

APPG: Cycling and Walking Investment Strategy 2 – response from [Community Rail Network](#)

Description and reason for submission: Community rail is a unique and growing movement comprising more than 70 community rail partnerships (CRPs) and 1,000 volunteer groups across Britain that help communities get the most from their railways. It is about engaging local people at grassroots level to promote social inclusion, sustainable and healthy travel, wellbeing, economic development, and tourism. This involves working with train operators, local authorities, and other partners to highlight local needs and opportunities, ensuring communities have a voice in rail and transport development.

One of the four key pillars of the Department for Transport's [Community Rail Development Strategy](#)¹ is promoting sustainable and healthy travel, placing rail at the heart of sustainable journeys. We are increasingly seeing community rail partnerships and groups developing projects to link rail with active travel including walking and cycling and are keen to see further progress in this area.

Questions

Capacity. Do local authorities and other bodies have the capacity and skills needed to spend the funding allocations required to meet the Government's targets (or any new ones)? If not, how can this capacity be boosted, and how quickly can CWIS spending be ramped up? What should be the role of Active Travel England? What resources will it need to fulfil this role?

Community rail partnerships and groups can add resourcing, skills, and knowledge to projects to increase walking and cycling activity, especially through their knowledge of the rail network and common barriers to sustainable travel, including how to connect rail better with walking and cycling routes and facilities. Local authorities and other bodies should seek to include community rail in active travel consultations and projects, and they will have useful insights to offer, and may be able to assist in, or even lead on, the delivery of projects. Their involvement should ensure a more joined up and holistic approach across sustainable transport modes, aligning with recent commitments made in the new [Transport Decarbonisation Plan](#),² and meaning local schemes are doubly valuable, aiding more inclusive, sustainable and healthy access to the rail network as well as a more attractive active travel network. Their position within communities also helps schemes to be genuinely place-based, responding to local needs, and getting local people involved and enthused, helping to maximise take-up and reduce the risk of local backlash.

Many community rail groups are already working to improve connectivity between rail and other modes of transport, with a range of success seen in walking and cycling schemes. Groups have worked to provide improved facilities and infrastructure at and around stations, such as applying for funding for bicycle racks and lockers or overseeing projects to improve signage or paths connecting stations to residential areas and town centres. Working with local cycling and walking groups, and bringing them together with train operators and other transport providers and authorities, they have a track record in bringing disparate parties together towards common goals, as well as delivering sustainable travel awareness-raising, outreach and confidence initiatives.

Many of our members are involved in projects designed to improve walking and cycling routes to and from stations, as they are aware that increasing access by foot and by bike is key to people being

¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/community-rail-development-strategy/connecting-communities-with-the-railways-the-community-rail-development-strategy>

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https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1002285/decarbonising-transport-a-better-greener-britain.pdf

encouraged to make longer, and more regular, multi-modal journeys involving active travel and rail. We would advocate that both modes be given equal attention and emphasis, and suggest this in '[Connected Stations](#)',³ our guide to community-led station travel planning. We state that when seeking to improve walking and cycling environments, e.g. the 'first and last mile' to and from stations, there are shared aims and characteristics that can be applied across all projects. For example, how safe, easy, direct, and attractive are walking/cycling routes? Are they well-maintained, well-lit, and traffic free? Are the routes obvious, with directions and other relevant information, e.g. transport connections and timetables, clearly signposted? If the routes are accessing stations, is the area in and around that station welcoming and well-designed for people arriving on foot or by bike, and are their needs prioritised over vehicle users?

Some community rail partnerships have also worked with local authority partners on wider plans around walking and cycling, such as Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plans (LCWIPs), to improve active travel connections with rail. [We have encouraged partnerships to work with their local authority to offer their support and expertise in this area.](#) For example, [Community Rail Cumbria worked with Cumbria County Council](#) to help draft Local Cycle & Walking Infrastructure Plans (LCWIPs) for the six key service centres across the county. They advised on requirements for cycling and walking routes to/from the relevant railway stations, worked with the authority's active travel team to support healthy lifestyles, and looked at using station volunteers as walking guides. The partnership was also involved in joint messaging on new initiatives and support for strategic planning to link walking and cycling with rail, such as improved signage and public information.

Community rail partnerships and groups are rooted in the communities they serve and well-placed to identify opportunities for active travel projects that integrate well with rail and wider public/community transport links, but they might not be obvious local partners. We therefore encourage the new strategy to name them as prospective partners in any walking and cycling schemes.

Behaviour change. The pandemic has shown how flexible people's travel behaviour is in certain circumstances. What combination of schemes and policies will provide the basis for a substantial and lasting shift towards active travel?

The government has stated its aim for public transport and active travel to become the 'natural first choice for our daily activities'⁴ To achieve this, new schemes and policies will need to overcome embedded behaviours, especially private car use. There appears little doubt that the impacts of COVID-19 will change travel patterns for the foreseeable future, and some positives have come from this, including a marked rise in regular walking and cycling. There is a need to seize on the positive elements of travel behaviour change caused by the pandemic, and the glimpses we have all been given of quieter, less polluted communities with less traffic.

In our recent report on [encouraging and enabling modal shift](#),⁵ we looked at research insights into behavioural change in this area, and would suggest that policies/projects should look to:

- Combine 'normalising' communications with practical improvements – encouraging people to monitor their transport behaviours against social norms has proved effective in sustaining

³ <https://communityrail.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/ACoRP-STP-toolkit-final-version.pdf>

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https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/932122/decarbonising-transport-setting-the-challenge.pdf

⁵ <https://communityrail.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/Modal-shift-report-FINAL-FOR-WEB.pdf>

active and public transport use. This resonates with wide-ranging studies indicating that social norms are important in guiding choices and habits. It suggests that normalising sustainable travel and the use of public transport and active travel as a natural way to get around is key. Providing and communicating stories of successful instances of modal shift can also resonate with people and help to encourage and embed long-term change. Practicalities are crucial too, and we would suggest that active travel options could be most effective when well-integrated with other modes, made highly visible and accessible to potential users, and understood by local people. Research has shown that the most successful interventions were those that focused on short and simple journeys and allowed users to try out the sustainable options first, e.g. supported cycling projects;

- Recruiting people socially – Social practice research argues that people cannot be ‘persuaded’ to adopt different behaviours, but need to be ‘recruited’ within their social contexts. This suggests that communications and practical improvements should be combined with interactive engagement that assimilates sustainable travel behaviour, such as walking and cycling, with local needs, lifestyles, and identities. COVID-19 has illustrated how behaviours can change quickly, but for these to become embedded, it requires a ‘social mandate’,⁶ so changes become accepted and habitual in the longer-term;
- Place-based approaches – One of the key themes in research around sustainable behaviour is considering local contexts, putting local needs at the heart of any project or development, and involving communities in the process of change. This involvement must be meaningful and sustained if interventions are to have long-term impact. The DfT’s Transport Decarbonisation Plan has as one of its priorities ‘Place-based solutions to emissions reduction’, recognising that, whilst decarbonisation of transport has to happen everywhere, it will be enacted in places. Place-based approaches are seen to have the potential to engage communities and businesses in building the vision of the neighbourhoods, towns, cities, and villages they want to live in, including transport networks. This will be crucial in attempting to achieve the transitions needed to move away from strongly embedded behaviour, such as car use;
- Listening, empowering, and enabling – Research across disciplines points to localised, community-driven activity as being important, if not vital, to achieving action on the climate emergency and sustainable behaviours. Localised approaches and interactive engagement can support people to make change together, and many studies have proposed that community empowerment naturally produces more sustainable forms of development. Engagement can build a sense of identity and belonging around transport modes other than cars, e.g. walking and cycling, promoting them in ways that are engaging, relatable and empowering, connected to local realities and identities.

Community rail aligns extremely well with all of the points above, and its ongoing success over 25 years – and continued growth and development - shows how a grassroots approach can help to stimulate a sense of local ownership and momentum around the process of change that cannot be created from the top-down, so there is no need to try to ‘persuade’ people to change their behaviours. It becomes instead a case of community members making things better for themselves

⁶ <https://researchportal.bath.ac.uk/en/publications/building-a-social-mandate-for-climate-action-lessons-from-covid-1>

and their future collectively, with sustainable transport behaviours and people's sense of local pride, identity and aspiration becoming inextricably linked. Evidence, such as the examples highlighted in our '[Value of community rail](#)' report,⁷ shows that community rail has been effective in bolstering passenger numbers on local railways, and widening access to rail among different groups, benefiting sustainability and social inclusion. We therefore suggest that community rail (along with grassroots networks brought together by third sector partners that we work with through the Sustainable Transport Alliance, such as community transport providers, shared mobility schemes, and local Living Streets groups) has many valuable lessons and insights to share with projects looking at active travel specifically or sustainable travel as a whole, which the strategy could beneficially recognise.

Walking as much as cycling. The differences between the two modes are significant and cycling has been shown easier to “cater to” than walking. How can CWIS 2 exploit the shared characteristics of walking and cycling whilst at the same time ensuring that both modes receive appropriate attention and emphasis?

We strongly encourage a holistic approach to accelerating progress on sustainable, healthy, and inclusive travel across modes, at local, regional, and national levels. It is very welcome that the DfT has published a cross-modal Transport Decarbonisation Plan, and we hope this will galvanise a less siloed approach across the transport sector, but there is without doubt much work to do to achieve the greener, healthier, and more equitable transport system we need, to safeguard our climate and unlock manifold benefits for communities. Our members often testify to the complexities and barriers surrounding pulling together partners at a local level across modes, especially across rail and bus, but also sometimes to do with (lack of) resourcing among local authorities, and a sense sometimes that these modes are competing rather than working together. There is also the ongoing, significant issue of 'car is king' mentality, fears around offending or disadvantaging 'the motorist', or simply an ongoing assumption that people will continue to drive, especially in rural areas. The Transport Decarbonisation Plan commits to accelerating modal shift and making public transport and active travel the natural first choice, but of course these commitments need to be followed with strong leadership and rapid action, particularly to reinforce the sustainable transport hierarchy, empower and enable localised action, and steer away from misapprehensions that electric cars will save the day. It is clear too that cross-departmental working is needed, especially given the links with local planning and housing, to ensure new developments are not locked into car dependency, and that regeneration investment supports a shift away from private car use.

We very much welcome the recognition in this consultation that active travel improvements should consider walking as much as cycling. Community rail experience attests to the great importance of walking for accessing public transport – the first and last mile of longer journeys – as well as short local journeys, and this important aspect is often overlooked. Walking is of course the most accessible, cheapest, and lowest carbon way to get around – not to mention the very well evidenced health and wellbeing benefits – yet people's ability to walk is absolutely not a given. In rural areas especially, a lack of safe/suitable/accessible paths and pavements, for pedestrians and cyclists, is very common, even on routes linking stations to major local conurbations, and even in more urban areas there is often lots of scope for improvement around stations themselves, such as better/safer/faster changing crossings, cycle slipways, and forecourts designed for people not cars. Improvements like this – as our members are often involved in – can hugely increase the catchment

⁷ <https://communityrail.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/ACoRP-Value-of-Community-Rail-2019-final-for-web-141019.pdf>

area of stations and widen access to rail (and the same applies to other modes of course) for those who previously found it out of reach, often for modest costs.

Our guidance for community rail partnerships and groups on station travel planning and integrated transport urges that local communities are engaged inclusively (going beyond consultation) to consider the needs of different groups, including existing pedestrians, cyclists, and rail passengers, but also considering those who might be able to start using these modes if barriers are removed. We therefore suggest that this approach generally is taken to active travel development, while acknowledging that initiatives often can benefit those using different (sustainable) modes and encourage more to take them up. See pages 8-12 and 18-23 of our [Connected Stations](#) toolkit.

Decarbonising transport. Given the extraordinary contribution active travel can make to tackling the climate emergency, how should CWIS 2 be positioned within transport and wider climate policy? More specifically, how should CWIS 2 fit with the anticipated transport decarbonisation plan?

Accelerating modal shift to public and active transport is one of the main strategic priorities of the Transport Decarbonisation Plan, with an associated focus on encouraging increased levels of walking and cycling, particularly for shorter journeys. One of the positive effects of the COVID-19 pandemic has been the widespread recognition that our communities have benefitted from less traffic, positioning alternatives to driving as aspirational. This change in attitude must be grasped if we are to preserve and extend rises in walking and cycling, and the major health and wellbeing benefits this offers.

While we welcome the prioritising of active travel for shorter journeys, if the level of transport decarbonisation needed to avert the climate emergency is to be achieved, walking and cycling also need to be integrated with public transport and shared/community transport, to encompass longer journeys and, in turn, decrease private car use. Most transport carbon comes from car journeys of ten miles plus, and the biggest share from leisure, so the new strategy must emphasise how cycling and walking can be enhanced as realistic elements of longer journeys and/or leisure travel, e.g. the first last mile of trips, joining with modes such as rail or bus/coach.

Community rail experience shows how by enhancing and better joining up rail, buses, walking and cycling we can unlock greater social, environmental, and economic value from our transport network, enabling more people to travel who would otherwise have limited mobility, and enabling those journeys to be made by entirely sustainable, healthy, socially responsible means. It is important to note that these benefits cannot be realised through a focus on electric cars, which are neither inclusive, nor sustainable, in relation to the embodied carbon and intensive use of resources, and which fail to address the congestion, road danger and particulate pollution problems that communities everywhere suffer. Therefore, we hope that the new Transport Decarbonisation Plan will aid a clearer focus on walking and cycling, along with rail, bus, and other forms of public/shared/community transport, ensuring that these modes are integrated and prioritised over the private car. Strong messaging and leadership, from national government and at regional and local level, reinforcing the great benefits of public transport and active travel combined, for individuals, health and wellbeing, our communities, and climate, will be hugely helpful in securing sure progress.