

# What is community rail? A framework for steering group members



This guidance is for Line Officers, Line Chairs, Vice-Chairs, and Steering Group members. We share the primary aim of working together to build the Community part of Community Rail.

## Who We Are

In the 1990s, Railways were privatised and operated by the current franchise system. At the time, the government still wanted people to feel a local connection and ownership of the railways. They invited groups to set up community rail partnerships (CRPs) in their local area. In 2004, two of these local groups created Sussex Communities Rail Partnership Ltd.

Today, we are Southeast Communities Rail Partnership CIC (SCRP CIC). As of 2025, we have expanded to operate ten community rail lines and two education projects. We remain an independent not-for-profit organisation.

## What is Community Rail?

The SCRП is part of a national network, (Community Rail Network- CRN), of over 75 community rail partnerships (locally based community organisations). We are part of 1,300 station volunteer groups and other community-led initiatives across Britain. We engage and empower communities, helping them get the most from their railways. All community rail partnerships operate within an established framework.

## Oversight by The Department for Transport (DfT)

The DfT requires all community rail groups to:

1. Provide a voice for the community
2. Promote sustainable, healthy, and accessible travel
3. Bring communities together and support diversity and inclusion
4. Support social and economic development

SCRП employs Line Officers to support community development projects at stations. Steering groups are essential to this work, as they bring together rail professionals, local government, and community groups to work within this framework. The DfT requires community rail partnerships (CRPs) to produce an activity plan that prioritises work and identifies funding for the year while remaining flexible enough to respond to good ideas and changing priorities.



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The DfT also requires partnerships to demonstrate financial competence and good governance through an accreditation process. Accreditation is renewed on an annual basis.

SCRП employs Line Officers to carry out the work prioritised in the activity plan and support the Steering Group. The Line Officer is managed by the SCRП, not the Steering Group. There is a small supervisory/management team Line Officer Team Manager, Deputy CEO and Finance Officer and a Chief Executive. The SCRП board, comprised of volunteer directors, sets the overall strategy of the organisation.

Grants are obtained from train operating companies (TOCs) to cover employment costs. Applications are made to a range of different funders to cover project costs.

## What is a Line Officer?

As part of their job, Line Officers carry out an activity plan. This is created each year with the help of the Train Operating Companies and community representatives through the Steering Group. Line Officers report progress on delivering the Line Action Plan at each Steering Group meeting. Quarterly updates are sent to the Train Operating Companies and other stakeholders.

Southeast CRP CIC employs Line Officers. Should concerns related to staffing, employment, or any other work-related issues arise, these should be brought to our Senior Line Officer, deputy CEO and CEO.

We value the contributions of Steering Group members and Line Chairs/Vice-Chairs in supporting Line Officers to carry out the action plan. The focus of the Steering Group is to help deliver community impact. The Line Officer's priorities and workload are formally set during our grant process with TOCs as Key Performance Indicators., (KPIs) which means the Steering Group cannot amend them.

## The Role of the Steering Group

This is set out in the [terms of reference](#).

The SCRП invites volunteers to be appointed to chair the meetings..

Members are drawn from the local community and stakeholders. The objective is to bring stakeholders together to share information, develop projects and support community initiatives that will encourage more people to travel by train. The focus is on community development. There are other groups whose primary focus is on service issues. We try not to duplicate each other's efforts and use the correct



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forums to progress timetable issues. We have achieved positive results as a consequence.

## Stakeholders

### Train operating companies and Network Rail.

The role of railway professionals who attend Steering Groups is to help local communities enhance the station environment and improve the train experience through physical and social accessibility schemes. They also update the Steering Group on significant works that will impact services. They are not responsible for timetabling decisions. Their key role is to help stakeholders navigate the complex environment of the rail industry and connect groups to the Steering Group.

### Local Government

The role of local government representatives (usually transport planners) is to liaise with locally elected councillors and work cooperatively with all stakeholders and community groups. They share knowledge about local initiatives, planning applications and accessing local and national funding pots to progress community projects.

### Community Rail Network (CRN)

As noted above, CRN is the national trade body for community rail partnerships. Individual station adopters can join for a small fee to access training, awards, conferences, and the small projects fund. SCRP is an accredited member of this organisation and can access these services and funds for more extensive projects through the Community Rail Development Fund (CRDF). This is dependent on match funding at a certain level. A regional staff member attends Steering Group meetings.

### Funding

SCRP receives core funding from the various TOCs in the area in which it operates to cover the employment costs of Line Officers. This is done on an annual basis for now.

Project costs are met by Line Officers and/or station groups applying to a range of funders. These may include:

- Customer and Community Improvement Funds (CCIFs). These are available for TOCs on an annual basis



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- [Community Rail Small Grants Fund](#) currently goes up from £1,000 to £2,500. This funding scheme is taken up quickly and runs out early in the year.
- Community Rail Development Fund as above, only accredited partnerships can apply
- Local funds from charities and local councils.
- Lottery grants
- Special initiatives like walking and cycling programmes

## Reporting

SCRIP is required to seek accreditation on an annual basis. SCRIP publishes a yearly review, case studies, and news reports on various media platforms.

All funders require us to report on outcomes and confirm that funds were used correctly.

We have also started using the Rail Social Value Tool (RSVT) to measure our impact. For example our Go Learn Education project generates £8 million in added social value annually.

## How to achieve your idea:

The rail industry is complicated. You may have the TOC or Network Rail responsible for all or part of the station. Gaining permission from the correct party is an essential first step in seeing through a project. Some of the land adjacent to the station, such as walls, station forecourts, buildings, hoardings, etc., are the responsibility of a range of different groups such as the TOCs, Network Rail, local authorities, or individuals, or leased to private companies. The Line Officer can signpost to the correct authority and help obtain permissions but cannot give permission for work to be carried out.

Essential things to do if you have a great idea to connect people to their local railway station.

1. Write down what you want to do and identify risks and opportunities
2. Find out if there is an existing group and/or community rail partnership connected to the station
3. Prepare a project plan. Include data collection methods for reporting.
4. Form a Friends of Station Group or join an existing group if necessary. A constituted group will attract expertise and provide a body that can apply for and receive grants



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5. Share ideas with the Steering group and/or community manager who looks after the line
6. Find out from the station/community manager and Line Officer what permissions you need to have to carry out the work. Obtain written permissions.
7. Consult with the broader community and gain community support
8. Finalise the project plan and liaise with the Line Officer to move to the implementation phase
9. Monitor progress and ask for help from stakeholders
10. Celebrate achievements and report on impact

The SCRП will do what it can to support your good ideas come to fruition within the framework and funding opportunities set out above. We welcome involvement from diverse groups and stakeholders and look forward to welcoming you to the Steering Group and supporting your project.



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