

# Community Rail Report



AVANTI  
WEST COAST





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## Introduction

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### Welcome to the Avanti West Coast Community Rail Report for the year 2023-2024.

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.

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.

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.

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

# 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.

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 2024 – 2025 which connect communities to their railways.

Avanti West Coast are dedicated to making a difference today to look after tomorrow. As a responsible business, we're committed to delivering social value activities that add significant benefits to the communities we serve. To this end, we've given ourselves a target to create over £1 billion worth of social value by 2031 and to become the leading train operator in the UK when it comes to measuring and reporting social value.

We're proud of the fact that we progressed since the previous report (FY22/23) which shows an increase of over £130 million in social value impact. It's great to see how far we've reached into our communities, with over 120 projects logged by our station teams.



**Jo Buckley**  
Community Manager

Measuring social value matters because it helps us on our journey towards being a responsible, sustainable business that benefits the communities we serve. It also enables us to understand the impact the railways have on the people and places around us, from environmental, social and economic perspectives. From 1st April 2023 to 31st March 2024, we contributed a total operational, environmental and economic impact worth **£345,907,324.00**.

We use the Rail Social Value Tool (RSVT) as recommended by RSSB (Rail Safety and Standards Board) to measure the impact of social value and are proud to report that the total social value impact raised by our community projects is **£41,039,797.52**.

We divide our social value impact into 10 different avenues in line with the RSVT and it is interesting that our community and charity projects permeates most of these areas.

We are fortunate to have a team of passionate Community Champions based at our managed stations who co-ordinate projects and events. These initiatives form a tapestry of social value impact in the communities we serve and are supported by our Community Rail Partnerships. In our social value report, we can only celebrate a small sample of these projects, however it is important to note that we have more than tripled the amount of community projects we logged this year in comparison to the previous financial year. With the support of Jo Buckley, Community Manager and station colleagues, we've included 132 community initiatives in this year's social value report.



**Dr. Theresa Roberts**  
Social Value &  
Accessibility Manager  
with her Guide dog Kaz

# Key Highlights

## The Rugby Colour Palette

A new piece of community inspired artwork has been unveiled at Rugby station thanks to the backing of Avanti West Coast and the **Heart of England Community Rail Partnership**.

The CRP worked with artist Stacey Barnfield from Draw My City, to develop the project to help promote the character of the town.

The colours were chosen from the ideas that arose from a public consultation, the aim of which was to get respondents to celebrate their hometown. At its heart were a number of school and community workshops delivered by Ruby Road, a Warwickshire based storytelling collective, and its creative producer Jo Chalkblack.

Working with the project partners, Stacey brought to life the many ideas, creating three colour palettes with the themes History and Heritage, Creativity and Culture, and Industry and Innovation. The colours chosen are a mix of direct references to suggestions from the public as well as more thought-provoking choices designed to encourage conversation around the palette.



## Key Highlights

### Duck Bills Event

We helped to bring to life a specially created story trail as part of a project that aimed to get children in Stoke-on-Trent reading.

We teamed up with **North Staffordshire Community Rail Partnership**, the National Literacy Trust in Stoke (a charity giving children and young people the literacy skills they need to succeed in life) and B Arts (a participatory arts organisation) to stage live performances on the streets of Stoke-on-Trent, as well as activities at Stoke Library for a one-off event.

Based on Duck Bills' Great Railway Adventure Story Quest, written and illustrated by local artist, Kidda Kinsey, the experience takes participants for a waddle around the Staffordshire city. Families follow in the footsteps of the book's main character, Duck Bills, who likes to go on adventures by rail and write to his younger brother, Duck Small, about them.

The self-guided trail also offers primary school children and their families the opportunity to complete challenges and discover fun facts about Stoke and its railway station –using a specially-designed map and information in the book.

To offer something unique for the school holidays, actors from B Arts gave children the chance to meet and engage with the book's characters and historical people from the region along the trail's route from Stoke Library to Stoke-on-Trent railway station.

Partners hosted a range of activities at Stoke Library including storytelling sessions, illustration workshops, pebble painting, and badge-making as part of the event to bring Duck Bills' Great Railway Adventure to life.

Specially created for Story Quest –a project by the National Literacy Trust in Stoke that encourages families in the region to take part in free story trails around their neighbourhood –the book celebrates the city's heritage and railway and hopes to inspire people to make sustainable adventures by train.



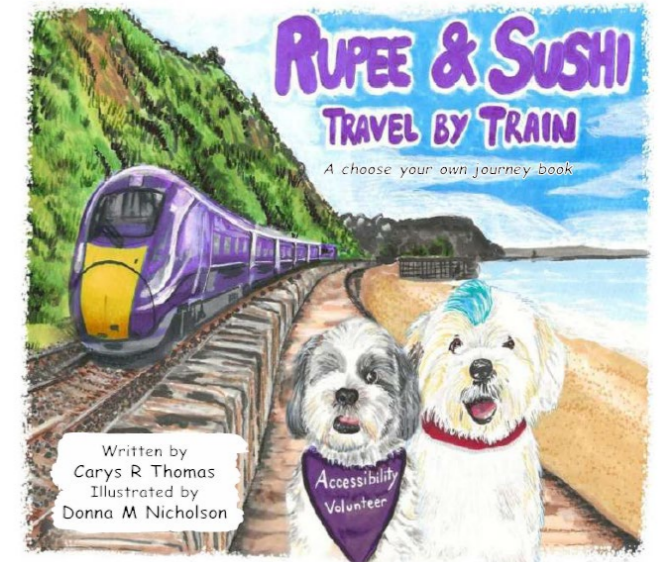
## Key Highlights

### Rupee and Sushi Travel by Train

A choose your own journey railway accessibility book was launched during Community Rail Week.

Written by railway safety auditor and accessibility volunteer Carys R Thomas, with illustrations by artist Donna M Nicholson, the interactive story follows characters Rupee and Sushi, on their first train journey and highlights some of the accessibility features on the railway aimed at improving people's confidence when travelling.

The book, published in Welsh by **Conwy Valley and North Wales Coast Community Rail Partnership** and in English by Severnside Community Rail Partnership, is available free of charge thanks to funding from Transport for Wales, Avanti West Coast, Great Western Railway and Transreport.



### E-bike Wellbeing Activity

**Conwy Valley and North Wales Coast Community Rail Partnership**, in collaboration with the Ffit team from Conwy Leisure Development were thrilled to announce the launch of free e-bike sessions, made possible by funding from Avanti West Coast.

These sessions aimed to promote healthy and sustainable transportation options while exploring the picturesque landscapes of the region.

Beginner and intermediate sessions were available with participants embarking on an 11-mile ride along the cycle path from Bodlondeb to Penmaenmawr and back, or towards Llandudno/West Shore and back. These sessions were ideal for those new to cycling.

Intermediate Sessions: Riders cycled from Bodlondeb towards Rowen and Henryd, covering a 12-mile route along country roads.

There were plenty of sessions for the local community and those visiting the area to get involved in.



# Key Highlights

## Crewe Station Poetry

2022 was the 185th anniversary of the first train to pass through Crewe. Local poet, Gareth Williams, approached Avanti and **North Staffordshire Community Rail Partnership** about featuring a poem he wrote about Crewe Station at the station to mark the anniversary. Avanti's brand team designed a mural featuring Gareth's Tracks are our Veins, poem which was installed on the north overbridge.

Crewe Station Manager requested a school engagement project as a legacy from the poetry wall and it was agreed that local schools would be invited to submit poems. Three schools participated in the project, two primary and one special school, with each school submitting a rail themed poem. The children's poems and Gareth William's Tracks are our Veins poem were printed in a booklet with artwork designed by Avanti's brand team.

An event was held at Crewe Station on World Book Day where pupils from the three schools performed their poems, alongside Gareth Williams, and the poetry booklets were given out to passengers at the station. Pupils then received refreshments in the First Class Lounge and had the opportunity to talk to Gareth and Avanti and North Staffordshire Community Rail Partnership staff.

In addition, eight schools were offered a railway safety briefing or careers session at their school and to date one primary school has had a rail safety session and one high school has had a Careers Day delivered.



## Key Highlights

### All Aboard! A Knotty Summer Carol

The North Staffordshire Railway Company, known affectionately as "The Knotty", was based at Stoke-on-Trent Railway Station, but ceased to exist in 1923 when lots of smaller railway companies were being amalgamated into fewer larger ones during "The Grouping".

This project is one of a series of talks, projects and events held in Stoke-on-Trent and Newcastle-under-Lyme in 2023, led by the North Staffordshire Railway Study Group.

**North Staffordshire Community Rail Partnership** proposal was for a partnership project with local arts organisation, B-Arts, to create a free event at Stoke Station to celebrate the 100th anniversary of the dissolution of "The Knotty", working with the diverse communities who live within walking distance of the station.

During 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> November 2024 participants in eight groups were guided around Stoke Station to meet actors dressed in period costume. They heard their stories, all linked to the history of the station and The Knotty. The performance ended with a hot drink and an iced bun in a pop-up Knotty Café.

There were four guided tours per day of approximately 20 people per group. The event was attended by a total of 173 people, including 51 under 16s.

Participants were given goody bags containing local rail and visitor attraction information, a free Avanti West Coast pen and an NSCRP notebook.



### Community Resilience Fund

12 community organisations, charities and community interest companies, within 5 miles radius of stations that link to the **3 Counties Connected CRP**, were awarded up to £2,000 to support the sustainability of their projects.

Grants were awarded to the projects best targeting social inclusion and fostering behaviour change. These projects linked to healthy wellbeing activities and encouraged the use of public transport.

Activities and beneficiaries included wellbeing walks, trips on trains with Chapter Mental Health, Saturday morning club, craft, music and movement with Wrexham Sounds. Hosting entertainment sessions for the over 55's with The Rainbow Foundation and trips on trains for young people with disabilities alongside the Central Cheshire Buddies Scheme.



## Key Highlights

### Walking Connections

Walking Connections was envisaged to be a series of guided walks that would build the health, well-being and knowledge of the participants.

We wanted to build upon the success of the Heart of Wales Trail by finding new, shorter routes that would be more accessible to newer walkers who may lack confidence in some of the longer, existing walks.

The **Heart of Wales Line Community Rail Partnership** worked with Lisa Dennison from Quiet Walks, an experienced guide, who designed and led 8 circular walks beginning at stations along the Heart of Wales Line which are available with maps and full instructions as downloads via our website. This will encourage more people to undertake healthy and sustainable travel and provide a lasting benefit to the project.

*"It has helped me gain confidence in finding new routes and also overcome some social anxieties of walking in groups (which I previously avoided). I will definitely use the train to explore some of the smaller stops and new/more remote routes, which I also generally avoided for fear of getting lost. It's giving me more motivation to "explore" the area again via train and on foot."*

- 90% of participants enjoyed meeting new people
- 40% reported increased travel confidence
- 60% felt they had improved their fitness
- 30% had increased social skills



### Haltwhistle Water Tower

**Tyne Valley CRP** has taken an initial lease on the 1861 Water Tower at Haltwhistle station, owned by the Haltwhistle Partnership.

The intention was to run a small café selling light snacks and locally produced art / Hadrian's Wall souvenirs. The outdoor space in front of the Water Tower will be used for events (farmer/art markets) linking the Water Tower with TVCRP's Old Booking Hall.

TVCRP have secured funding for solar powered e-charging bike boxes, containing hire bikes to assist onward journeys to Hadrian's Wall.

Funding has been granted from CrossCountry, Northern and Avanti West Coast. The new cafe is now open, serving a range of snacks, including soup, sandwiches, jacket potatoes and a delicious range of traybakes

and cakes. A selection of railway themed gifts are also available to purchase and dogs are welcome.

**Opening times: 10am to 4pm Wednesday to Sunday.**



## Key Highlights

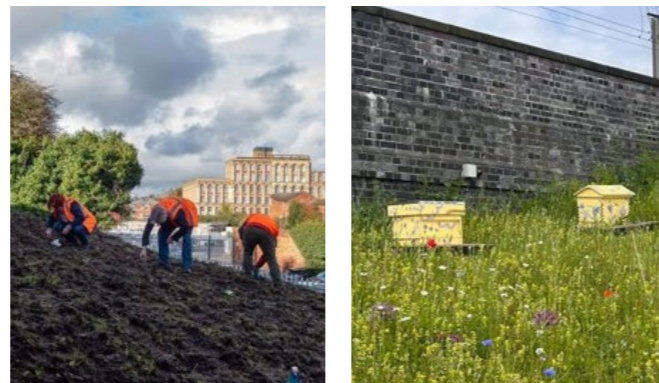
### Re-greening and Establishing Beehives (Phase 2)

Phase two of the project that initially transformed a piece of wasteland owned by Network Rail, adjacent to Wigan North Western station, into a wildflower meadow with fruit bushes and beehives. Additionally, it has renovated the space behind the hotel with a living wall, herb garden and classroom space. The second phase consisted of the continued maintenance and additional planting of the meadow. The ongoing preservation of the bees, collection of the first batch of honey produced in the hives, creation and installation of new 'heritage' style mural panels, with the involvement of a group of local school pupils at risk of exclusion.

The hotel manager has been instrumental in the delivery of several aspects of the project. She brought enthusiasm and innovation to the project, suggesting ideas for school sessions and additional elements to the project including the installation of a noticeboard to display work produced by pupils. The project involved a total of 40 people including **South East**

**Lancashire CRP**, hotel staff, volunteers, teachers and pupils, and has continued to improve the meadow area, classroom area, and beehives.

This wider community engagement has also aimed to ensure the longevity of the project through sustainable and ongoing involvement with the local school and a small team of volunteers.



### Coventry Community Engagement

Building on the success of 2022's award winning Coventry Station Community Day, **Heart of England CRP** developed community engagement events that benefitted users of Coventry Station and the wider community. The project included the creation and installation of public art at the railway station, supporting the running and promotion of the community hub to increase usage in this fantastic space amongst community groups and supporting community events held at the station and on the adjacent boulevard.

The project funding was split between three events:

- Community Day at Coventry Station taking place in September 2023
- Young Enterprise Trade Fair taking place in December 2023
- Artist on my Street – Art in the Interchange workshops and art installation with the Life Path Trust and Coventry Artspace

**Clr Birdi, Lord Mayor of Coventry:** *'It was great pleasure to have met the artists whose artwork was displayed along the corridors of interchange tunnel at the Coventry Railway Station during the launch of the Project Artist on my Street. The works attracted the attention of passengers passing by who invariably remarked what a wonderful display. The organisers deserve praise for setting up such a wonderful project.'*



## Key Highlights

### Feel Good Field Trips

Since launching in April 2022, Feel Good Field Trips, a first of its kind initiative, aims to connect pupils around the country to immersive and enriching learning opportunities. The initiative is designed to give up to 5,000 pupils aged between four and 18, the chance to travel by train for hands-on learning, and culturally diverse days out that may previously have been inaccessible for them.

We're just about to hit our milestone of 5000 pupils who have so far taken part in Feel Good Field Trips. This amazing achievement is down to David Savage, Rail Officer for **Community Rail Lancashire**, who researches each experience, books transport, arranges lunches, keeps in touch with the school before and after the trip. The most important thing is his passion to ensure pupils get the most out of the trip. From explaining how to stay safe whilst waiting for the train to arrive at the station, to what they can experience whilst on board the train, and then the experience once the children arrive at their destination.

*"We are a school on the edge of Birmingham. Our local estate is mainly council housing with many tower blocks. Many of our children don't have many opportunities outside of school so we are always looking to see how we can broaden their horizons so thank you so much for our trip. I do hope this project continue as with current costs and the lack of school funding it provides opportunities for deprived pupils that just aren't possible otherwise. Dave was excellent, anyone who joined us would have thought that he was a member of staff. He was calm and friendly and related to our pupils straight away. The day ran incredibly smoothly, and he ensured that the children got every opportunity throughout the day".*



# Key Highlights

## Annual Community Rail Conference

Over 40 delegates attended our annual conference which we held in December at the Pyramid Arts Centre in Warrington, a venue steeped in history and cultural significance.

A full agenda included presentations from our Managing Director, Community Rail Network, South East Lancashire CRP and the Community Champion from Runcorn station and a mental health charity. Delegates enjoyed networking over lunch which included products sourced from local food and beverage suppliers from across the West Coast Mainline and the afternoon session including two panels discussing improving integrated travel and new solutions to funding & delivery.

*"I loved everything, the venue, the atmosphere was warm and relaxed, great guest speakers sharing brilliant stories and the lunch ..... what a great way to showcase local through your suppliers and I loved the goodie bag, so much thought had gone into the day, well done!"*



# Feedback from our CRPs





## Feedback from our CRPs

### Abbey Line CRP

As always, we are so grateful for the support given to us by First Trenitalia/Avanti West Coast. Funding has contributed to the core running costs of the organisation as well as projects aligned with the four pillars of community rail.

This year, a big focus has been on connecting our communities with nature – by making better use of railway land and by encouraging integrated sustainable travel. The Abbey Trail ‘refresh’ was completed with the installation of new map lecterns at Abbey Line stations. These act as both promotional and wayfinding resources, encouraging users to hop on and off the train to walk sections of the beautiful countryside in the Colne and Ver valleys. Work continues to transform an unused piece of land at Garston Station into a wildlife-friendly community

garden, and we have commissioned the Bee Friendly Trust to maintain the pollinator-friendly planters at Watford Junction Station. All this as well as continuing with the upkeep of planters at the other stations.

Other activities include: Timetable distribution, getting out and about in Community Rail Week, a stakeholder engagement event and starting a partnership with Learn Live UK to deliver much-needed rail safety training to school children all the way from Watford to St Albans.

In December, we welcomed new officer Kate Swindells. She has been busy getting up to speed, continuing ongoing projects and connecting with partners. She also has exciting new ideas for ‘Connecting communities with their railway’.



### The Bentham Line CRP

The Leeds-Morecambe Community Rail Partnership (LMCRP) continues to work at good pace and with a positive effect across a wide range of projects. Some examples are set out below.

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 22 hours 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 and the running costs of the CRP from our headquarters at Bentham station.

The officers continue to undertake educational activities with the schools and colleges along the route and Year-in-Industry university students from across the North who join us each year to carry out community projects. This year’s students have looked at ‘Biodiversity on the Bentham Line’ and are working with local primary school pupils on creating insect habitats, for both the schools and the stations. Recent rail safety, rail history and art educational projects have been undertaken with schools in Gargrave, Bentham and Heysham.

The LMCRP were delighted to win the ‘Community Creative Projects and Station Art’ (large and medium groups) at the National Community Rail Awards 2024 in Swansea, which was sponsored by Avanti West Coast. The project ‘Rail and Sail’ was based at Heysham Port station, brought together a host of rail and council groups with the community and the nearby the neighbouring primary school. It celebrated 120 years of the integrated journeys at the port and the arrival of a new ferry ‘Manxman’ on the Heysham-Douglas (IOM) route.

Large panels reflecting on the history of the local railways in the Lancaster area have now been completed and installed in the waiting room on platforms 4 and 5 and are getting a good degree of attention from passengers. A travelling exhibition of 20 history posters relating to the Bentham Line has been created by the CRP which we have agreed to trail at Lancaster Castle station, on the over bridge and in the waiting room on platforms 4 and 5.



## Feedback from our CRPs

### Cambrian Rail Partnership

The Cambrian Railway Partnership had a successful 12 months with a focus on delivering projects that promote sustainable travel, rail usage and community involvement in the railway network.

Our main achievements include supporting the repurposing of Newtown Station building with a local charity called ‘Men Shed’ to allow the community a safe space for men to come together and support the local community.

We launched a section on the Cambrian Railway on the popular app ‘Windowseater’ which explains the history and culture of the Cambrian Railway as people travel along the line. This app received significant local

and national media attention and combined with the return of 4 coach trains on the Cambrian promoted the tourist benefit of the railway system in Mid-Wales.

We are sponsoring ‘Rail Safety Live’ to deliver railway safety training to 100 schools in the Mid-Wales area and within 5 miles of the Cambrian Railway line to improve safety awareness for children and increased understanding of the risks of trespassing on the railway. We also supported Network Rail Level Crossing Managers with safety tours and organised a litter pick at Tywyn station in June 2023 to promote a safe and clean environment for passengers.



### 3 Counties Connected CRP

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## Feedback from our CRPs

### Community Rail Cumbria

Community Rail Cumbria is delighted to continue to work collaboratively with Avanti West Coast and is very appreciative of the funding contribution for Community Rail activity. The funding enables us to maintain connections with the Community Champions and Station Managers at Carlisle, Penrith and Oxenholme stations and to work on community initiatives throughout the year.

The amazing volunteer group at Penrith station continue to impress with their fantastic work. We're also involved with the Penrith Masterplan which has set out some amazing plans for the refurbishment of the former station house; supported the new e-bike offer and brought together relevant partners to develop the through ticketing offer to Keswick.

We are currently in discussion with another school group who are considering supporting some gardening and planting activity at Oxenholme and there are also two art projects underway and now we have a new CRPO for the line these should reach completion fairly soon.

Each of the WCML stations forms a gateway to our local lines and onward into the Lake District and other communities and the support from Avanti West Coast enables us to create a warm welcome and encourage return visits.



### Community Rail Lancashire

During 2023 Community Rail Lancashire worked closely with Avanti's Community Champion Dhani Solanki at Preston station to develop the Community Room to be a better place to bring community and educational groups to. Thanks to a local arts charity's creativity there is now a reading tree, beautiful artwork and soft furnishings created from seating offcuts donated by Diamond Rail Services.

Throughout the year CRL and Avanti West Coast have shared several important events at Preston station including:

1st February 2024 we celebrated World Hijab Day which helps promote understanding of a woman's right to choose what to wear. There were posters, displays of hijabs and demonstrations on how to wear them.

10th February 2024 saw the unveiling of the Preston station history poster in the waiting room on platforms 3&4 that had been designed by Billy Burton a 6th form student at Clitheroe's Royal Grammar school.

8th March 2024 saw the launch of the new 100 More Women 100 More Journeys booklet which celebrates stories from women across the country about their rail journeys and encompasses the heartbreaking, the humorous and the hopeful. The book can be viewed here: <https://online.fliphtml5.com/fewde/omfv/#p=1>

March 11th 2024 members from Arts2Heal came to Preston station to create badges with members of the public to celebrate Sustainability Week at Preston Station.

There has also been significant developments in respect of the community project to improve platforms 3c and 4c at the south end of Preston station, including: Landlords consent, station change and minor modifications industry approvals all received. The designs for the signage and poster cases have been agreed with installation planned for either the 10th or 24th June and tied in with other railway works taking place at that time. The hanging baskets and artificial flowers are now being fabricated by Margaret Mason Florists, Preston with the installation expected to be during summer 2024.



Partneriaeth Rheilffordd  
Cymunedol Dyffryn Conwy ac  
Arfordir Gogledd Orllewin Cymru  
Conwy Valley and North West  
Wales Coast Community Rail  
Partnership

## Feedback from our CRPs

### Conwy Valley and North West Wales Coast CRP

The benefit of Avanti West Coast funding to the Conwy Valley and North Wales Coast CRP has been invaluable to the partnership. It allows us the opportunity to work with smaller rural community groups such as Young Carers, offering them the opportunity for respite with fellow carers on activity weekends away. The larger Community fund allows us to work on much larger projects such as our E bike project which supported local people with physical and mental health, allowing them the opportunity to meet others, become less socially isolated and explore their local area. The funding also allowed pupils from a local referral unit to participate in weekly sessions, which was proven to improve their concentration in class, and be less disruptive, meaning a better learning experience for others.

Avanti's Community Manager Jo Buckley is proactive, supportive to the CRP and there when needed. This includes the opening of a new social enterprise café at Llandudno Junction, attending and meeting instructors as part of the E bike project and supporting the CRP with Rupee and Sushi travel book launch, as well as World Book day at Chester station, handing out free copies of rail safety books to passengers and travellers. Jo is a delight to work with and I am glad to be back in this role as CRO working alongside her.

Avanti's Annual Community Rail Conference brought other rail officers and rail partnerships together to network, it allowed us the opportunity to see other projects that have been funded and delivered across the UK. As a rail officer, this personally, gives me inspiration to replicate similar projects in our area and the ability to seek out advice and information from those who have delivered such projects.



### Manchester CRPs

Continuing support from Avanti West Coast West Coast and its staff has enabled us to hold a number of meetings at Stockport Station using the Conference Room, on platforms 3-4, as this is a convenient and welcoming room to use. Meetings included our all our Management meetings, the Crewe to Manchester Station Friends Group Meeting and meetings with our colleagues from The High Peak and Hope Valley CRP as we work on our joint project, The Steel Cotton Trail, a rail/walking route between Sheffield and Manchester.

The Community Rail Officers continue to work closely with the Station team at Stockport on projects such as the Thompson St Bridge mural project, led by Cheshire Wildlife Trust, which will hopefully be complete in the summer of 2024. As well as assisting with project ideas to brighten up the underpass area and developing the area of ground at the end of platforms 3 & 4 into a garden area.

We also have had continued support, help and advice on the large-scale Edgeley Approach art project,

which is hoped to be completed by late summer/ early autumn 2024 with an official launch and the final part of the funding, previously received from Avanti West Coast, to be used to produce an accompanying booklet which will include details about the groups and artists who have contributed to this art project.

In September 2023, with support from Avanti West Coast, Holmes Chapel Youth Council were able to travel to London and visit the Houses of Parliament. It was an incredible experience for all those involved to see these historic sites and ask insightful questions during their tour and watched a lively debate in The House of Commons from the public gallery.

Funding for Feel Good Field Trips Experience – The Crewe 2 Manchester CRP previously received funding for the Avanti West Coast for the Feel-Good Field Trips Experience and remaining funds, for this activity was used to fund, further trips to Food Sorcery Cookery School in Manchester.

## Feedback from our CRPs

### Heart of England CRP

Without Avanti's funding our capacity to work on projects would be very limited. The core funding we receive is vital for staffing the CRP and ensuring we can continue to deliver projects and initiatives to the communities that need them the most. Equally as important is the support from the staff at the station who provide that extra warmth and friendliness making our groups feel really welcomed into the railway family, and the amazing support from the community team at Avanti who go above and beyond to facilitate our projects.

In 2023 we were able to employ an additional CRP Officer to develop our educational offering and as a direct result of this, we have now developed a programme of work with a Coventry-based special educational needs school that includes rail confidence/safety workshops at the school and at Coventry Station and a Try the Train Trip. We have also been able to develop an exciting biodiversity project that is due to start in September as well as increase our offering to schools in terms of workshops and assemblies.

### Heart of Wales Line CRP

This year the Heart of Wales CRP recruited a new host, Powys Association of Voluntary Organisations (PAVO). They then employed a new Community Rail Officer and one of his first events he attended was the Community Rail Conference organised by Avanti West Coast. The information and networking opportunities provided at this event were very useful and helped with his induction into the role, providing an understanding of the wider Community Rail movement. The community team at Avanti West Coast also helped with the new host recruitment and have provided advice and guidance as PAVO began the hosting arrangement.

Thanks to Avanti West Coast's support this year we were able to facilitate a successful walking project which improved physical and mental wellbeing amongst the people who participated in the walks. We were advertised the opportunity to take part in the project all throughout the network and saw an immediate increase in traffic to our website.

Heart of  
England | Community  
Rail Partnership



Through Avanti's CRP Project funding we have been fortunate to deliver some major projects in the area. We developed a community-inspired Rugby Colour Palette at Rugby Railway Station that has made a huge difference to the subway at the station and has led to increased engagement with Rugby Borough Council and the local BID. We have hosted another community day at Coventry Station showcasing local community organisations. At Christmas we were able to support a Young Enterprise Trade Fair at the Station and, most recently, the funding provided by Avanti saw us working in partnership with a local artist and our station adopters to create art for our exhibition space in Coventry Station.



We promoted the activities throughout the project's lifespan to highlight the natural landscapes along the railway line. Once the project was complete we had 8 new circular walks from stations on the Heart of Wales line which are available for people to download to complete themselves. This has given a lasting impact from the project increasing the visitor experience and the wellbeing activities available for local people.

We promoted these walks during the launch of our new website during National Walking Month and there were several national news articles highlighting this. <https://nation.cymru/news/heart-of-wales-line-launch-new-circular-walks-from-stations/>.

## Feedback from our CRPs

### High Peak and Hope Valley CRP

High Peak and Hope Valley Community Rail Partnership greatly appreciates the support from Avanti West Coast over the past twelve months.

We are grateful to have received essential annual core funding that contributes to the employment of a full-time officer to undertake ongoing daily tasks and specific project management for the CRP.

The core funding has also enabled us to focus on project delivery ranging from installing traditional picket fencing enabling us to enhance our stations to engaging with urban groups helping them to access rail travel into the Peak District. We were able to employ a freelance Marketing and Communications Co-Ordinator to support the CRP's social media work and develop a marketing plan.



### Marston Vale CRP

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

The core funding has enabled MVCRP to relaunch the Marston Vale Line in February 2024 after a 14 month suspension of services following Vivarail going into administration. The relaunch has included distribution of cakes (supplied by a local bakery) to welcome passengers back on the first day of service and advertisements in publications targeted at young families and Senior Citizens.

The core funding has also facilitated the booking of a professional photographer to cover the resumption of the partial train service in November 2023 and the launch of the full service, providing MVCRP with a library of high quality images for future use. A special

charter cruise on the John Bunyan Community Boat was arranged for the Friends of Ridgmont Station in September 2023 to mark the start of their 10th Anniversary Year.

The MVCRP Officer attended the Avanti West Coast Community Rail Conference held at Warrington on 14th December 2023, which proved to be a really interesting and enjoyable event with the additional benefit of networking from being in person. Avanti complimentary tickets were used for travel.

We look forward to continuing to work with Avanti West Coast, in particular running Feel Good Field Trips for schools on the Avanti network to venues including Ridgmont Station Heritage Centre and the Forest of Marston Vale.



## Feedback from our CRPs



### Mid Cheshire CRP

The financial support which Avanti West Coast provides allows the Mid Cheshire CRP to develop projects which bring benefit to communities along the mid Cheshire Line and in particular at Stockport.

Last year we part funded a frog statue outside Stockport station, which was part of a frog themed art trail around the town. This helped to attract visitors to the town and its station and provided a fun activity for local children during the school holidays to follow the trail and discover all the statues. We were also given the opportunity to distribute our publicity on the station concourse and are allowed to have a permanent stand in the ticket office where we can leave our rail walk brochures.

This year we are planning to use funds towards transforming a large shrubbed border at the station into a bee friendly garden. This will increase biodiversity at the station, allow engagement with the local community in maintaining the garden and will enhance the appearance of the station. There are also plans to part fund some artwork for the under pass at the station to help transform it into a warm welcoming space to use.

Avanti West Coast also provide support through inviting our CRP to their conferences so we can meet others in community rail and find out about all the exciting projects which they support. Help is also provided in the form of advice and guidance and a representative of Avanti West Coast always attends our steering group meetings. This allows us to maintain good communication which is crucial in the development of our projects.

As a member of the Cheshire Best Kept Stations Committee we have kindly been allowed to make use of the meeting room at Stockport station for our committee meetings and their support of this county wide competition is greatly appreciated.

We, at the Mid Cheshire CRP look forward to working closely with Avanti West Coast in the coming year.



### North Cheshire CRP

Avanti West Coast's ongoing support allows North Cheshire CRP to deliver various projects that benefit local communities along our line and promote community rail. The core funding we received in 2023 has helped us:

- Create and exhibit artwork at Chester Cathedral
- Celebrate Chester station's 175th anniversary
- Produce a town map of Frodsham and improve signage in the area
- Develop marketing materials to promote CRP
- Participate in sustainability events across Cheshire

Regional Growth Managers regularly attend CRP meetings, contributing to decision-making and providing important industry updates. They are supportive and enthusiastic about our project ideas.

We have many exciting projects planned for this year, and Avanti's financial support will help us bring them to life.

## Feedback from our CRPs



### North Staffordshire CRP

The North Staffordshire Community Rail Partnership has benefitted from core funding, project funding and wider support from Avanti West Coast this year. The core funding contributes to the work of the partnership in engaging with communities, education, improving stations, promoting rail travel and local attractions, overcoming barriers to travel and supporting station volunteers.

Avanti's project funding has enabled us to deliver a range of projects over the last twelve months including a guided Duck Bills trail for families that raised awareness of leisure travel and Family Railcards and promoted the heritage of Stoke town and the railway; a 100 year celebration of The North Staffordshire Railway Company at Stoke Station which included an event with a character guided tour of the station designed for all ages to build a positive experience of the station and raise awareness of how train travel works in a safe and playful way; and a poetry event at Crewe Station which saw three local schools create railway themed poems that were performed by pupils at the station and printed in a booklet that was given out to passengers. Over 380 people attended/participated in these three projects.

The Avanti team have been very supportive of other projects and activities that have been delivered this year including creating artwork and installing a large poetry mural at Crewe Station, designing artwork for the snap frame galleries at Stoke and Crewe Stations and designing a poetry booklet featuring poems from local schools. They have delivered safety briefings and careers sessions in our local schools, provided train

travel and station visits for schools, engaging them with the railway, promoting rail as a sustainable means of travel and providing information about safety on the railway. They have provided schools with Arlo Railway Safety books and donated reading books and they have also supported a number of our local schools with their Feel Good Field Trip programme giving pupils the opportunity to travel by train to access fun learning opportunities.

Station staff have also been supportive of the CRP activities and have provided safety briefings to station volunteers, including three new volunteers who started this year, hosted events at stations as well as supporting our activities for National Heritage Open Days by providing space at their stations for talks and delivering guided tours of Crewe Station.

## Feedback from our CRPs



### South East Lancashire CRP

South East Lancashire Community Rail Partnership are grateful to have received a range of support from Avanti West Coast over the past 12 months. Firstly, we are thankful for the essential annual core funding that contributes to the employment of our full-time officer to undertake both ongoing daily tasks and specific project management for the CRP.

Secondly, we are pleased to have also been granted Station Community funding for phase two of our ongoing Re-Greening Project at The Swan and Railway Hotel opposite Wigan North Western station, which sustained the maintenance of our newly created wildflower meadow with beehives, and also facilitated the development of wider community engagement, working with local schools and volunteers to ensure longevity of the project beyond the funding period. Specific outputs centered around providing long lasting impact through use of the outdoor learning

area created in the initial phase and developed with additional facilities in phase two, which provides a space for ongoing engagement with schools and young people through activities including honey collection, arts and learning about the environment.

As well as financial support, South East Lancashire Community Rail Partnership also values the relationships that have been built and maintained between Avanti staff and the CRP, in particular with our CRP Officer. Additionally, we are grateful to have been invited to speak at the latest Community Rail Conference as an opportunity to share our work and learn about other fantastic initiatives being supported by Avanti West Coast. We value greatly the ability to approach, ask for assistance and input from Avanti in a variety of ways, and are pleased to continue into this financial year with Avanti West Coast as a key stakeholder for our Community Rail Partnership.



### Rail 74 CRP

We are delighted that Avanti have supported and contributed to our main achievements, which are:

Well attended and engaging meetings supporting local groups growing our awareness of community rail across our areas.

Another year of successful funding bids for projects within Lanarkshire, building relationships with our train operator supporters: Avanti West Coast, Cross-country and Scotrail.

Ensuring our governance of the charity is strong, building our reputation and partnerships to do good in our communities whilst supporting Scotland's railways thrive.

Creating our very own TikTok channel to showcase the work we do sharing the love and learning with other CRPs around Scotland and the UK Into 2024.

Celebrating at award ceremonies for Community Rail Network, Scotrail and VASLAN (third sector interface) for our entries supporting the community and promoting Scotland's Railways. Winning a Scotrail CRP member of the year award for Suzie Mccheyne's development work in project delivery. Shortlisted for 2 UK community rail awards through CRN and shortlisted for partnership working in local area.

Completion of Hope in Hamilton Project which provided an engaged art piece through the journey of workshops for local people to get involved with an aim to support mental wellbeing, raise awareness of suicide prevention and completion of an art installation. This has included press releases, community consultation, various local groups involvement, Samaritans support and guidance, positive mantras catalogue from local people & refurbishment of unused carriages.

## Feedback from our CRPs



### Settle Carlisle Railway Development Company

The financial and non-financial support provided by Avanti West Coast has enabled the Settle Carlisle Railway Development Company to provide a better customer experience when connecting with their services.

Their support enables us to provide an enhanced service, including the refreshment trolley, for customers connecting at Carlisle station from West Yorkshire and Scotland. Our trolley service also provides information on connections to help customers.

We are grateful for the support of Avanti West Coast in providing our line guide which allows customers to learn about the early controversy surrounding the railway's construction and historical facts about the towns, villages and landscapes found along the railway line.



### Tyne Valley CRP

Avanti's funding, both core and project has again been very valuable for Tyne Valley Community Rail Partnership.

The core funding helps support our Rail Officer to deliver several work streams which include:

#### Education

Our work with schools continues and the range of curriculum topics which we can support is developing. We are now offering WW2 evacuation days, geography fields and more are in development. This is important to ensure that we can encourage teaching staff to see that a day out exploring rail travel and safety can be part of the core curriculum.

#### Inclusion and Diversity

Over recent years, we have funded a singer-songwriter, Gareth, to work with refugees, asylum seekers and vulnerable groups to help the groups explore attractions from the route. After the day out, the groups have another couple of sessions with Gareth to write a song about their experiences of travelling by rail. We are now recording the legacy from our various Lyric and Line projects in the form of five exhibition panels, complete with QR codes linking back to the music written. Hopefully the Lyric and Line story will encourage other groups to explore by rail. We are pleased that we have already had interest from Northumberland National Park to take a set of boards for display at The Sill.

#### Promotion of the route

Promoting the line, despite ongoing industrial action, continues. Our new leaflet, Rovers and Rangers has been popular and attendance at events such as Hadrian's Wall Networking Day have seen our stand be very busy. Working with World Heritage UK, we have been producing a national leaflet on using rail to visit World Heritage Sites.

#### Project funding

Our project to create a café/makers shop in the old Water Tower in Haltwhistle is reaching completion and Planning and Listed Building consents have delayed this project beyond initial estimates, as has allowing plastering to 'cure!' The capital grants for the cafe will contribute to increasing TVCRP's sustainability. Likewise, the Haltwhistle waiting rooms re-development project is, we believe, in the final weeks.

# Principles of Funding



Community Rail Network are once again happy to support the proposed allocations of CRP core funding (the 'CRP Amount') as detailed.

We confirm that these amounts were discussed with us, and that sufficient account has been taken of our views around the need to protect this and make long-term core funding commitments to help CRPs plan for the future.

The commitment by Avanti West Coast at all levels of their business to fully support the growth of Community Rail and station adoption is evident through the provision of a dedicated Community Rail Project fund and Station Community Fund and support by their team of Regional Growth Managers.

The Community Rail Manager is fully supportive of the overall aims of Community Rail and has a very positive relationship with Community Rail Network and each of the CRPs through regular catch-up meetings and an annual Community Rail conference.

**Paul Webster**  
Regional Support Manager  
Community Rail Network



# Project Funding

In accordance with the Franchise Agreement, we 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 previously detailed 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 2023/24 we committed £70,176 to support the delivery of eleven projects, details of which can be found in the Key Highlights section of this report.

Avanti West Coast and the Department for Transport are committed to supporting CRP Projects in future years.

# Core Funding

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

Community Rail Partnership	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>

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