

Community Rail Consultation

Submission from Transport Focus

Transport Focus welcomes the opportunity to comment on the above consultation.

We support Community Rail Partnerships (CRP) and agree they bring benefits as set out in the 2015 ACORP report on the Value of Community Rail Partnerships¹. This report shows that they can be extremely successful, evidenced by the increased footfall at stations along CRP lines and that the costs of running CRPs are less than the additional revenues they bring into the industry.

We believe CRPs offer distinctive attributes to local rail compared with other parts of the national rail network, including:

- creating a sense of involvement
- information and marketing activities
- implementing local schemes
- providing a focus for investment.

Passengers expect the stations they use to be welcoming and attractive. Local involvement, by community groups, and supported by the railway industry and local government, can achieve significant improvements in the attractiveness of stations, in stimulating community engagement with the railway and the use of redundant station buildings by local businesses and organisations, including those involved in local tourism.

Transport Focus's role means we are especially interested in how CRPs can help to improve the experience for passengers. Of course community rail's aims are not limited to this area, but the work CRPs do, for example to improve station environments for existing passengers, is very important and should continue to be communicated to local stakeholders. Rail passengers are one of CRPs key local stakeholders and CRPs should continue to seek opportunities to strengthen their engagement with them to better understand their priorities and seek their views and input into local projects. As users of the trains and stations, as well as members of the local community, passengers have a strong interest in CRPs work.

Passengers expect transport to be integrated – which should, of course, mean that it is more effective in attracting users as well as being more useful. Innovative

¹ <https://acorp.uk.com/research-projects/research/value-of-community-rail-partnerships/pdf>

marketing schemes have become the hallmark for community rail. Local enthusiasm is a powerful tool in generating links with visitor attractions that can be accessed from local stations. Increasing 'localism' should help this task, and improve accessibility in rural areas and passengers' end to end journeys.

The Value of Community Partnerships report also suggests that security of funding, the employment of a CRP Officer, good communications and marketing, and creating productive partnerships are key to the success of a CRP. While volunteers can provide important back-up through 'additionality', for example looking after station gardens and assisting with catering services.

We welcome the emphasis in franchising on supporting and working with CRPs. Not only is it important that funding and dedicated staff are written into franchise bids, but also, perhaps just as important is building working with CRPs into rail industry managerial structures. Proper local engagement requires not only finance, but also senior management buy-in and a culture in favour of working with local groups.

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