

Response to Department for Transport Community Rail Consultation

January 2018

Introduction

Campaign for Better Transport is a leading charity and environmental campaign group that promotes sustainable transport policies. Our vision is a country where communities have affordable transport that improves quality of life and protects the environment.

Campaign for Better Transport strongly supports community rail and welcomes the Government's support for it and for the partnerships that underpin it. We want to see community rail developed and broadly support the themes and topics in the consultation development. We have seen the response to the consultation from the Association of Community Rail Partnerships and support the points it makes. We would like to see the community rail designation used more creatively by the Government and the rail industry to develop local rail services and lines in cost effective ways using standards appropriate to those lines.

Response to consultation questions

Theme A: Connecting people to places and opportunities

We have noted and welcomed the growth on community rail lines above the general growth in rail travel general. We support the argument in 3.8 that there is scope for community rail to engage with sub-national transport bodies, and would urge the Government to set this out in more detail to SNBs.

Question 1a: What role can community rail play in improving end-to-end journeys?

Question 1b: How can community rail help to make journeys more sustainable, encourage more healthy travel and reduce the environmental impact of travel?

There are huge opportunities for improving end-to-end journeys with community rail. In particular, the new Bus Services Act gives new opportunities to improve links between rail and bus services. The joint ticketing, open data and enhanced and advanced partnership provisions in this Act could be applied to the areas served by community rail services. The best example so far planned for using these powers is the Cornwall Council "One public transport" initiative - <https://www.cornwall.gov.uk/media/26752828/one-public-transport-diagram.pdf>, with single smart tickets for residents and visitors <https://www.cornwall.gov.uk/transport-and-streets/public-transport/ongoing-developments/one-ticket/>, an integrated network between buses and trains and a single brand. We would like to see this kind of initiative rolled out to other areas, with community rail lines used as the spines for integrated public transport networks. We expect other areas to develop such initiatives as they consider opportunities available to them with the Bus Services Act. In addition, if bus franchising powers are used by or made available to authorities with community rail lines in their areas, there will be opportunities to integrate bus and rail franchising. We would like the Government to actively explore with community rail partnerships the opportunities arising from the Bus Services Act, and potentially fund pilots to develop bus-rail co-ordination using powers in the Act.

We have also supported the idea of station travel plans, looking holistically at travel to and from stations and identifying ways to manage traffic, reduce single-occupancy car use and give people more choice in accessing stations. We believe that this framework offers opportunities for improving sustainable and healthy travel to and from stations.

We echo ACORP's suggestions for improving end-to-end journeys through joining community rail up in partnerships, cross departmental working and improving the affordability of public transport. We also agree with the need to improve bureaucratic and practical barriers to achieving improvements around stations and better connectivity with other modes. Too often, small but important improvements founder due to a lack of clarity on responsibilities and ownership, especially with stations where the current structure of shared ownership and leases between Network Rail and train operators can inhibit progress. Community Rail Partnerships should in theory be obvious places to make progress on small improvements but sometimes the key stakeholders in stations are not involved. The Network Rail recent proposals on third party funding could help here.

Question 2: How can community rail help:

a. Communities have a voice in influencing the provision of rail?

b. Complementary transport services and development of the rail network?

We support the points made in ACORP's response about the potential for involving communities in developing local rail networks. In particular, we support the comments made on involving those promoting developments near community rail lines. We have identified in various research reports the potential for using local rail lines to serve new housing and commercial developments – see http://www.bettertransport.org.uk/sites/default/files/research-files/Getting_there_final_web_0.pdf and <http://www.bettertransport.org.uk/sites/default/files/pdfs/Tracks-Development-Around-Stations.pdf>.

Question 3: Where should the Government encourage community rail to develop on parts of the network currently without active CRPs or other community participation?

We agree with ACORP that there are opportunities for the Government to help ACORP use its expertise more strategically across the rail network as a whole to involve local communities in their local rail services. There are also opportunities to involve communities in shaping local services as part of franchising processes – we have argued for franchising to become more outward facing and focused on involving stakeholders as well as passengers, and indeed produced a guide to franchising in response to concerns about this. <http://www.bettertransport.org.uk/sites/default/files/research-files/franchising-guide.pdf>.

We would like to see the Government help ACORP reach out to the wider voluntary and community sector, building on what it is already doing, and seek involvement in local rail services from community, parish and neighbourhood councils, community development trusts and others who could develop community rail. There is a specific opportunity for neighbourhood plans to give community rail more support, and this could be developed with appropriate funding.

Theme B: supporting communities, diversity and inclusion

Question 4a: What is the role of community rail in supporting:

- **Community cohesion?**
- **Promoting diversity?**
- **Enabling social inclusion?**

Question 4b: How is this best achieved?

We support the ACORP responses on this, around supporting volunteering, social and creative activities, educational work, and targeted programmes for groups with specific needs. We also strongly support the development of stations as community hubs; there is now plenty of good

practice in this, and we would like to see new frameworks to make this easier. We return to this below.

Question 5: How can community rail help to make sure that the railway is accessible to as many people as possible?

Alongside the good practice identified by ACORP, there is a lot of good practice on local and devolved rail services in making the railway accessible – see for example <https://tfl.gov.uk/modes/dlr/dlr-ambassadors> and <https://www.merseyrail.org/about-merseyrail/environment/supporting-the-local-environment.aspx>. We echo ACORP's proposal for major review and action plan in this area, in collaboration between DfT, ACORP, disability groups and others.

Theme C: Supporting local and regional economies

Question 6: How can community rail support local economies and railways grow through:

- Increasing employment?
- Education and training opportunities?
- Supporting small businesses?
- Social enterprise development?

We agree with the consultation document and with ACORP's response that there are huge opportunities here. Community rail offers opportunities for local regeneration and job creation with community support – this is likely to be more sustainable (in economic and environmental terms) than the larger scale development often promoted by economic development partnerships, LEPs etc. Development companies on lines such as the Heart of Wales and Settle-Carlisle have shown the potential for this. In practice there is an opportunity to integrate community rail and ACORP more closely with the Transport Knowledge Hub being run to help Local Enterprise Partnerships find out about opportunities and good practice in the transport sector. ACORP's response refers particularly to local tourism and food businesses that community rail can support, and we endorse this. We suggest that DfT should actively promote community rail-led regeneration and development to LEPs.

Question 7: What role can community rail play in making best use of:

- Station buildings?
- Railway land?

We have promoted the concept of local rail partnerships as means to enable this – see http://www.bettertransport.org.uk/sites/default/files/research-files/Local_Rail_Partnerships.pdf. There are opportunities for using neighbourhood plans to give formal support for community uses of station buildings and railway land. The increasing interest in promoting high density development around stations, using the powers of the Homes and Communities Agency to assemble land, should be integrated with community rail where possible so as to ensure developments have community consent and make the best use of buildings and land. We support ACORP's concern about creating a sharp distinction between community and commercial uses of railway land and buildings, and the barriers this can put up to community use. The use of community land trusts and community development trusts may be ways round this problem.

Theme D: Suggesting innovative ways to improve the way the railway works

Question 8: How can community rail be best supported to act:

- Innovatively?
- Effectively?

We support the points made by ACORP on the ways to develop capacity among CRPs and all those active on community involvement in rail lines, and the need for DfT and the rail industry to

support ACORP in developing that capacity. We also strongly support ACORP's view that "innovation" in community rail should be seen broadly, not just in technical and infrastructure innovations but covering anything community-minded, so related to community engagement, communications, accessibility and affordability. The issue of innovation relates to q 11 below.

Question 9: What opportunities are there to secure a:

- **Diverse income base for community rail?**
- **Sustainable income base for community rail?**

We endorse the proposals made by ACORP in its response on this question. In particular, we support ACORP's suggestion that it work with DfT to draw on wider third sector insights and input from across Government, and agree it could be beneficial to work with partners such as NCVO and NAVCA to develop a robust long term development strategy. Unlike other sectors, transport has few national non-governmental organisations, and DfT has less experience in helping NGOs develop than other government departments whose remit has a much larger NGO sector. Campaign for Better Transport would be happy to be involved in such discussions and offer support where appropriate.

We also think there may be opportunities for community rail to diversify its income base through links with wider community transport organisations. As noted in our response to question 1, the Bus Services Act opens up opportunities for integrated public transport, and there have been many suggestions that transport services might be provided through social enterprise (see for example <http://www.hctgroup.org/docs/Innovation%20in%20transport%20procurement.pdf>). We suggest that HCT group and other social enterprises be involved in discussions on development of a long term community rail strategy.

Question 10: How can community rail designation be developed to more fully realise its potential?

Question 11: How can community rail:

- **Support the development of rail line and stations improvement?**
- **Contribute to the development of rail line and station improvement?**
- **Make greater use of heritage railways?**

We take these two questions together because we believe they are linked. Community Rail designation originally had as one of its intentions the enabling of innovation through flexibility around regulations. As ACORP notes in its response, this intention has not been fully realised. However, this can and should be revisited now, because of changes taking place in the railway as a whole, and especially in Network Rail. NR is undergoing structural change with devolution of responsibility and project oversight to Route Managing Directors. These have at least in theory the flexibility to move away from rigid adherence to group standards towards more appropriate route/project specific standards. This fits with pressure to reduce costs and improve project delivery. Along with this, NR is actively encouraging third party funding, financing and delivery of rail projects – see <https://www.networkrail.co.uk/industry-commercial-partners/third-party-investors/network-rail-open-business/>.

These trends appear to fit well with more active community involvement in the development of the railway. ACORP's response gives details of the community involvement in reinstating a service between Wareham and Swanage and the evolution of the groups such as TransWilts CRP linked to expansion of the rail network. However, there appear to us to be greater opportunities here – to use the community rail designation as originally intended to enable cost-effective upgrades through applying regulations and standards more flexibly and innovatively. We suggest that the Government work with Network Rail and ACORP to pilot a more flexible approach on a community rail designated line to see if in a project such as a new or expanded station, derogation from full group standards (while fully ensuring safety of staff and users) can reduce costs, create wider social and community value, and potentially attract funding from community sources.

More generally, we have been deeply involved in supporting the extension of the rail network, most recently through the publication "Expanding the Railways" <http://www.bettertransport.org.uk/sites/default/files/research-files/expanding-the-railways.pdf> and we have welcomed recent Government support for new/ reopened lines and stations. We agree with ACORP on the need for and advantage of community rail involvement in expansion projects. We largely agree with ACORP that providing commercial services on heritage railways is fraught with challenges, though having recently surveyed this we have identified a few opportunities where new commercial and housing development may support a conventional rail service on a heritage line. We believe that such opportunities would be best taken forward with a development fund for extending the railway, which we have proposed separately, so that opportunities for new services and stations on heritage lines can be treated on the same basis as those on the rest of the rail network.

We also note and welcome ACORP's suggestion of closer working with us and Railfuture to create better links between community rail and rail user/ campaign groups, and we are keen to explore this further.

In summary, we welcome this consultation and see the potential for community rail to link the railway industry more closely to the communities it serves, and to maximise the social economic and environmental value of the railway to those communities.

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Campaign for Better Transport

Campaign for Better Transport's vision is a country where communities have affordable transport that improves quality of life and protects the environment. Achieving our vision requires substantial changes to UK transport policy which we aim to achieve by providing well-researched, practical solutions that gain support from both decision-makers and the public.

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