



Kent Community Rail Partnership



Annual Report April 2024 - March 2025



2025 Community Rail Network Award Winning Partnership

“Outstanding Contribution to Community Rail”



Community Rail
Accredited Partnership

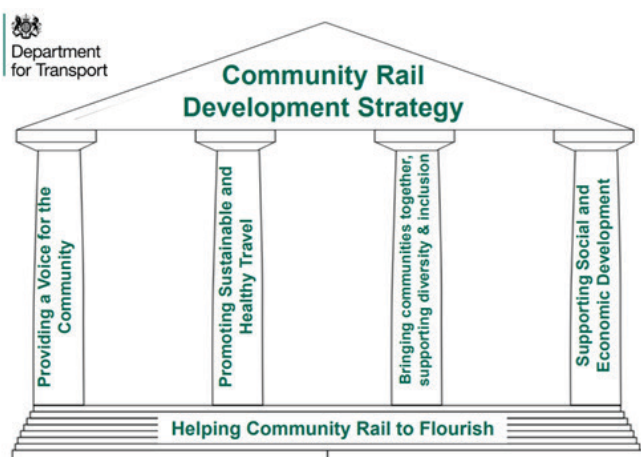
Community Rail Strategy

An 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).

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 wellbeing. It's estimated that community rail creates a social return of £17.89 per £1 invested (CRN Value report 2024).

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. 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

It is my privilege to add my comments to the 2025 Annual Report of the Kent Community Rail Partnership. The partnership has been operating for over 20 years and continues to expand its activities and help enable community groups at a growing number of stations on our lines. This has been despite continued pressures on our finances and staff resources.

This Annual Report shows how our Sustrans team have continued to respond to increased demand and to deliver quality projects and support. The partnership continues to deliver a variety of exciting and impactful projects across all three lines, with the support of our stakeholders.

In 2023-24 we were challenged by a possible reduction in our allocation from Southeastern which affected our ability to replace project officer Andy who covered the Swale Rail (with stations between Sittingbourne and Sheerness). In 2024-25 this was reinstated, but in the interim our thanks go to Gary and Therese who held the fort whilst the project was under-resourced.

We are fortunate that Southeastern continue to appreciate the benefits that we provide to the railway and communities that it served. Following the restoration of funding we were able to recruit Vicky from a quality list of applicants and she has hit the ground running.



Chris Fribbins – Chair of Kent CRP

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 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, the MVL meeting is chaired by Paul Harper, the KDL is chaired by Clive English and the SRL is chaired by Linda Brinklow. The Partnership could not operate without the collaboration of its members and volunteers, who dedicated approximately 3,627 hours over the last 12 months to support its work for which we are extremely grateful. It is the Kent CRP members/volunteers with the support of the part-time Officers (2.1FTE) 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 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;

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



All Kent CRP train services are operated by SE Trains Ltd, part of DfT Operator Ltd

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:

We began the financial year with additional reserves in the project budget after receiving our full expected contribution from Southeastern (rather than 75% as we were led to believe). In addition, Southeastern awarded us an extra £25,000 for 2024/25 from its Customer and Community Improvement Fund, allowing us to recruit to fill our vacant position and restore Officer capacity to 2.1FTE. Looking ahead, the funding environment remains extremely challenging.

An updated 2025/26 budget report will be available for our April Partnership meeting.

Financial Statement for 2024/25

Core Funding & other income	Total Forecast	Budget	Balance
Kent County Council	£15,000	£15,000	
Southeastern Rail Income	£100,000	£100,000	
Parish Council & Grant Income	£500	-	
Medway Borough Council Income	£7,000	£7,000	
CRN Grant Income	£200	-	
Carried forward from 2023/24	£30,317	£30,317	
Total income	£153,017	£152,317	£700
Expenditure	Total Forecast	Budget	Balance
Staff Costs & Overheads	£112,141	£112,141	
Unallocated Costs	-	£35,660	
Events and Marketing	£1,500	£1,500	
Community Rail Network Awards	£1,000	£1,000	
Volunteer Expenses	£200	£200	
Office Admin	£953	£650	
Five Acre Wood	£250	£250	
Paddock Wood and Queenborough	£65	£65	
Support for station adopters	£750	£750	
Platforms for Change	£100	£100	
Total Expenditure	£116,960	£152,317	- £35,357
Planned deferral into 2024/25	£36,057	-	

Outcomes of events, projects, and activities

1. Providing a voice for the community

Kent Community Rail Partnership is community led.

The Partnership action planning process seeks projects and activities from members and the wider community.

The Annual Stakeholder meeting provides an opportunity for these projects and activities to be shared.

Quarterly Steering Group and individual line meetings are held to update members and stakeholders on the progress of the action plan and offer further opportunity for community engagement.



KDL January line meeting



"Thank you, Kent CRP. Really helpful and much appreciated that you have shared members' views on Southeastern's timetable, whether there is enough space on local trains and what they would like from train services in future; to inform Medway Council's response to a Southeastern stakeholder survey"

**Darren Taylor, Integrated Transport Team
Medway Council**

Planning Responses

The Partnership responds to planning consultations, e.g. Castledene site at Aylesford, Medway Local Plan, Maidstone Borough Council LCWIP, Network Rail's Tonbridge Station Strategic Study (14 community responses).



Community Rail Network national award shortlisted project Paws on the Platform

This event provided an opportunity for the partially sighted within our community to voice their experience of travelling by rail.

The collaboration with Guide dogs was covered by Kent Radio, Kent on-line, Kent Messenger newspaper and over 15K views on X.

"This event provided a great insight into the challenges faced by some of our customers and it was a useful opportunity to learn more about how Southeastern can improve accessibility for visually impaired passengers."

**Josh Coupe, Media Relations Manager
at Southeastern**

2. Promoting sustainable, healthy and accessible travel

101 people taken on train travel training trips to build their confidence

Train travel training trips provide members of our community with the knowledge, skills and confidence to travel independently. To date 22 surveys have been completed with all respondents saying they found the travel training both fun and interesting. Four respondents were tutors, who took part in travel training with around 38 young people.

All the tutors who responded said they felt more confident taking students out by train, all said they either have taken journeys by train since taking part in the training or are planning to and $\frac{3}{4}$ tutors either have, or would like to, replace a car journey with a train journey. They also all said that the students who took part were now more confident around travel, and half said the students were now more independent around travel. 18 people completed the travel training survey from a participant perspective. 17/18 agreed that they had more information about travelling by train locally and they knew more about the CRP and where to get more information about train travel and the CRP. 17/18 also said they now knew more about sustainable travel options locally and 16/18 said they felt more connected to their local train station. 12/18 showed new ambition for taking a train for a work journey, 8/18 to education or training and 10/18 for leisure purposes.

"Therese is very friendly and approachable and always inclusive as some of our students have both physical and mental health needs."

She carries out the safety talk in detail and adds interesting facts about the area to make it even more engaging"

Tutor

"I had a wonderful day. I love the tour, the cathedral and the people. Vicky and Gary were really nice."

I learned how to navigate if I needed to."

Participant

"Now I have seen what my learners are like with a basic trip I would love to try some other trips with an end destination such as a cafe."

Tutor



Ashford College 18 students



4th Milton Regis Cub Scouts 30 Cubs



Heath Farm School 8 students



Diversity House 14 participants



Grow 19 College 9 students



Bikes On Trains 7 cyclists



Paws on the Platform 14 participants

Over 150 people taken on 'days out by rail' promoting sustainable travel and active travel

We have had ten survey responses to date from led walk attendees. 10/10 respondents feel they know more about the CRP having taking part, 8/10 have more information about travelling locally by train and 7/10 feel more connected to their local train station.

Whilst the led walks are tourism focused, they are also increasing knowledge of community rail, rail travel and are helping people feel some community ownership of their local stations.

"I really enjoyed the walk I did. The guide was informative and very friendly as was the rest of the group. Since joining this trip my local walking group are doing once a month train treks to various locations which are proving very popular"

Led Walk Attendee



Snodland Lakes 12 walkers



Wateringbury Hills 17 walkers



Charing to Harrietsham 35 walkers



Lenham to Hollingbourne 21 walkers



Cuxton 19 walkers



Paddock Wood Oasts 12 walkers



Cycle Rails

We fundraised, and facilitated cycle rails being installed at 6 Kent Downs Line stations after the success of 6 Medway Valley Line station installations resulting in all 31 of Kent CRP stations being accessible to people taking cycles on the train (apart from Wateringbury where installation is not possible). The cycle rails encourage end to end journeys.



Information boards

We organised the funding, design and installation of information boards at Charing, Lenham, Harrietsham and Hollingbourne stations to encourage independent walking between stations

- funded by CRN

I am definitely bringing friends up here it's easier than I thought it would be by train.

Led Walk Attendee from Folkstone referring to the North Downs Way



Pop ups

The Partnership ‘pops up’ at various locations to promote sustainable, healthy and accessible travel – over 1,000 people engaged.



3. Bringing communities together and supporting diversity and inclusion Promoting sustainable, healthy and accessible travel

19 Station Adoption Groups across our 31 stations

Station adopters improve the station environment for station users and improve the travel experience for passengers.

We welcomed Bearsted CAN, Valley Park Secondary School, Lenham Secondary School and EKC Sheppey Secondary School in joining our existing station adoption groups this year.



“There was nowhere for us to meet before this café opened, I now meet so many people and know what’s going on in the village.”

Hollingbourne Resident

Building Project

In August, the Partnerships first ever railway building project, The Signal Box Café at Hollingbourne Station was passed over to the very energetic, capable and committed Community Interest Company (CIC) which was established to manage its on-going success. Over 2,000 volunteer hours are estimated to have been devoted to this project over the last year. This is an excellent example of people working together to provide much needed amenities for their community, helping to reduce loneliness and isolation.



3,627 Volunteer hours

The Partnership works hard to recruit a substantial number of dedicated volunteers from a variety of sources within our communities. The Partnership provides a welcoming and inclusive atmosphere where all are appreciated. Dominic Noades is our much valued 'Volunteer of the Year' for his contributions including social media, weekly volunteering at The Signal Box café, regular pop-up assistance and quarterly notice board updates.



Newsletters in Station Notice Boards

Quarterly newsletters are published to share the impact of our work, engage the community, and promote rail travel. The online circulation list includes nearly 200 non-members, copies are linked within our social media and are displayed in noticeboards at our stations to engage the community as widely as possible.

3 Maidstone station audits to attract CIL or Section 106 funding

To attract greater numbers to travel by rail into and out of Maidstone's 3 stations, audits have been actioned with each of the ward Maidstone Borough Councillors with the intention of accessing funding for station signage and access improvements.



4. Supporting social and economic development

The Partnership supports social and economic development through promotion of sustainable tourism by rail via its social media channels and website. We have highlighted the Great British Rail Sale, Southeastern "Hop on Board" podcasts, the Heart of Kent Walking Festival, attractions in Medway accessible through PlusBus tickets, exploring the Kent Downs National Landscape, Maidstone River Park, Visit Maidstone's Maidstone Trails App and Maidstone Museum. The Partnership also promotes funding opportunities to its communities e.g. Southeastern's Stations in Bloom funding, Customer and Community Improvement Funding, Community Rail Network funding and other sources to enable station enhancements e.g. murals, artwork, music events, gardening and other projects.

43 organisations represented on the Partnership Steering and Line Groups

Working in partnership with a wide range of organisations results in an inclusive atmosphere where a broad range of voices steer the activities of the officers and volunteers enabling social and economic development. See page 11 for full list of represented organisations.

Passenger Numbers on our Lines

JOURNEYS to/from station (Southeastern trains serving specific CRP route ONLY)

Another year of good percentage increases. The drop in passenger numbers for Swale station can be attributed to the Kingsferry Bridge closures and the increase in journeys to/from Paddock Wood station is due to a change in apportionment between different Southeastern lines.

There were 6,234,560 journeys recorded on our lines in 2019 (the highest pre Covid figures). 2024 saw 6,041,415 journeys on our lines which is an encouraging sign especially as many of our lines are used by commuters who often work from home a few days a week post Covid.

CRP	Station	2021	2022	2023	2024	2022 vs 2021	2023 vs 2022	2024 vs 2023
KDL	Ashford (Kent)	227,667	314,933	169,665	181,985	38.3%	(46.1)%	7.3%
KDL	Barming	99,208	156,301	196,082	188,471	57.5%	25.5%	(3.9)%
KDL	Bearsted	133,837	219,809	243,719	264,806	64.2%	10.9%	8.7%
KDL	Borough Green & Wrotham	176,777	268,248	357,363	401,127	51.7%	33.2%	12.2%
KDL	Charing	33,279	57,528	67,963	77,402	72.9%	18.1%	13.9%
KDL	East Malling	34,322	51,379	59,271	70,821	49.7%	15.4%	19.5%
KDL	Harrietsham	38,946	59,855	70,314	78,112	53.7%	17.5%	11.1%
KDL	Hollingbourne	29,909	38,687	47,411	53,812	29.3%	22.6%	1.3%
KDL	Kemsing	7,215	8,566	13,732	13,911	18.7%	60.3%	60.3%
KDL	Lenham	35,909	56,241	68,201	83,492	56.6%	21.3%	22.4%
KDL	Maidstone East	620,753	971,601	1,170,900	1,351,888	56.5%	20.5%	15.5%
KDL	Otford	99,439	161,136	250,172	360,169	62.0%	55.3%	44.0%
KDL	West Malling	312,309	511,927	667,009	791,257	63.9%	30.3%	18.6%
MVL	Aylesford	53,451	65,460	85,050	109,142	22.5%	29.9%	28.3%
MVL	Beltring	3,409	4,834	6,846	6,714	41.8%	41.6%	(1.9)%
MVL	Cuxton	26,792	37,212	40,677	46,906	38.9%	9.3%	15.3%
MVL	East Farleigh	12,329	19,643	24,899	28,746	59.3%	26.8%	15.5%
MVL	Halling	44,215	48,626	66,769	87,788	10.0%	37.3%	31.5%
MVL	Maidstone Barracks	41,995	59,512	76,895	93,025	41.7%	29.2%	21.0%
MVL	Maidstone West	186,591	254,588	301,161	345,192	36.4%	18.3%	14.6%
MVL	New Hythe	52,109	66,616	79,494	100,869	27.8%	19.3%	26.9%
MVL	Paddock Wood	73,219	91,789	97,773	131,605	25.4%	6.5%	34.6%
MVL	Snodland	115,301	110,740	153,635	179,699	(4.0)%	38.7%	17.0%
MVL	Strood	90,112	115,453	125,610	142,465	28.1%	8.8%	13.4%
MVL	Tonbridge	38,239	50,612	37,104	39,228	32.4%	(26.7)%	5.7%
MVL	Watlingtonbury	27,848	46,377	50,277	55,775	66.5%	8.4%	10.9%
MVL	Yalding	15,532	20,423	24,870	29,785	31.5%	21.8%	19.8%
SRL	Kemsley	82,159	103,714	130,598	146,578	26.2%	25.9%	12.2%
SRL	Queenborough	84,476	101,144	118,831	138,257	19.7%	17.5%	16.3%
SRL	Sheerness-On-Sea	202,987	267,738	289,040	319,411	31.9%	8.0%	10.5%
SRL	Sittingbourne	80,010	88,913	112,554	116,733	11.1%	26.6%	3.7%
SRL	Swale	3,830	6,778	4,853	4,219	77.0%	(28.4)%	(13.1)%

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 station adoption, helping plan an event, creating 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 Steering group and the Kent Downs Line, Gary Outram for the Medway Valley Line and Vicky Wright for the Swale Rail Line – Officer contact details on the back cover.

Funders and Partners

Kent CRP is very grateful to its Funders and Partners; without their continued support we would be unable to bring new life to our lines on Kent's Rail Network.

Funders 2024-25

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



Partners 2024-25

- Network Rail
- British Transport Police
- North Kent Rail User Group
- Explore Maidstone
- Rail Future
- Nu-Venture Coaches
- Explore Kent
- Visit Maidstone
- Kent Downs National Landscape
- Ashford College
- Sheppey College
- Sheppey Secondary
- Lenham Secondary
- Valley Park Secondary
- Bearsted CAN
- 4th Milton Regis Cub Scouts
- Five Acre Wood
- Grow 19
- Heath Farm School
- The Station at Hollingbourne Community Interest Company
- Hollingbourne Parish Council
- Charing Parish Council
- East Malling Parish Council
- Barming Parish Council
- Queenborough Town Council
- Yalding Parish Council
- Cuxton Parish Council
- Halling Parish Council
- Aylesford Parish Council
- Snodland Parish Council
- Paddock Wood Town Council
- Swale Borough Council
- Maidstone Borough Council
- Tonbridge & Malling Borough Council

Contact Us



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Steering Group

Chair: Chris Fribbins

Deputy Chair: Tom Shelley

Kent Downs Line

Chair: Clive English

Deputy Chair: Vacancy

Medway Valley Line

Chair: Paul Harper

Deputy Chair: Vacancy

Swale Rail Line

Chair: Linda Brinklow

Deputy Chair: Jonathan Fryer

Website: www.kentcrp.org



@kentcrp1



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Kent CRP is hosted by Sustrans **SUSTRANS**
JOIN THE MOVEMENT

Sustrans is a registered charity in England and Wales (326550) and Scotland (SC039263) and a company limited by guarantee registered in England (1797726) at 2 Cathedral Square, Bristol, BS1 5DD.

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