

Community Rail Report

2025



Foreword

I'm delighted to welcome you to this celebration of the outstanding work delivered by our Community Rail family over the past 12 months.

This year we've proudly embraced the Railway 200 national campaign, delivering more than 80 events that celebrate 200 years of railway history. From historic walks and commemorative blue plaques to legacy garden projects and vibrant murals, our network has truly been at the forefront of these national celebrations.

Our South Western Railway (SWR) Community Awards continue to grow in strength and visibility, further highlighting the amazing work happening across our community stations. It's been a pleasure to visit many of you throughout the year and see your creativity, energy, and commitment in action. Whether it's greening our stations, telling local stories, or hosting inclusive events that welcome everyone, your passion continues to inspire.

Thank you for your dedication and your hard work as always.



Paula Aldridge
Community Rail Manager



Wish You Were Here! – Railway 200 Postcard Campaign

The **Blackmore Vale Line** and **Devon & Cornwall Rail Partnership** launched an exciting campaign to mark Railway 200, encouraging people to explore the region by train, bus, bicycle, and on foot. As part of the initiative, limited edition postcards were designed and distributed at over 100 destinations, inviting people to collect them and win Railway 200 prizes. The campaign highlighted heritage-rich locations across the Salisbury to Exeter railway route and along the old Somerset and Dorset line, drawing new visitors to local venues and attractions.

To find out more about **Blackmore Vale and Devon & Cornwall's postcard initiative** scan the QR code or visit:

www.blackmorevaletrains.com/railway-200/postcards/



Postcards from First Class Destinations

COLLECT YOUR FREE POSTCARDS HERE

WIN RAILWAY 200 PRIZES

TAKE THE TRAIN ON THE SALISBURY TO EXETER LINE
WALK OR CYCLE THE NORTH DORSET TRAILWAY AND VISIT STURMINSTER NEWTON, SHILLINGSTONE, STOURPAINE, BLANDFORD AND SPETSURRY AND A SECTION IN STALBRIDGE

SCAN QR CODE FOR MORE DETAILS

Postcards available from participating stations, cafes, pubs, museums, libraries, art galleries, garden centres, information centres and heritage railways from Salisbury to Exeter. And Henstridge and destinations off the North Dorset Trailway

www.blackmorevaletrains.com/railway-200/postcards



Celebrating 200 Railway Heroes with Blue Plaques

Each line officer from the 10 South East Communities CRPs, including the **Richmond and Hounslow** and **Reading to Windsor partnerships**, worked with local history groups, museums, and youth organisations to research historical figures and stories linked to the railway. These ranged from former employees to unsung local heroes. The stories were commemorated with Railway 200-branded blue plaques displayed at stations along the routes. Alongside these plaques, posters showcased modern railway careers to inspire the next generation.



Blooming Successes

The Community Train CRP returned to the Hampton Court Flower Show with a fashion-inspired garden, celebrating 60 years of fashion design at Kingston College. This was supported by us at SWR, as we installed a Railway 200 planter at Hampton Court station marking the 35th anniversary of a festival created by Network SouthEast.

SWR was also proud to sponsor both Wight in Bloom and the RHS Celebration Stations campaign. More than 80 stations from various operators took part, showcasing stunning horticulture and community pride. The celebration culminated in a special event at RHS Wisley.

Derek Beer, a South and South East in Bloom judge, summed up the impact beautifully:

"What a great privilege it has been to meet so many amazing people who take such pride in their stations—stamping them with personality, history, care for the environment, and outstanding horticultural displays. Every station had its own special features and its own story to tell."

The Green Hub Project

The Green Hub Project for Teens is a friendly local charity in Surrey that supports young people dealing with anxiety and other mental health challenges. They help them get outdoors, gardening and doing nature-based crafts, because all the evidence shows that fresh air, green spaces, and connecting with others can really boost mental wellbeing. They have only been running for four years but thrilled to be growing and settling into their new home at Witley Station House. They have even adopted the station to turn it into a welcoming wellbeing space for the local community.



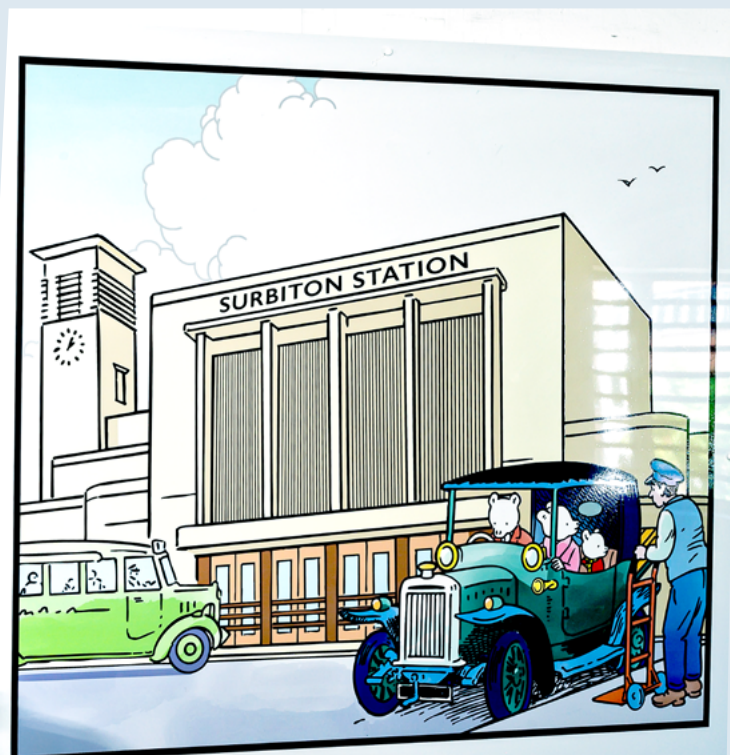
Community Art and Public History

At Dorchester South Station, **Purbeck CRP** collaborated with the local Arts Society, Dorchester town council, and community groups to commission three murals by local artist Maria Burns. These bright, professionally designed panels depict iconic Dorchester landmarks and have transformed the station's main entrance into a welcoming, art-rich space.



Aldershot Station has also undergone a creative transformation. A new underpass mural, designed by UCA graduate Brianna Chartrand, reflects Aldershot's military heritage and cultural diversity. The design features local landmarks, Nepali mandala patterns as a nod to the locally based Gurkha regiments, and poppies in tribute to its military past. It was created in partnership with UCA in Farnham, Rushmoor Borough Council, and local signage company Reade Signs.

In Surbiton, the magic and nostalgia of Rupert the Bear now greets passengers. A mural celebrating Rupert and illustrator Alfred Bestall, who lived in Surbiton for 40 years, was created by current Rupert artist Stuart Trotter. The panels show Rupert and his family embarking on a seaside adventure by train. The project was a collaboration between the Surbiton Art Trail, Kingston Council, and the **Friends of Surbiton Station**.



*Brimming with anticipation
They park outside the railway station.*



Barnes Station saw the unveiling of a new mural, designed and created by local schoolchildren and community groups with funding support from **Hounslow and Richmond CRP**, Network Rail and SWR.

We would like to thank Network Rail for their continued support for all of these art initiatives delivered across the network.

Social value brought to life

With Hilsea Station right on her doorstep, Jane Lindford – one of Community Spotlight's founders – saw an opportunity to transform the station into a focal point for community engagement. Working in partnership with SWR and the **Hills to Harbour Community Rail Partnership**, a dedicated group has now officially adopted the station under the banner Friends of Hilsea Station.

The group's mission is to connect local people and businesses, encourage visitors, and create a welcoming community hub.

Monthly community litter-picking sessions have also been launched, attracting an enthusiastic team of volunteers. Even local businesses have taken part, with one company group giving up an hour on a Saturday morning to help take pride in their neighbourhood. Among the more unusual items collected were a garden rake, a large sheet of plastic, and even a bag of shellfish!

So far, just two litter picks have generated around £10,500 in social value, with 18 volunteers collecting 88 kilograms of waste over the course of two Saturday mornings.





Railway 200
Be part of
the journey

Celebrating with Style

Throughout the year, the network came together to celebrate some interesting historic anniversaries and milestones. We were delighted to have the much loved Inspiration Train make an appearance at Waterloo in July and in Southampton later this year.

We would like to show our appreciation to Mike Lamport, from the Railway 200 steering group for his support and guidance.





A Word from Jenni Jones – Community Rail Network

It's been a year since I joined the weird and wonderful world of Community Rail, and how time has flown! It's been a fabulous rollercoaster of a year with far more ups than downs.

As a member support officer for Community Rail Network, no two days are the same. I support members with funding applications, deliver accreditations on behalf of the Department for Transport (DfT), and get involved with the wide range of projects delivered by Community Rail Partnerships and adopters. Sometimes I'm the expert, but just as often I'm a connector, pointing people towards advice, resources, training or funds to help bring their ideas to life.

Living in Portsmouth, it's been a special privilege to work with SWR's passionate and dynamic team of adopters, community stations and volunteers. Did you know that Community Rail Network has more adopters from SWR than from any other train operator? Over 75 grassroots groups benefit from our training, resources and networking events. In 2024-25 alone we awarded over £50,000 of funding to SWR Community Rail Partnerships and station groups, through SWR and DfT funds. This includes numerous art galleries, murals, planters, markets, music events, wayfinding, bus links, led walks, heritage boards and much more. This work engages and empowers our communities, and helps make our stations feel brighter, safer and more welcoming for everyone.



Community Rail is also a place of warmth, kindness and generosity. Winter Warmers was a collaboration between North Downs and Hills to Harbour CRP's, giving out hundreds of coats and warm clothes to those in need in Guildford. Hundreds of Try the Train experiences have taken place, with special care for those who need a little extra help including refugees, Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) adults, youth groups and carers. Places like Platform 1 café in Shawford are safe spaces for vulnerable people, while community pantries are flourishing in Bitterne and Petersfield. Events at stations put the railway at the heart of the community, bringing people together in a place where everyone belongs and everyone is welcome.

Thank you to everyone in at SWR for the warm welcome to the community rail family. It's my absolute pleasure to support you with everything you do to bring people together and help them to get the most from their railways.

School Sustainable Travel

Oasis Academy Sholing, in collaboration with Southampton City Council and Modeshift, took part in the Try 2 Train initiative, giving students the chance to gain valuable travel experience. As part of the Active Travel Ambassador (ATA) programme, pupils developed confidence and practical skills to address transport issues in their school community. Supported by a Modeshift Coordinator, school staff and Charlene from **Three Rivers CRP**, they worked on creative campaigns promoting active travel and road safety. The programme included both guided sessions and independent tasks, culminating in a final campaign which the students proudly presented at a travel conference.



Twelve pupils travelled by train to the event, which was a key part of their journey. The experience of using public transport felt exciting and meaningful, especially as they were on their way to share ideas about sustainability. The journey itself gave them a sense of independence and showed how simple and rewarding it can be to make more environmentally friendly travel choices. The students came away inspired and said they would happily recommend train travel for future school trips.

Food, Drink and Local Discovery

The **Hampshire CRP CIC** 'Tasty Tipples and Treats' campaign has brought attention to the many independent food and drink producers and venues accessible via our network. The initiative supported local businesses and encouraged passengers to explore local flavours while discovering new destinations by train.

A leaflet from **Wey Valley, Three Rivers and Hills to Harbour CRPs**, have all been designed to show off the best pubs, cafés, restaurants and walking trails that you can easily get to from nearby train stations. Each leaflet has QR codes that take you to a brand-new interactive map. It's also very easy for businesses to apply to be listed, and because most of it lives online, we can keep updating and adding new spots. They have planned themed editions too—from LGBTQ+ friendly venues to bubble tea hotspots—plus some fun promotion activities to keep the map fresh, relevant and full of ideas for your next outing.

To find out more about **Hampshire CRP CIC's** 'Tasty Tipples and Treats' campaign, scan the QR code or visit:

www.hampshirecommunityrail.co.uk/local-eats-and-drinks/



How to get involved

Community Rail

If you're interested in your local station and rail services, looking to volunteer on a regular or ad hoc basis, or would like to meet some new people, why not join your local Community Rail group? We have 12 Community Rail Partnerships and over 100 adopted stations across our network to choose from.

Station Adopters are groups of volunteers who work with SWR to make the most out of their local station, imagining new and creative ways for these places to better serve their communities and strengthening their role within their surrounds.

Community Rail Partnerships are not-for-profit organisations that promote healthy and sustainable travel along a line of route, bringing communities together with the railways that serve them, as well as supporting social and economic development.

Don't have an adoption group at your station?

Why not start one of your own!

- We work with you to develop your plan
- We provide safety training relevant to your station, so your aspirations can be delivered safely
- We provide funding for your group to join Community Rail Network (the national body for station adopters), which gives you access to more potential funding
- We support your group's work through our own SWR communication channels

To find out more

Email Paula.Aldridge@swrailway.com, scan the QR code, or visit the URL below.



www.southwesternrailway.com/other/about-us/community-and-rail-station-adoption