

Chairman's Report



Chris Fribbins - Chair Kent Community Rail Partnership

The 2024 Annual Report again shows what can be achieved by community volunteers, and our Sustrans officers who deliver project activities through the year, across our lines and provide the guidance and support to those volunteers. There continues to be a growth in community groups taking care of their local stations as Station Adopters - although the ultimate responsibility for the stations remains with the train operator (Southeastern on a lease from Network Rail the owner), station adopters can provide a bit extra.

This year we celebrated 20 years as a community rail partnership. From small beginnings on Swale Rail, through expansion on the Medway Valley Line and latterly the Kent Downs Line. We are respected throughout the Community Rail Network, Network Rail, Southeastern and the Department for Transport who certify us on an annual basis. It has been a difficult year for the Kent Community Rail Partnership and the rail industry. We are all still suffering from the financial costs of the Covid pandemic, government financial pressures and the impacts these have on the rail staff. After last year's KCRP budget was agreed, we had a reduction of 20% with no notice. This meant we were not able to recruit a replacement for Andy Place and had to take some tough decisions on what activities we were able to run this year. Southeastern were able to fund the gap for this year, but without the certainty of funding for 2024, we were unable to reinstate the recruitment.

Who would have thought that strike action would have continued over a year later! This undermines the KCRP activities to encourage more people to use the railways, a very environmentally sustainable method of transport and to support the sustainability of our local railway lines.

So much delivered in the past year, despite the increased financial and workload pressures, we are looking to maintain and increase delivery where possible in the future. Should the benefit of Community Rail Partnerships be recognised with funding on a sustainable long term basis, we can do more. So my report ends with a very big thank you to the involvement and support of Southeastern, Local Authorities, Parish Councils, Local Community Groups and Sustrans for all they do to make this an ongoing success.

What is Kent Community Rail Partnership?

Community Rail Partnerships (CRPs) encourage communities to support their local railway lines and stations. There are approximately 85 CRPs across the country and the number is continuously growing. CRPs are comprised of railway operators, local authorities including county, district, borough and parish councils, station adoption groups, schools, colleges, businesses, rail user groups, community organisations and volunteers. CRPs deliver a wide variety of projects to fulfil the needs of the local communities, provide a voice for their communities and promote sustainable, healthy and accessible travel whilst supporting diversity and inclusion and social and economic development. Kent Community Rail Partnership (Kent CRP) was established in 2003 and works within a 5 mile radius of each of its 31 stations along the Medway Valley Line (MVL), Kent Downs Line (KDL) and Swale Rail Line (SRL) see map on front cover. All three Lines' activities are overseen by a Steering Group which is chaired by Chris Fribbins and meets quarterly. Each line has its own partnership meeting, during 2023-24 the MVL meetings were chaired by James Willis, the KDL was chaired by James Lehane and the SRL was chaired by Linda Brinklow and line meetings took place 3 times a year. The Partnership could not operate without the collaboration of its members, who dedicate many hours to support its work for which we are extremely grateful. Our members/volunteers dedicated approximately 2,779 hours to Kent CRP activities over the last 12 months (over 68.5% increase on last year) for which we are extremely grateful. It is the Kent CRP members/volunteers with the support of the part-time Officers (1.6FTE) that achieve the considerable activity detailed within this report. Kent CRP has been hosted by the charity Sustrans since April 2014.

Accreditation

We are delighted to share that Kent CRP first achieved accreditation on 23 March 2020 and has retained the status each year since.

"Accreditation is the formal recognition by the DfT that a CRP operates to a high standard and that its objectives and activities are supported by the Government. Accreditation should provide assurance to others, including potential funders and partners, that the CRP operates to high standards of governance and financial propriety; adopts a collaborative approach; is worthy of trust by others; and is a suitable entity for receiving public funds. Further Government considers it a good representative of the local community." DfT

Kent Community Rail Partnership supports 3 railway lines;

- The Medway Valley Line (MVL) which runs alongside the beautiful river Medway connecting Tonbridge and Strood via Maidstone West and has 14 stations.
- The Kent Downs Line (KDL) which runs along the breath taking North Downs connecting Ashford and Otford via Maidstone East and has 12 stations.
- The Swale Rail Line (SRL) which runs from Sittingbourne to Sheerness connecting the Isle of Sheppey with the rest of Kent and has 5 stations.









Train services on all three lines run trains directly to London and are operated by SE Trains Limited, part of the DOHL.

Financial Report and Funding

Kent CRP is extremely grateful for the continued funding support from Southeastern Railway, Kent County Council and Medway Council. Kent CRP has been successful in attracting grants and match funding from elsewhere, we are particularly grateful to the Community Rail Network, Ashford BC, The Colonel Stephens Society and funds from KCC's Combined Member Grants Scheme. It is also thankful for Borough and Parish Council funding which is carefully spent to benefit our communities. **Financial notes:** Expectation was that we would end the financial year with little to no reserves in the project budget. However, due to a combination of receiving our full expected contribution from Southeastern this financial year (rather than 75% as we were led to believe), alongside receiving this information too late in the year to recruit to the vacant position, we are looking to carry around £35,000 into 2024-25. This will go some way to bridging the gap between rising costs and the lack in uplift required to meet those costs. Income for the project has not increased over the past few years to meet increased demand, and in fact in 2022-23 we lost £15,000 of income. We have been briefed to expect further decreases in income and as such are operating at a lower capacity to keep the project in budget. An updated 2024/25 budget report will be available for our April Partnership meeting.

Financial Statement for 2023/24

Core Funding & other income	Total Forecast	Budget	Balance
Kent County Council	£27,540	£15,000	
Southeastern Rail Income	£75,000	£56,250	
Parish Council & Grant Income	£1,285	-	
Medway Borough Council Income	£7,000	£7,000	
Cycle Rail Income	£20,540	-	
CRN Grant Income	£3,245	-	
Castledene Transport - MB Mural	£500	-	
To Carry Forward from 2022/23	£21,651	£21,651	
To Carry Forward into next FY	-	-	
Total income	£156,761	£99,901	£56,860
Expenditure	Total Forecast	Budget	Balance
Staff Costs & Overheads	£90,674	£91,734	
Unallocated Costs	£36,567	£4,167	
Events and Marketing	£4,500	£1,950	
Community Rail Network Awards	£500	£850	
Volunteer Expenses	£100	£600	
Office Admin	£600	£600	
Materials Sheppey College	£1,204	-	
Five Acre Wood	£250	-	
Cycle Rail Project	£20,540	-	
Maidstone Barracks Mural	£221	-	
Paddock Wood and Queenborough	£525	-	
Charing Gate	£1,080	-	
Total Expenditure	£156,761	£99,901	-£ 56,860

Review of events, projects and activities

The events, projects and activities have been listed under the 4 pillars of DfT strategy for community rail, greater detail for these projects and activities can be found on our website www.kentcrp.org

1. Providing a voice for the community

- Community Rail Network Awards 2024 1 third place award, 'Most Enhanced Railway Spaces' Hollingbourne Station Café and Community Hub. Last year saw the refurbishment of the once derelict Hollingbourne station, this year has seen the very committed and talented Community Interest Company (CIC) transform this empty space into a bustling hub of community activity. The CIC has established a popular café (7am-4pm Mon, Wed, Fri and Sat) for locals and those from further afield, the space is hired and regular events have been extremely popular e.g. board games afternoons, film nights, Halloween, Christmas and spring events all providing much needed income for essentials such as insurance, fire compliance, Wi-Fi and utilities etc. Soon 'The Pantry' will be added, a much needed essential items store as there is no shop in the village. This safe and welcoming place has become a valuable meeting place for the Hollingbourne and wider community. The project was also nominated for 'World Cup of Stations' and won a Highly commended certification at the 2023 National Railway Heritage Awards. See https://kentcrp.org/hollingbourne-station-community-hub/ for photos, video and further information.
- The Kent CRP action planning process seeks projects and activities from our members and the wider community, the members then vote (if necessary) to determine which projects and activities are undertaken throughout the year.
- Our Annual Stakeholder meeting where ideas are shared and incorporated into the activities of the CRP our key speaker this year was Steve White – Southeastern's Managing Director
- 20th Anniversary celebrations of the Kent Community Rail Partnership were held where the Partnership began on the Swale Rail Line.







Community Rail Awards

National Rail Heritage Awards

World Cup of Stations Award







Stakeholder Meeting

Kent CRP 10th Anniversary Celebration on the Isle of Sheppey

2. Promoting sustainable, healthy and accessible travel

• Delivering train travel training sessions for those who may find it difficult to access train travel. During these travel training sessions students are shown the electronic screens and taught how to work out which trains go where, at what time and from which platform and if appropriate may be assisted to download Apps on their phones.

We supported Ashford College students with special educational needs (SEN) and their tutors on a guided tour of Ashford International Station to help familiarise them with the station prior to travelling by train the following week. A week later the SEN students undertook a train travel training journey to Maidstone East where they enjoyed behind the scenes station access and the opportunity to make public travel announcements. "Initially our students were

anxious at the prospect of train travel, but with the support of Therese and her team they managed to overcome the anxiety surrounding the travel and looked forward to and enjoyed their subsequent trips." Caitriona Ford – Tutor Ashford College.

We made visits to the Travel Safe Travel Smart centre at Margate with students from Sheppey College and Five Acre Wood (Snodland). The TSTS team delivered sessions to raise awareness of the dangers of trespassing, facilities at stations to make your journey easier and how to get help from railway staff and British Transport Police. Kent CRP would like to thank Southeastern and Network Rail for funding these travel training sessions and their amazing staff for supporting the sessions.

- Over 40 students at Sheppey College received rail safety messaging during rail safety week. The students designed rail safety posters to strengthen their learning.
- Pop-up at Sheppey College during their college open evening to promote all things rail.
- Another successful smoothie bike pop-up took place during the summer at Maidstone CycleFest 2023. Riding and
 walking to railway stations was promoted and we encouraged cyclists to take their cycles on the train for their end to
 end journeys. We provided cycling and walking maps for local towns including Maidstone, Ashford and Tonbridge.
- Faversham Festival of Transport. It was a very busy weekend. Bags, pens, stickers, colouring in pages and puzzle sheets flew off the shelves, spreading our branding around the town. Lots of conversations around places to visit in Swale supplemented with walking and cycling maps, brochures for attractions and Railcard information helping people to "Go Green by Train."
- Our social media presence through Instagram, Facebook and X (Twitter) accounts continues to grow. Regular
 messages are in place supporting our core activities and promoting rail travel. Additional posts are made in support of
 our own events and those of partners in our communities e.g. Heart of Kent Walking Festival, Community Rail Week,
 Rail Safety Week. We have 576 followers on Facebook, 809 on X (Twitter) and 273 on Instagram. This represents a
 12% increase in our followers.
- Our website is kept up to date with news on all of the Partnership's projects and activities. New pages provide details
 of artworks, history boards and information panels on each line, tips on cycle security, the use of defibrillators, and the
 amazing story of the transformation of the Hollingbourne Station Community Hub.
- The publication of quarterly newsletters that share the work of Kent CRP and promote rail travel. These are circulated to over 200 members and friends, displayed in our station noticeboards and are available on our website. Social media posts promote every issue and encourage people to sign up to receive a copy by email.
- We have updated the promotional materials that we use at events, adding new brochures promoting PlusBus
 ticketing, sustainable tourism on our Swale Rail Line and inclusive volunteering opportunities at Kent CRP. We would
 like to express our gratitude to Community Rail Network for supporting the creation of these materials through their
 Community Rail Development Fund. See page 3 for photo



Ashford College Students Travel
Training to Maidstone East



Sheppy Students Travel Training to Margate Travel Safe Travel Smart Centre



Rail Safety Assembly at Sheppey College



Rail Safety Artwork



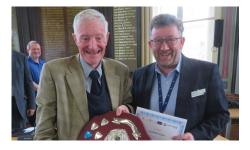
Cyclefest 2023



Faversham Festival of Transport

3. Bringing communities together and supporting diversity and inclusion

- Facilitating the 3 active community rail line partnership groups who each meet 4 times a year The Medway Valley
 Line, The Kent Downs Line and The Swale Rail Line. Members are drawn from the communities served to generate
 the work of Kent CRP. The meetings also provide a voice for the communities each member represents.
- Continuation of the prestigious Volunteer of the Year Award at our annual Stakeholder Meeting. This was presented by Steve White, Southeastern's MD to Jonathan Fryer in recognition of Jonathan's contribution to the Partnership for over 20 years from when the Partnership first began.
- Tracey Crouch MP invited us to attend the Snodland over 55s Advice and Information Fair. We engaged with over 120 people, discovering how they value the connections that the railway provides and sharing information on railcards, assisted travel services and our Rail Trails from Medway Valley Line stations.
- Considerable work has taken place this year supporting our 19 station adoption groups. Activities have included station improvement days with gardening and station art to enhance the station environments for our passengers.
 - 1. Weeding at Wateringbury station
 - 2. Gardening at Borough Green & Wrotham station
 - 3. Grow 19 bulb planting at West Malling station. "It was a good opportunity for the students to learn the new skill of planting bulbs. The technique used was naturalisation. This experience will support a unit of work for Level 1 practical horticulture skills City and Guilds." Jo Wells Tutor
 - 4. Charing Station station adoption group held their first working party where KCRP supported them in bringing together many members of their community. Members of the PC, led by Cllr Susan Easun were joined by members of the local community, students from Heath Farm School (SEN) and Ashford College (Afghanistan refugees and SEN), Southeastern and Sustrans to plant 3 large barrels, 4 window boxes and to paint the 'Charing Stones'.
 - 5. Community events at Hollingbourne station e.g. Heritage event, board game afternoons and film nights.
 - 6. Thanks to the support of Councillor Mike Whiting and Councillor Andy Booth through Kent County Council's Combined Member Grants Scheme, we were able to provide a variety of gardening hand tools to help our Queenborough station adopters with their work keeping the station gardens looking splendid for the local community and visitors to the town.
 - 7. The Friends of Broomhill Park joined us to tidy the public areas outside Strood station. With equipment and support from Medway Council, we gathered 18 bags of litter and a few larger items, improving the station environment.



Volunteer of the Year 2023 Jonathan Fryer



Snodland over 55's Transport Fair



Wateringbury Weeders



Station Adopters at Borough Green & Wrotham



Grow 19 Students - West Malling



Film Night at Hollingbourne Station

4. Supporting social and economic development

- We support social and economic development through our promotion of sustainable tourism by rail. #DaysOutByRail messages have highlighted the Great British Rail Sale, Southeastern "Hop on Board" podcasts, Heart of Kent Walking Festival, attractions in Medway accessible through PlusBus tickets, Sittingbourne and Kemsley Light Railway, guided walks by Boots on Adventure and History Hikers, exploring the Kent Downs National Landscape, Maidstone River Park, Visit Maidstone's Maidstone Trails App, Quiz Trails, Maidstone Museum and the Signal Box Café at Hollingbourne station.
- Arranging events to promote awareness and tourism along the lines. We guided a Rail Ramble from Halling station
 to Cuxton supporting sustainable travel, tourism and the local economy. Participants were encouraged to return with
 friends and family to undertake the walk and enjoy overnight stays in the villages near our stations.
- We continue to work with our members to engage in local authority planning and transport consultation processes, to
 achieve positive outcomes for rail travel and to promote sustainable and healthy travel for the first and final miles of
 journeys e.g. Medway Local Plan, Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plans for both Kent and Medway.
- Murals, information boards and artwork enhance our stations and provide valuable information attracting visitors to the local area.
 - 1. Ashford College Art and photography students Entitled "A Fish Out of Ashford", the planter art and willow weaved "Welcome" letters have transformed the planters outside the station, creating a fantastic greeting to the town for everyone who arrives by Train.
 - 2. Swale Mural showcasing attractions along the Swale Rail Line.
 - 3. Murals from Maplesden Noakes, Maidstone Girls Grammar School and Mid Kent College along the walkway between Maidstone East and Maidstone Barracks stations depicting places of interest within Maidstone.
 - 4. St Edwards primary school mural at Sheerness-on-Sea station.
 - 5. Colonel Stephens information boards at Queenborough and Paddock Wood stations.



Guided walk to Cuxton



Friends of Cuxton station map showing places to explore



Ashford College 'Fish Out of Ashford' pots



Mural at Swale Station



Colonel Stephens Board at Queenborough



Mid Kent College Mural

Passenger Numbers on our Lines

Journeys to / from station (Southeastern trains serving specific CRP routes ONLY)

It can be seen there has been a good percentage increase in journeys taken along all 3 of our lines. The figures for Ashford, Tonbridge and Swale reflect a change in the way passenger journeys are apportioned and recorded.

CRP	Station	2020	2021	2022	2023	2021 vs 2020	2022 vs 2021	2023 vs 2022
KDL	Ashford (Kent)	147,386	227,667	314,920	169,636	54.5%	38.3%	(46.1)%
KDL	Barming	67,245	99,208	156,301	196,048	47.5%	57.5%	25.4%
KDL	Bearsted	143,222	133,837	219,809	243,691	(6.6)%	64.2%	10.9%
KDL	Borough Green & Wrotham	165,802	176,777	268,248	357,331	6.6%	51.7%	33.2%
KDL	Charing	33,835	33,279	57,528	67,947	(1.6)%	72.9%	18.1%
KDL	East Malling	38,060	34,322	51,379	59,264	(9.8%)	49.7%	15.3%
KDL	Harrietsham	36,776	38,946	59,855	70,310	5.9%	53.7%	17.5%
KDL	Hollingbourne	29,025	29,909	38,687	47,409	3.0%	29.3%	22.5%
KDL	Kemsing	6,898	7,215	8,566	13,730	4.6%	18.7%	60.3%
KDL	Lenham	34,501	35,909	56,241	68,187	4.1%	56.6%	21.2%
KDL	Maidstone East	579,028	620,753	971,601	1,170,604	7.2%	56.5%	20.5%
KDL	Otford	103,125	99,439	161,136	250,153	(3.6)%	62.0%	55.2%
KDL	West Malling	307,517	312,309	511,927	666,893	1.6%	63.9%	30.3%
MVL	Aylesford	48,135	53,451	65,460	85,033	11.0%	22.5%	29.9%
MVL	Beltring	2,420	3,409	4,834	6,844	40.9%	41.8%	41.6%
MVL	Cuxton	23,218	26,792	37,212	40,673	15.4%	38.9%	9.3%
MVL	East Farleigh	11,757	12,329	19,643	24,898	4.9%	59.3%	26.8%
MVL	Halling	42,162	44,215	48,626	66,765	4.9%	10.0%	37.3%
MVL	Maidstone Barracks	35,197	41,995	59,512	76,883	19.3%	41.7%	29.2%
MVL	Maidstone West	151,518	186,591	254,589	301,123	23.1%	36.4%	18.3%
MVL	New Hythe	47,089	52,109	66,616	79,484	10.7%	27.8%	19.3%
MVL	Paddock Wood	44,715	73,219	91,789	97,767	63.7%	25.4%	6.5%
MVL	Snodland	101,480	115,301	110,740	153,609	13.6%	(4.0)%	38.7%
MVL	Strood	76,803	90,112	115,453	125,610	17.3%	28.1%	8.8%
MVL	Tonbridge	26,380	38,239	50,612	37,103	45.0%	32.4%	(26.7)%
MVL	Wateringbury	21,155	27,848	46,377	50,267	31.6%	66.5%	8.4%
MVL	Yalding	13,056	15,532	20,423	24,866	19.0%	31.5%	21.8%
SRL	Kemsley	70,334	82,159	103,714	130,589	16.8%	26.2%	25.9%
SRL	Queenborough	58,591	84,476	101,144	118,822	44.2%	19.7%	17.5%
SRL	Sheerness-On-Sea	144,588	202,987	267,738	288,949	40.4%	31.9%	7.9%
SRL	Sittingbourne	68,819	80,010	88,905	112,553	16.3%	11.1%	26.6%
SRL	Swale	2,528	3,830	6,775	4,853	51.5%	77.0%	(28.4)%

Be Part of Our Future

Whether you are an individual, a group, an institution or a business, we can offer a range of opportunities to become involved whether it be work experience, station adoption, help plan an event, create a piece of artwork to be displayed at one of our stations or maybe you're a social media whizz, whatever your favourite activities we would be interested in hearing from you, please email kent.crp@sustrans.org.uk, visit our website http://kentcrp.org/get-involved or contact Therese Hammond for all queries concerning the Partnership and the Kent Downs Line and Gary Outram for the Medway Valley Line and Swale Rail Line – contact details on the last page.

Funders and Partners

Kent CRP is very grateful to its Funders and Partners, without their continued support we would be unable to deliver the number of projects and activities which bring new life to our lines on Kent's Rail Network.

Funders 2023-24

- Southeastern
- Kent County Council
- Medway Council
- Community Rail Network
- Ashford Borough Council
- Barming Parish Council
- Charing Parish Council
- Castledene Transport
- East Malling and Larkfield Parish Council
- Snodland Town Council
- The Colonel Stephens Society
- Wrotham Parish Council
- Yalding Parish Council

southeastern







Partners 2023-24

- Ashford College
- Aylesford Parish Council
- Barming Parish Council
- British Transport Police
- Charing Parish Council
- Cuxton Parish Council
- East Malling and Larkfield Parish Council
- Explore Kent
- Visit Maidstone

- Five Acre Wood
- Grow 19
- Halling Parish Council
- Heath Farm School
- The Station at Hollingbourne CIC
- Hollingbourne Parish Council
- Kent Downs National Landscape
- Maidstone Borough Council
- Network Rail

- North Kent Rail User Group
- Nu-Venture Coaches
- Paddock Wood Town Council
- Queenborough Town Council
- Rail Future
- Swale Borough Council
- Sheppey College
- Snodland Town Council
- Tonbridge & Malling BC
- Yalding Parish Council

Contact Us

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Vacancy

Project Officer Lead Officer for Swale Rail Line

Website: https://kentcrp.org/



Steering Group

Chair: Chris Fribbins

Deputy Chair: Tom Shelley

Medway Valley Line

Chair: James Willis

Deputy Chair: Paul Harper

Kent Downs Line

Chair: James Lehane

Deputy Chair: Clive English

Swale Rail Line

Chair: Linda Brinklow

Deputy Chair: Jonathan Fryer



Kent Community Rail Partnership



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kentcommunityrail partnership

Kent CRP is hosted by Sustrans SUS**trans**

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