

# Community Rail Report

June 2023

AVANTI  
WEST COAST



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# 01 Introduction

Welcome to the Avanti West Coast Community Rail Report for the year 2022-2023.

Throughout this report, we will showcase the efforts of our dedicated and passionate Community Rail Partnerships who work tirelessly to enhance the experiences of both our communities and customers in the areas we serve. By leading and participating in community-driven projects, supporting local causes, and fostering meaningful connections they strive to be a catalyst for positive change, leaving a lasting impact on the communities we touch.

Through partnerships with schools, we have invested in the education and development of young minds, empowering them to embrace the world of rail and transportation. By offering Feel Good Field Trips we aim to inspire the next generation of rail professionals and welcome new customers ensuring the long-term sustainability and success of the industry.

As you read this report, we hope you will gain insight into the incredible work being done across the West Coast Mainline which our funding has enabled partners to deliver throughout the year. Whilst we are proud of the achievements highlighted, we also recognise that there is always room for improvement and growth. By working hand in hand with our communities and stakeholders, we are confident that together we can build a future where we make a difference today to look after tomorrow.



A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Andy Mellors". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

**Andy Mellors**  
Managing Director, Avanti West Coast

## 02 Feedback from our CRPs



Partneriaeth Rheilffordd  
Cymunedol Dyffryn Conwy ac  
Arfordir Gogledd Orllewin Cymru

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Conwy Valley and North West  
Wales Coast Community Rail  
Partnership

The Conwy Valley and North West Wales Coast CRP values the financial and non-financial support given from Avanti West Coast. With their funding, in collaboration with Avanti the Conwy Valley and North Wales line engaged with children from across the network on World Book Day

Our project took place in the Conwy Valley and Northwest Wales Coastline, where we aimed to provide various themed entertainment activities at stations and libraries. We identified four specific locations for these activities: Llandudno, Llanrwst, Bangor train station, and the Culture Conwy centre. Our goal was to bring communities together, support diversity and inclusion, and promote social development while also supporting economic growth through collaborations with local authors and entertainers.

To achieve our objectives, we organised a series of engaging activities at each location. In Llandudno, we invited a local children's book author and the characters from her book, "Trixielle," to conduct a reading session of her recently published book written during the lockdown. In Llanrwst, we arranged for a Welsh storyteller to captivate the audience at the local library. At Bangor train station, a magician entertained the children with an exciting magic show. Finally, the Culture Conwy centre hosted a thrilling pirate-themed performance.

Our project yielded significant positive outcomes. We successfully engaged with over 450 children across the four locations over the course of two days, providing them with memorable experiences. By inviting local schools close to the stations, we fostered community participation and involvement. Additionally, we supported diversity and inclusion by incorporating local authors and entertainers into the project, thereby encouraging representation and showcasing talent within the community.



Furthermore, our initiative contributed to social development by creating opportunities for children to explore different forms of entertainment and storytelling. We aimed to cultivate a love for reading and creativity among the young participants. Economically, our collaboration with local authors and entertainers supported their professional growth and stimulated the local economy.

To ensure the project's success, we partnered with Conwy Libraries and Conwy Family Information Services, with the latter providing each child in Conwy County locations with a complimentary activity pack containing items such as colouring pencils. By leveraging these partnerships, we maximised the impact of our project, leaving a lasting impression on the children and communities involved.



We haven't had any projects that solely link directly with Avanti West Coast and Watford Junction station this last year. However, as part of the CRP activities in general, the core funding provided by Avanti West Coast has been used as part of the following activities:

Maintenance contract with The Bee Friendly Trust for one year to maintain the Bee Friendly Garden at Watford Junction

A community engagement event in December 2022 (Santa train) that also saw the launch of a new timetable leaflet (Abbey Line Days and Nights out) which promoted not just the new late train service, but things to do from Watford Junction station too.

Engaging the services of Smart promotions to distribute new timetable leaflets in the catchment area of the Abbey line and for Watford Junction station includes:

- ASDA Hyperstore
- Holiday Inn, Watford Junction
- Holiday Inn, Watford Junction B
- Mirror Colour Print
- Watford Hospital
- Watford North Library
- Watford Town Hall
- Pump House Theatre



Community Rail Lancashire works with four Lancashire CRPs three of which directly link in with Avanti West Coast services at Preston and Wigan North Western. These are the South Fylde Line CRP (Preston to Blackpool South); the East Lancashire CRP (Preston to Colne/Burnley Manchester Rd and Manchester Victoria) and the West of Lancashire CRP (Preston to Ormskirk and Wigan to Southport). The fourth is the Clitheroe Line CRP which operates between Clitheroe and Manchester Victoria via Blackburn.

CRL is delighted to have received core funding from Avanti West Coast and an additional grant that enabled CRL to recruit Dave Savage to lead the Feel Good Field Trips campaign. The core funding enables CRL and its CRPs to deliver a wide range of community and educational projects. Many of these have been highlighted in our Annual Report which can be viewed at

<https://communityraillancashire.co.uk/news/crl-annual-report-2022/>

Below we outline the main projects that CRL and its CRPs have been directly working with Avanti West Coast on.

#### **Preston Station: Improvements to Platform 3c and 4c.**

The platform 3c/4c at Preston Station is undergoing significant improvements. However, the project faced delays in 2022 due to additional design requirements requested by Avanti West Coast's assets and property teams. To address these requirements, design consultants Seed Architects have been commissioned to provide the necessary design information for industry approvals. The December 2022 timetable change has led to an increased utilisation of platform 3c/4c, as it now serves as the primary departure point for local services to Colne and Ormskirk.

To ensure the successful implementation of the platform improvements, Seed Architects have been entrusted with providing the required design information to obtain industry approvals. Their expertise will play a crucial role in ensuring compliance with standards and regulations. By addressing the additional design requirements, the project will move forward, enabling the next phase of installation to begin. Contractors are anticipated to commence the works by the end of Summer 2023.

The delay in delivering the platform improvements has inconvenienced passengers and stakeholders involved. However, the anticipated completion of the works will have a positive impact on a larger number of passengers.



With the bulk of local services to Colne and Ormskirk now departing from platform 3c/4c, the improved facilities, particularly the additional seating, will be warmly welcomed. The enhancements will address the needs of the growing passenger demand, offering greater comfort and convenience at Preston Station. Passengers will benefit from a more pleasant and accommodating environment, enhancing their overall experience during their journeys.

### **Feel Good Field Trips**

Feel Good Field Trips is a program that offers students aged 4-18 the opportunity to embark on educational, enjoyable, and culturally diverse journeys along the West Coast Main Line. The goal is to facilitate these trips for up to 5000 pupils from schools with a high number of pupil premium during the 2023/4 period. The initiative was launched in March 2022 but had to wait until the introduction of the new timetable in December 2022 due to the reduced services provided by Avanti.

Since the beginning of the year until May 10th, a total of 33 Feel Good Field Trips have been organised, taking approximately 850 students to various destinations along the West Coast Main Line. The trips cater to students across different age ranges, from Year 1 to Year 12, providing many of them with their first experience of train travel. With a budget of around £25 per pupil, the program aims to plan high-end field trips that create memorable experiences for young people. Thanks to Avanti's generous budget for the project, the program is also able to cover the cost of lunches for the participating groups, most of whom are eligible for free school meals.

The support received from the booking team at Avanti has been invaluable to the success of the Feel Good Field Trips program. The process of reserving seats on the desired trains and obtaining tickets and seat reservations for schools has been seamless. Avanti staff at stations and on the trains have played a fantastic role, engaging with the student groups, sharing insights about their roles, and even allowing some pupils to make announcements over the tannoy. This support and interaction have enhanced the overall experience and made the trips even more memorable for the students.

Overall, the Feel Good Field Trips program has had a positive impact by providing hands-on learning opportunities, cultural exploration, and train travel experiences to a significant number of students. Through the collaboration with Avanti and the support received, the program has been able to fulfil its objective of creating enjoyable and educational journeys for young people along the West Coast Main Line.



## **Dick, Kerr Ladies**

### **'Granny' Showcase at Preston North End in August 2022**

This project originated when a film company approached Avanti West Coast with a request to film on one of their trains for a newly scripted short film called "Granny." The film aimed to showcase the story of Lizzy Ashcroft, a member of the original Preston's Dick Kerr Ladies women's football team, whose grandson had conducted research into his grandmother's history, leading to the creation of this film.

To bring this project to life, a film exhibition was organised at Preston North End in August 2022. This exhibition saw the participation of representatives from all the Lancashire football clubs involved in establishing the league. Transportation for the event was arranged via trains and buses, enabling everyone to come together. Gail Newsham, the esteemed historian of the Dick Kerr Ladies team, provided invaluable assistance throughout the process. Additionally, About Time Dance Company delivered a poignant performance, enhancing the ambiance of the event. Prior to the exhibition, the dance company conducted a workshop for young individuals from Blackburn FC Community Trust, offering them a unique opportunity to delve deeper into the inspiring history of the team.

This project had a significant impact on various levels. Firstly, it brought together individuals and representatives from multiple Lancashire football clubs, fostering a sense of unity and collaboration. The exhibition provided a platform to celebrate and honour the achievements of the Dick Kerr Ladies team, shedding light on their important role in women's football history. The workshop conducted by About Time Dance Company allowed young people to engage with this inspiring narrative, expanding their knowledge and appreciation for the team.

Furthermore, ProjectSearch, a youth group, collaborated with community artist Karen Allerton to create postcards highlighting the accomplishments of the renowned women's football team of 2021. These postcards were shared at the exhibition, serving as informative and commemorative mementos.

Since the showcase, the project has facilitated additional initiatives and engagements. Train trips to the National Football Museum have been organised, involving football clubs from Blackburn, Preston, and Fylde. Talks have been given to various groups, further spreading awareness about the Dick Kerr Ladies team and their significance. Another local showcase took place at the Blackpool Film Festival, amplifying the reach of the project and celebrating the team's legacy. Importantly, these endeavours have led to the establishment of numerous new local relationships, fostering community connections and strengthening the appreciation for the Dick Kerr Ladies women's football team.

## Granny Film

<https://communityraillancashire.co.uk/news/dick-kerr-ladies-remembered/>

## About Time Dance Company DKL performance:

[https://vimeo.com/604141209?embedded=true&source=video\\_title&owner=21575448](https://vimeo.com/604141209?embedded=true&source=video_title&owner=21575448)

## Avanti News Item

<https://newsdesk.avantiwestcoast.co.uk/news/forgotten-womens-football-team-to-be-commemorated-by-community-rail-project>

## Blackpool Festival 2023 features 'Granny'

<https://communityraillancashire.co.uk/news/granny-film-shown-at-blackpool-film-festival/>







The Leeds-Morecambe Community Rail Partnership (LMCRP) continues to develop constructively following the pandemic. Whilst numerous meetings are continuing online, an increasing number are back to being in person, or at least hybrid in format. Pleasingly, we have now got back into the swing of 'live' launch events.

The recovery from the pandemic has gone well for the Bentham Line with passenger numbers approaching, and even exceeding at times, pre Covid figures. Sadly, this has been punctuated by the large number of strike days when no services have operated.

The core funding from Avanti West Coast and other train operators remains vital for the LMCRP to function effectively. The majority of this funding goes towards the salaries of our most valuable resource, our two part-time Community Rail Officers, who are both employed for 3 days per week. Without them, it would be impossible to undertake our wide range of activities. The remaining funding goes towards the many community-orientated projects undertaken by the officers.

The officers have been involved in an increasing number of educational activities with both the schools and colleges along the route and Year-in-Industry university students from across the country who join us each year to carry out community projects. Something which we would be pleased to undertake with any Avanti West Coast apprentices, students and graduates. Last year's students created an award-winning 'Access for All - to the Bentham Line' project which included innovative 360-degree interactive videos of the route's stations. This year's group of students are in the process of creating a 'Destination Wellbeing' project, founded on their concerns for fellow students who felt the pandemic and subsequent times challenging.

Recent rail safety, rail history and art educational projects have been undertaken with schools in Heysham and Bentham. Schools in Gargrave, Bentham and Skipton are next on our educational agenda.

Summer 2022, saw the partnership engage with the 'Fifty Things to do before you are Five' organisation, based in Bradford. The young people and their parents enjoyed traditional activities on visits to Lancaster and Morecambe. The partnership was also able to support groups of refugees from Bradford and Lancaster to enjoy a trip along the line to walk in the Yorkshire Dales and visit the seaside.

The panels for the 'Pioneer Line Project' are now completed and ready for installation. They tell the story of the pioneering catenary electric route linking Lancaster Castle, Lancaster Green Ayre, Scale Hall, Morecambe Promenade and Heysham Harbour stations. It was established by the Midland Railway in 1908 and used as a test bed, in the 1950s for apparatus which would eventually play its part in the electrification of the West Coast Main Line. There are panels for the present Lancaster, Morecambe and Heysham stations, whilst those for Green Ayre and Scale Hall will be sited on the former railway route which is now part of national walking and cycling routes. The Lancaster station panel is to be installed in the newly refurbished waiting room on platforms 4&5, adjacent to where the unique EMUs departed. Official launch, at Castle station following the installations.

In 2021/22 the LMCRP commissioned a Bentham Line Development Study, a first for a Community Rail, to look at the next twenty years for the route and build on the past two decades of good growth. Avanti participated in the study and responded positively to its findings as a stakeholder. The findings of the Study have now been published and circulated widely, as an Executive Summary and the Full Strategy. At the western end of our route, the study proposes a business case be developed for improvements to the services between Lancaster and Morecambe, looks at the roles of Lancaster and Morecambe stations in the major Eden North project. In January 2023, £50 million 'Levelling Up' funding was awarded to the project and the rail business case is about to get underway.

The partnership has established a positive working relationship with the Isle of Man Steam Packet Company, who's shipping services connect at Heysham Port with our line. There is a new vessel, 'Manxman' arriving in July and the partnership took the opportunity to engage with St. Peter's Cod E Primary School in Heysham to celebrate the event with artwork on a Rail and Sail theme.

The LMCRP remains keen to establish community, multi-use space at Lancaster station, where educational and art-based activities can take place, possibly in the rooms on the no-longer-used platform 6, as an integral part of the regeneration of the station. We undertook a tour of these unused spaces with Matthew Worman and now await to hear of possible developments.

The British Transport Police Officers at Lancaster have participated in our dementia awareness sessions this year, as part of our award-winning Dementia and Community Rail project. which was highlighted in the Williams-Shapps Review of Rail. The partnership remains hopeful that Avanti staff would also like to participate in these sessions, as we continue bring groups of people living with dementia and their carers to the seaside at Morecambe.





Avanti's core funding and complimentary travel has contributed to Tyne Valley Community Rail Partnership being able to work with communities along the Tyne Valley route to promote rail, provide a voice for our communities and develop inclusion and diversity.

Some of TVCRP's activity underpinned by the core funding has included:

This year we have increased our efforts to engage with schools and saw our Officer and our Education Volunteer spend a day delivering safety lessons to all pupils in Great Corby Primary School, Cumbria. Year 5/6 at Warwick Bridge Primary, Cumbria, had a packed day looking at rail safety and exploring their topic 'What did the railways do for Britain?' We also began to engage with staff at William Howard High School in Brampton, which is delivering results in 2023-2024. We have had similar engagement at the east end of the route. With the primary schools, we have used Arlo's Adventures, there and back book and the Backtrack lesson plan.

In September 2022, we were delighted to premier our film *It started with a train ride...* Working with Wallsend Local History Society, Haltwhistle Film Project and Film Able, this film records the memories of those who were evacuated from Wallsend to Haltwhistle and Cumbria in 1940. The film has been very well received regionally and was short listed for a Community Rail Award. The film is available at <https://tvcrp.org.uk/news/515-it-started-with-a-train-ride>

In 2021, one of our directors undertook a piece of work looking at the stations between Newcastle and Carlisle with a view to their accessibility, ambience and general useability (shelters, bike racks etc). In 2022, this study was updated and detailed accessibility maps included for two stations which looked at a passenger's journey from their home across the village to the station. One of these stations being Wetheral. Whilst there are no easy answers, particularly for stations opened 1835-1838, this work has helped to shape our thinking in ways to help make rail travel as accessible as possible.

In January 2023, we were delighted to work with Bishop Line CRP to deliver the Backtrack Competition winners' event at Newcastle College's Rail and Built Environment Academy. This day gave the runners up and national winners from the Rail Academy and UTC in Darlington, the opportunity to work together to find out about careers in rail and was very well received by all who attended. The film of the 2022 winning entries can be viewed at <https://backtrackcompetition.co.uk/>

One of our major projects this year has been Lyric and Line, Roman Routes. Working with a professional singer- songwriter and 3-4 groups of vulnerable men, and refugees and asylum seekers this project aimed to explore the challenges and rewards in taking a group to Hadrian's Wall by public transport. Each group has been given a day out to a site of Roman interest, and then 2 further half days exploring the groups views of the day and writing a song about their experiences. This approach works well, not only for the individuals who feel they gain a greater understanding of using public transport, but also helps to develop relationships with the host organisations involved. We are currently starting a review of this project, as we are aware that there is much learning from Lyric and Line which needs to be recorded.

TVCRP Directors are clear that the Partnership needs to be an effective organisation, and that governance is key. The Board of Directors have an annual half day training event, issue a Directors Handbook and take up opportunities for continuing professional development. It is in this area that Avanti complimentary travel has been valuable, enabling Officer and Directors, along with other volunteers to attend TOC Stakeholder/Community Rail workshops, visit and learn from other CRPs and of course attend the Community Rail Awards.

As we look to 2023-2024, TVCRP is taking the lease on the Water Tower at Haltwhistle with a plan to open the building as a café and gallery. This is a major project which will support passengers at Haltwhistle and encourage onward travel to and from Carlisle. We look forward to the adjudication of the 2022-2023 Avanti Community Fund.





The funding provided by Avanti West Coast enabled the Community Rail Officers for the Crewe to Manchester and South East Manchester CRPs to be involved in several activities and events to promote travelling by train.

The CRPs have worked with North Staffordshire CRP and Avanti West Coast on 185<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the first train passing through Crewe with the attached logo / sticker being funded and produced by the Crewe – Manchester CRP and a very popular behind the scenes tour of Crewe Train Station taking place as part of the 2022 Heritage Open Days festival. It should also be noted that the logo/sticker were given away at several Community Rail events during 2022.



Specific community rail funding, from Avanti West Coast has been used to progress the Edgeley Approach art project with the funding being used by Art In Community for Recovery (ARC) to hold several art workshops, with a number of groups from different ages ranges, to produce artwork which will be included in the final installation. The funding also enabled ARC to engage and work with the Youth Group based at Walthew House, a Stockport based charity providing emotional and practical support for people living with sight and hearing lose, to produce artwork for this project.



We also received funding for Feel Good Field Trips (FGFT) but the delivery of these experiences were delayed due to the COVID pandemic. However, the Rail Officers have been working with and supporting David Savage and several trips have now taken place with schools visiting Food Sorcery Cookery School, traveling to the venue via Stockport station. In March 2023, the Crewe - Manchester Rail Officer led a FGFT to Food Sorcery with Beechwood Primary School from Crewe.

International Bee Day – In May 2022, Crewe - Manchester CRP attended the World Bee Day event hosted by the Community Champions at Stockport and Manchester Piccadilly stations. The CRP supported with activities and promoted these on social media following the event.



Use of station spaces – the team at Stockport station have allowed complimentary use of the conference room for both our partnerships to hold Steering Group, Management group and Station group meetings. We have also used Stockport station for a promotional event for Community Rail Week in May 2022.

The CRPs have also worked closely with the Stockport Station team to look at future projects such as the Thompson St Bridge mural project with the CWT alongside complimentary station projects, and the distribution of Arlo's Adventures books to schools visiting the station.



South East Lancashire Community Rail Partnership is thankful to have been supported by Avanti West Coast over the past 12 months. We are grateful to have received essential annual core funding that contributes to the employment of a full-time officer to undertake both ongoing daily tasks and specific project management for the CRP.

In addition to this we are pleased to have also recently completed a number of large-scale projects previously funded by Avanti West Coast, including the rewilding and installation of beehives in a green space close to Wigan North Western station, and a self-guided walking trail from Wigan to Bolton. We are also hoping to receive confirmation of a bid submitted before the end of the last financial year to develop a second phase of our rewilding and beehives project.

As well as financial support, South East Lancashire Community Rail Partnership also values the relationships that have been built and maintained between Avanti West Coast staff and the CRP, in particular with our CRP Officer. Though we note that attendance and updates at our committee meetings have been absent due to limited capacity, their ongoing support is always fully acknowledged.

In recent years Avanti West Coast have also been generous in offering other forms of support including complimentary travel passes for service users of community groups who we have close links with, as well as members of the CRP. We value this ability to approach and ask for assistance in a variety of ways and are pleased to continue into this financial year with Avanti West Coast as a key stakeholder for our CRP.





The support we receive from Avanti West Coast is truly invaluable for the 3Counties Connected Partnership. Avanti's assistance comes in the form of advice, guidance, and crucial funding, which have significantly contributed to the success of our partnership. Despite the relatively short time the Partnership has been operational, we have consistently experienced Avanti's staff members as exceptionally helpful and responsive whenever we seek guidance on accessing relevant information. Their openness and promptness in assisting us have proven instrumental in navigating our partnership's journey.

The regular updates provided by the Avanti team regarding service and scheduling are greatly appreciated by our partnership. These updates enable us to ensure the smooth coordination of our partnership activities. By keeping us informed about service changes and schedules, Avanti empowers us to plan our initiatives effectively, thereby maximising our impact on the communities we serve.

In summary, the support provided by Avanti has proven invaluable to the 3Counties Connected Partnership. From offering advice and guidance to providing funding, Avanti has played a crucial role in our partnership's growth and development. The open and prompt assistance we receive, along with the regular updates on service and scheduling, have greatly facilitated our partnership's activities.

We are deeply grateful for Avanti's ongoing commitment and collaboration, which significantly contribute to the sustainability and success of the 3Counties Connected Partnership.



The financial funding generously provided by Avanti West Coast has been instrumental in the development of our exceptional STEM studio. This invaluable resource not only fills us with anticipation but also presents a remarkable opportunity to collaborate with schools along the railway line, as well as those from more distant areas. The studio serves as a gateway, inviting students into the countryside and offering them an immersive learning experience in various aspects of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM).

Avanti West Coast's support plays a pivotal role in amplifying our impact on local communities. By enabling us to establish and operate the STEM studio, their funding bolsters our ability to deliver valuable educational opportunities to students. The studio serves as a dynamic platform where young minds can engage with the wonders of STEM and explore its real-world applications, fostering curiosity and inspiring future generations.

Through this support, we aim to enhance the social value we provide to our communities. By empowering students to actively participate in STEM education and connecting them with the natural beauty of the countryside, we contribute to their holistic development and cultivate an appreciation for the interconnectedness of science, technology, and the environment. Avanti West Coast's financial backing allows us to extend our reach, providing enriching experiences to a wider range of schools and students.

In summary, the financial funding from Avanti West Coast has been transformative for our organisation. The creation of our remarkable STEM studio stands as a testament to the positive impact made possible through this support. By working closely with schools along the railway line and beyond, we look forward to utilising this resource to its full potential, offering engaging and immersive experiences that unlock the wonders of STEM education. Avanti West Coast's ongoing support not only enables us to create meaningful connections with our local communities but also enhances our capacity to deliver social value and promote a lifelong passion for learning among young learners.



**April** was a flurry of marketing activity, to promote our amazing lines and destinations in the Peak District as great places for days out by rail. 3000 Line guide leaflets were printed for each of our 3 lines and distributed across the area, in local communities, at TiCs and into Manchester. Poster versions were printed and installed at our stations as we prepared for the Community Rail Week in May.



**May:** During Community Rail Week we attended events at Stockport, Sheffield and Manchester Piccadilly stations to hand out leaflets, chat to passers-by and show off our banners. We also teamed up with the Peak District National Park (PDNP) to promote integrated travel into the national park with the Hope Valley Explorer bus which takes passengers from stations to places the train can't reach.





Travel along the Buxton line and you will spot a series of artworks, all by Stockport based artist Eamonn Murphy. Eamonn has created graphics of local highlights for each station. They can be seen in Stockport and along the line as far as Chapel-en-le-Frith currently. Dove Holes, Buxton, Furness Vale and New Mills Newtown soon to come on board.



**August:** We joined Peak District National Park rangers to support their Green Social Prescribing project and welcomed a group from SOAR in Sheffield out to Edale. SOAR is a charity that provides services to improve people's health, well-being and employability. Some of the people who joined us had never visited the National Park, despite having lived in Sheffield all their lives. With support from Northern for travel, they walked and spent some time practising mindfulness in nature.



*Wellbeing walk in Edale*

**October:** We led a guided walk for a group from Walthew House in Stockport. The visually impaired walking group were keen to explore the Peak District. With support from Northern for their travel, we met them at New Mills Newtown station and enjoyed a walk together along the Peak Forest Canal.



*Walthew House walking group enjoying the Peak Forest canal*

We also led a 'Friends Day Out' for our volunteers, meeting at Disley station and walking along the Peak Forest canal to the Transhipment Warehouse at Whaley Bridge. It was a great opportunity to acknowledge all their hard work as well as a good time to share ideas and experiences.





*Friends of stations meet and explore other stations*

**November:** We welcomed the first of two groups of people arriving from Sheffield for a day out in Edale. Cathrine Ashworth, from the South Yorkshire Mayoral Combined Authority (SYMCA) worked with the Sheffield Open Kitchen Social Club to organise the day. The Sheffield Open Kitchen Social Club was founded in 2014 and continues to provide food, peer support, and a place to meet for destitute asylum seekers, refugees, migrants and anyone in food or social poverty. Around 50 people travelled by train, joined guided walks, enjoyed the warmth of the village hall and tucked into delicious food brought by the organisers. Northern Trains provided the transport.



**December:** We started working with Megan Carroll who we have contracted to work two days per week for us as a freelance marketing co-ordinator, bringing our marketing up to date, raising awareness of the CRP profile and doing snazzy things with social media that we don't know how to do! Very exciting! We now have Facebook, twitter, Instagram and TikTok, and are planning a drone footage film as well as commissioning photography.

**2023** Following the Christmas and New Year break, we laid the ground for our 2023 aspirations. Plans are in place to create a long-distance walk route from Manchester Piccadilly to Sheffield station- we had nearly 50 name suggestions from our friends and stakeholders and we're working with local councils, the Canal and River Trust and our friends in the SE Manchester CRP to make this happen.

We are also working on our Buzzing Stations project produce a 'Bumblebee Walks from Stations' leaflet, which many stations groups have contributed to.



The following section outlines key operational highlights for the Heart of Wales CRP. Focusing on various initiatives and endeavours carried out within the specified time frame.

### **Social Media Engagement for Service Updates**

During the reporting period, we relied extensively on social media platforms to effectively communicate service delays and cancellations to passengers. This approach proved crucial as the organisation faced significant challenges due to high staff sickness rates and a severe lack of rolling stock. By utilising social media, we aimed to keep passengers informed and engaged despite the adverse circumstances.

### **Promoting the Heart of Wales Walking Trail**

A noteworthy ongoing project undertaken by us was the promotion of the Heart of Wales walking trail. This endeavour involved the installation of route signage along the trail and the establishment of an interpretation board at Craven Arms, the northern endpoint of the route. By implementing these measures, we aimed to enhance the accessibility and visibility of the walking trail, thereby encouraging its use and enjoyment by the public.

### **Welfare Trips for Selected Groups**

We actively organised, promoted, and executed welfare trips along the Heart of Wales Line for specific groups during the reporting period. These groups included immigrants being resettled and individuals with restricted mobility. The objective of these welfare trips was to provide support and facilitate opportunities for these groups to access and explore the region served by the Heart of Wales Line.

### **Collaboration with Shrewsbury Prison and MIND**

Notably, we engaged in collaborative efforts with Shrewsbury Prison and MIND (a mental health charity) to organise welfare trips.

Although these trips had not yet been delivered by the end of the reporting period, we aimed to leverage these partnerships to provide meaningful experiences and support to individuals associated with these organisations.

In summary, we control of the Heart of Wales Line in April and has since undertaken various initiatives and partnerships to enhance operations and passenger experiences. Moving forward, we acknowledge the need for more comprehensive reporting, ensuring that stakeholders receive detailed information regarding ongoing activities and achievements.



Avanti West Coast's unwavering support has been instrumental in enabling the North Cheshire Community Rail Partnership (CRP) to successfully implement a diverse range of projects that directly benefit the local communities along our railway line while promoting the ideals of community rail. The core funding, we have received from Avanti West Coast has played a crucial role in the realisation of these initiatives, specifically in the production of artwork and the subsequent delivery of an engaging art exhibition hosted at Chester Cathedral. Furthermore, this funding has facilitated the creation of cycling maps and promotional leaflets, serving to enhance the accessibility and visibility of sustainable travel options in the region.

The active involvement of Avanti West Coast's Regional Growth Managers in our CRP meetings has been invaluable. Their regular attendance not only contributes to the decision-making process but also provides us with important industry updates and insights. We are fortunate to have their unwavering support, as they display a genuine enthusiasm for our project ideas and consistently offer their assistance whenever needed.

Looking ahead, we have an exciting line-up of projects planned for the current year. The financial backing from Avanti West Coast will undoubtedly play a critical role in ensuring the successful execution of these endeavours. By securing this financial support, we are confident in our ability to deliver these initiatives, thereby further enhancing the positive impact of community rail and fostering closer ties with the local communities we serve.

Avanti West Coast's continuous support has been vital in empowering the North Cheshire CRP to actively engage with and improve the lives of our local communities. The funding received has been utilised strategically to produce captivating artwork, organise engaging exhibitions, and develop essential materials such as cycling maps and promotional leaflets. With the ongoing commitment and financial support from Avanti West Coast, we are poised to accomplish even greater success as we move forward with our planned projects for the year, creating a positive and lasting impact on the communities we serve.





The allocation of funds received from Avanti West Coast has not only enabled the production of essential pocket timetables but has also facilitated various projects aimed at promoting sustainable travel. Among these initiatives, the development of a captivating and informative map depicting the railway line has garnered significant praise from passengers. The artistic representation of attractions along the route, as well as the rich culture and heritage of Wales and its border regions, has generated considerable interest, prompting passengers to express a desire to acquire their own copy of the map.

To maximise visibility and enhance the promotion of rail travel and desirable destinations, the map has been printed on a large banner and prominently displayed at multiple stations along the line. This strategic placement has effectively captured the attention of travellers, further encouraging them to consider the benefits of rail travel and explore the appealing locations showcased.

The funding provided by Avanti West Coast has also allowed us to actively support projects focused on encouraging a modal shift towards more sustainable modes of transportation. One notable initiative, 'Give the Train a Try,' exemplified this commitment by fostering collaboration between three organisations: The Cambrian Railway Partnership, Talyllyn Railway, and Borth Community Hub. Together, they worked diligently to boost travel confidence for the Borth Walking for Wellbeing group, an endeavour that aligned closely with our mission to promote sustainable travel options.



Marston Vale Community Rail Partnership (MVCRP) is very grateful for the core funding provided by Avanti West Coast.

The core funding has enabled MVCRP to run a series of advertisements in publications targeted at young families over spring and summer 2022 as part of a return to rail campaign following the resumption of the full Marson Vale Line timetable in May 2022 (the first full service since December 2019).

The core funding facilitated a marketing campaign for the Bedford River Festival in July 2022 incorporating the additional late evening Festival Flyer and all day Sunay service arranged by MVCRP. This proved extremely successful wuth over 1,800 journeys made over the weekend.



The core funding also enabled MVCRP to take stands at several events including the two-day Great Electric Train Show in Milton Keynes and the Ageing Well Exhibition in Bedford (both held in October 2022).

The CRP was represented at the Avanti West Coast Community Rail Conference held virtually in September 2022 which proved to be a really insightful event.

We look forward to continuing to work with Avanti West Coast in several areas including forming a Station Friends Group at Milton Keynes Central and running Feel Good Field Trips for schools on the WCML to venues including Ridgmont Station Heritage Centre and the Forest of Marston Vale.



During 2022 – 2023, the Heart of England Community Rail Partnership has been able to deliver numerous projects and initiatives thanks to the core and project funding that Avanti West Coast have provided.

In May 2022 we held the first Coventry Station Community Day, which was developed to showcase the investment and improvements at the station, alongside giving local cultural organisations a spotlight to promote their work to tie in with the end of Coventry's City of Culture year. Avanti West Coast match-funded day and worked with us and Highly Sprung to deliver an amazing event that had over 1,000 people participating in the daytime events and an estimated 800 people enjoying the In Transit performances. The day also won the 'Best Community Engagement Project award at the 2022 national Community Rail Awards for this and we are now planning to hold more community days at the station.

Project funding from Avanti West Coast has also allowed us to deliver the Feel Good Field Trip initiative alongside colleagues from Community Rail Lancashire. The opportunity for the schools to have access to these opportunities and the free train travel that Avanti have organised for us has been incredibly well received by the schools we've worked with.

The core funding provided by Avanti West Coast has allowed us to deliver projects such as our Creative Platforms project and Colour Palette projects in Leamington and Warwick. These colour palettes have been such a success, that we are now working with Avanti West Coast and Rugby Borough Council to bring a Rugby colour palette to the station and town.

The support Avanti provides outside of funding is hugely appreciated. The new Community Hub at Coventry Station has allowed us to host rail familiarisation and confidence sessions, animation workshops, and meetings at the station, thus making it easier for those attending to use the railways to get to the events. The support that the individuals at Avanti West Coast give us is great. Jo Buckley (Community Manager) and Craig Mortiboys (Regional Growth Manager) have supported and facilitated projects and worked with the CRP to ensure that the local communities really are being supported by the railways in a wide variety of ways.



Core funding from Avanti West Coast has allowed the CRP to deliver the following in our communities:

Maintaining well attended and engaging meetings supporting local groups and providing a platform for collaboration, growing our awareness of Community Rail across our areas and Scotland

Achieve over £36k funding for projects within South Lanarkshire

Provide guidance and collaboration support for Cambuslang Gateway Project – a mural and welcome garden at the station with volunteers from Cambuslang community council. It now allows a key welcome to the area, enjoyed by the community and lots of press/radio event.

Conversation Café on the trains supporting mental health awareness/ Samaritans' crisis advice covering over 400 passengers and staff on the railways from Motherwell to Glasgow.

Involvement in Mini Cop26 by South Lanarkshire Council by actively choosing to travel by train for over 300 pupils from local Rutherglen, Blantyre and Cambuslang primary schools for 3 days get to and from the event by train & being safety aware on the station, learning about greening groups in the area to get involved with and community rail.

Working in partnership with planning 'feel good experiences' for Avanti for over 340 UK pupils to visit Glasgow and do an awesome day out activity.

Showing support and advising on green travel with the monthly greening Camglen network of like-minded climate activists

Community rail week/rail safety involvement through raising awareness through our social channels.

Our travelling classroom projects has delivered over 40 people so far through on train learning a little bit about Autism. To raise awareness and embracing difference in our communities from Motherwell to Glasgow.

An intergenerational journey and learning session with 6VT Youth CRP and Rail74 CRP & a local crafting group – First phase complete with a visit to Edinburgh to meet and share learning experiences and benefits of crafting/knitting and sewing from the vintage ladies and the young people taught how to make a TikTok. This involved 15 people and delivered lots of smiles, new learning/skills, confidence in train travel and broke down intergenerational attitudes/barriers.



The North Staffordshire Community Rail Partnership has benefitted from core funding and project funding from Avanti West Coast for FY 22-23. The core funding contributes to the work of the partnership in engaging with communities, improving stations, promoting rail travel and local attractions, overcoming barriers to travel, and supporting station volunteers. The estimated annual value of volunteering for the Partnership is £67,000.

Project funding from Avanti West Coast has enabled us to deliver a range of projects including the installation of dibond history panels at Stafford Station celebrating the 175<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Trent Valley Railway, the purchase of frames to create gallery walls at Stoke and Crewe Stations to feature local art work, creating new opportunities for engagement with educational establishments and community groups, and funding of the Sherborne Project in Crewe to support their children's gardening and adult peer support groups and provide a hub for the local community. Avanti funding, along with match funding from CRN, supported the creation of a family story trail in Stoke. The Duck Bills family story trail was developed with Stoke Reads, part of the National Literacy Trust, and raises awareness of the local history of Stoke town and the railway as well as sustainable travel. The project has engaged local school children with its links to literacy and local history and a community event to launch the trail was attended by over 70 children.

In partnership with Avanti West Coast we have been able to deliver several events engaging communities and schools. We offered "Try the Train" trips to schools and community groups, engaging them with the railway, promoting rail as a sustainable means of travel, raising awareness of careers in rail and providing information about safety on the railway. We have hosted railway history themed talks at Stafford and Crewe Stations and delivered activities to celebrate the 185<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the first train to pass through Crewe which included a guided station tour that was timed to coincide with the national Heritage Open Days programme.

Moreover, our promotional efforts extended beyond individual projects, as we sought to reach a broader audience by endorsing out-of-season tourism and sustainable travel during the Aberystwyth Comedy Festival.

Thousands of visitors from various locations, including those from far-flung areas, attended the festival, with many opting to travel by train utilising Avanti West Coast services. This substantial attendance further underlines the impact of our initiatives in advocating for sustainable travel and the positive response garnered from the public.

Through the core funding provided by Avanti West Coast, we have been able to effectively promote sustainable travel options, engage passengers with captivating materials, and facilitate collaborative projects that benefit both the community and the environment. These initiatives serve as a testament to our dedication to fostering a modal shift towards sustainable transportation and enhancing the overall travel experience for passengers.



The core funding from Avanti West Coast is vital for the Mid Cheshire Community Rail Partnership to operate. It allows us to bring benefits to the communities along our railway line including supporting Station Friends Groups to carry out gardening and art projects. By Encouraging volunteers, we bring communities together, improve people`s mental and physical health and encourage greater use of train travel by creating welcoming and safe spaces.

The funding also allows us to work with schools and other groups on projects related to the stations such as the 5 dove mosaics, made by Altrincham school children, which will soon be installed at the Interchange.

We also use our sponsorship by Avanti West Coast to increase biodiversity, such as by funding the sowing of wild flower seed by a group of Delamere volunteers a couple of years back. This has resulted in a beautiful show of pollinator attracting flowers again this summer.

We also use funds to engage with children and young people and are in the process of having a book of illustrated children`s poems published called Hare and Rabbit: Travels on a Train. The aims of this project are to encourage children to read and be read to and foster an interest in poetry by holding workshops in local schools.

We are very grateful for the support Avanti West Coast gives us and through the year we will continue to use it to benefit communities, wildlife and the environment.



## 03 Community Rail Funding

Funding allocation guidance from the DfT and Community Rail Network was sought, the table below details the funding plans in relation to the CRP amount provided to each of our Community Rail Partnerships:

| CRP                                 | Annual Allocation  |
|-------------------------------------|--------------------|
| Abbey Line CRP                      | £7159.35           |
| Bentham Line CRP                    | £7159.35           |
| Bolton & South Lancashire CRP       | £7159.35           |
| Cambrian Railways Partnership       | £7159.35           |
| Chester-Shrewsbury Rail Partnership | £14,318.69         |
| Community Rail Cumbria              | £14,318.69         |
| Community Rail Lancashire           | £14,318.69         |
| Conwy Valley Rail Partnership       | £7,159.35          |
| Crewe 2 Manchester CRP              | £14,318.69         |
| Heart of England CRP                | £14,318.69         |
| Heart of Wales Development Company  | £7,159.35          |
| High Peak Hope Valley CRP           | £7,159.35          |
| Marston Vale CRP                    | £7,159.35          |
| Mid Cheshire CRP                    | £14,318.69         |
| North Cheshire CRP                  | £14,318.69         |
| North Staffordshire CRP             | £7,159.35          |
| Rail 74 (South Lanarkshire)         | £7,159.35          |
| Settle-Carlisle Development Company | £7,159.35          |
| South East Manchester CRP           | £7,159.35          |
| Tyne Valley CRP                     | £7,159.35          |
| <b>Total</b>                        | <b>£193,302.37</b> |

# Principles of Funding

In accordance with the Franchise Agreement, we have made available three sources of funding to our CRPs:

- CRP Amount
- Station Community Fund
- CRP Project Fund

The CRP Amount refers to the funding to be paid (as determined by Community Rail Network) to each CRP as shown in section 3. Payment is made on an annual basis and is payable within 30 days of the franchise year start date. These funds are intended to support CRP operations and activities are made without pre-conception to their use.

During 2022/23 we committed £9579.00 to support the delivery of three projects which are detailed in the following case studies:

# Case Studies

|                    |   |
|--------------------|---|
| Project Name       | <b>RHS Bridgewater</b>  |
| Project Cost       | £7000.00  |
| CRP                | South East Lancashire   |
| Project Background | <p>The RHS Bridgewater site was observed to be poorly served by public transport, particularly in relation to the nearest railway station (Walkden), and this project aimed to provide a link and demonstrate the potential for commercial viability of diverting existing services or creating a bespoke new service to the site.</p> <p>The service aimed to provide a reliable and affordable option for those without access to a car and/or on a low income, and for local residents who could take advantage of free entry offered to Salford residents on certain dates.</p>   |
| Project Aims       | <p>The project aimed to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Provide an affordable bus transport scheme linking Walkden Station to RHS Bridgewater (building on the success of previous integrated transport projects previously run by SELCRP)</li> <li>○ Improve accessibility to the attraction. Particularly for local residents, including targeted deprived communities surrounding the site</li> <li>○ Contribute to the sustainability plans and aims of the local council and others, with the provision of a sustainable transport link</li> <li>○ Increase visitors to RHS Bridgewater. Therefore, underpinning the financial sustainability of the site, and its various environmental benefits</li> </ul> |
| Customer Feedback  | <p>The service was very well received by the general public and rail customers. Announcements and information posted on social media resulted in positive responses. RHS observed a great reaction from their customers, and as a result will be running the service themselves for 2023.</p>   |
| Staff Feedback     | <p>Avanti West Coast were supportive of the project, though the project did not directly involve an Avanti station, there wasn't as much direct engagement with staff specifically.</p>   |
| Lessons Learnt     | <p>It was a risk for us to go ahead and run the service without any confirmation of the funding from Avanti West Coast. All other funding was confirmed at the start of the service, and we had applied for the largest portion of funding from Avanti. In future our CRP will need to secure all funding before any service/project can begin.</p>   |

|                    |   |
|--------------------|---|
| Project Name       | <b>175 Anniversary Trent Valley</b>   |
| Project Cost       | £1079.00  |
| CRP                | North Staffordshire   |
| Project Background | The Trent Valley Railway (TVR) was 175 years old in 2022. The CRP was approached by two heritage rail enthusiasts from the Trent Valley Railway History Project as they wished to mark this important anniversary by creating four temporary posters for Stafford Station to inform customers about the history of the Trent Valley Railway.  |
| Project Aims       | To lend interest to the entrance foyer of Stafford Station and give station users something interesting to read whilst waiting for their train. The posters will present the information in a colourful and lively way, including bullet points, pictures and quotes. It will give station users the opportunity to engage with the railway through its history and demonstrate the progress that has been made in the industry over the last 175 years. It will raise awareness of the current Trent Valley route to those who don't currently use it.   |
| Customer Feedback  | N/A   |
| Staff Feedback     | N/A   |
| Lessons Learnt     | The project was seriously delayed by two factors 1) Agreement on locations for the posters at Stafford Station 2) At a late stage in the design process NSCRP was informed that Landlords Consent would be required for the installation of the two dibond posters. NSCRP had not previously required LLC for poster installations at other stations, so we had not thought to check first. This caused long delays as further details were required, which were not easily supplied. The projected completion date was end October 2022, but the posters were not installed until March 2023, well after the end of the anniversary year. NSCRP learned that it needs to be established before the project starts: a) who is able to give permissions for poster locations; b) whether LLC is needed or not; c) who the LLC contact will be. Only then should the project begin. |

|                    |   |
|--------------------|---|
| Project Name       | <b>World Book Day</b>   |
| Project Cost       | £1500.00  |
| CRP                | Conwy Valley and North West Wales Coast CRP   |
| Project Background | A number of local schools don't actually engage in World Book Day activities. There is research which explains children who participate in World Book Day activities are more engaged in reading and books than those who don't, 70% of early years settings and 77% primary schools said World Book Day is effective in fostering a reading for pleasure culture. By providing activities for the schools and local residents to get involved in we are making sure that all children have access and are included in this recognised day. We wanted to include as many schools as possible. |
| Project Aims       | We also worked with the Family information services and Conwy Libraries to provide the children with information about the libraries and services they provide. They also provided the children with some free items to take away, such as, colouring pencils, pens, note pads and bubbles. The project engaged with approx. 450 children in 4 locations over 2 days. The aim was to give the children access and information about their local library. I used local entertainers for each location also.  |
| Customer Feedback  | Thank you so much for organising this morning. It was brilliant!! The children loved it. Again, thank you so much.<br><br>Thank you so much for today, it was really good, and the children loved it!   |
| Staff Feedback     | I am so pleased that the events went well. You put so much work into them. We really enjoyed our 'supporting' role – please let us know if there is any way that we can help you in the future.<br><br>Two great sessions with Chris today – many thanks for arranging and sponsoring.  |
| Lessons Learnt     | I have built relationships with the schools and will be revisiting them to teach rail safety. It would have been nice to have done this at the same time and possibly something to consider in the future. The event was a success, but some schools did miss out as there was school strikes and St David's Day activities which clashed with the event.   |

## 04 Social Value 2022/23



Last year we employed a Social Value and Accessibility Manager, Beth Chambers, to engage stakeholders and to compile the Social Value Report.

We are pleased with the progress that we have made and our commitment to social responsibility and sustainability. Through the emphasis on working with local suppliers and charities, we are supporting our local communities, fostering innovation and growth, and reducing our environmental impact.

In addition to the emphasis on local suppliers, initiatives such as Feel Good Field Trips and working with our CRPs demonstrate our dedication to creating positive social value. Many initiatives have the potential to leave a long-lasting impact on the communities that we serve. For example, Feel Good Field Trips will provide young people with access to enjoyable opportunities, which will enrich their lives beyond the classroom.

Whilst we have made great strides, there is still more work to be done. We are exploring partnerships with external consultants to review our social impact and to advise us on how we can further our commitments. We want to help address social issues and create meaningful change. Such partnerships will help us to leverage our resources and expertise to support our local communities.

The full Social Value report can be found within the community section of our website [www.avantiwestcoast.co.uk](http://www.avantiwestcoast.co.uk) however the total social value attributed between 01.04.22–31.03.23 was £212,715,641.55, and the social return on investment was £59,298.997 based on a ratio of £3.59 for every £1 invested.

By continuing to prioritise our social impact and sustainability, we have the potential to create even more positive impacts on the communities that we serve.

## 05 Summary

Avanti West Coast supports the aims and aspirations of the DfT, Community Rail Network and each of our CRPs in terms of restoring rail confidence along with local rail development.

This report highlights the invaluable support provided by Avanti West Coast, enabling the implementation of various projects that promote sustainable travel, community engagement, and educational initiatives. Our involvement in meetings and the provision of industry updates showcase our commitment to partnership collaboration.

Jo Buckley – Community  
Manager



Our Community Manager will continue to provide routine co-ordination and manage each of the three funding programmes. Our team of Regional Growth Managers will continue to play a key role in leading stakeholder engagement and will be responsible for delivering a partnership railway.

We very much look forward to continuing our work with each of our CRPs to deliver a broad range of innovative projects during 2023 – 2024 which connect communities to their railways.



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