

hPRESENTATION TO THE APPG ON RURAL AFFAIRS

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ACoRP – The Association of Community Rail Partnerships - is a not-for-profit national representative body for the 40 or so community rail partnerships (CRPs) across the UK.

We provide support for existing and new partnerships, maintain several grant funds, spread best practice through publications, conferences and presentations and work with government and the rail industry on how rural and local rail services might best be developed.

We are funded and supported predominantly by the Department for Transport (DfT) but also by the Welsh Government, Network Rail and the Association of Train Operating Companies, together with a number of other authorities and sectors of the railway industry.

Until recently, our remit only extended to England and Wales but recent discussions indicate that the Scottish Government are also likely to move to support ACoRP and the concept of community rail partnerships. ACoRP's work has also been recognised in other countries such as the US, India and Europe

Community Rail Partnerships are bottom-up organisations that link the railway with the community it serves. The partnerships usually include representatives from the local train operator and local authority but will frequently also involve parishes, local schools, health organisations, universities and any other group that has the interests of the community at its centre.

CRPs are not lobbying organisations, the key phrase being 'co-operation not confrontation'. Their success is in working with the rail industry to

provide positive support and ideas which will help develop their local rail services for the benefit of all.

In 2004, the Strategic Rail Authority, with help from ACoRP, developed the Community Rail Development Strategy. Recognised as a new way of supporting and developing rural and local rail services, it was adopted by government and remains a key rail policy within DfT today. The four key objectives are to:

- increase patronage and hence revenue;
- manage down costs;
- encourage greater involvement of local communities;
- contribute to social and economic regeneration.

CRPs are localism in action and engaging with communities can create a much greater 'buy-in' which benefits both the railway and local populace. This is particularly true with station adoption groups.

Stations are the gateway to both the railway and the community it serves and having infrastructure that people will want to use is important to both. As well as encouraging volunteers to look after their local station, ACoRP's Community Stations Initiative looks at ways of using railway property which is unwanted and has little or no commercial value. A number of community groups have found premises in this way, bringing life and a presence to many otherwise unstaffed locations.

In this and many other ways, CRPs have demonstrated the value of their work, not least in reducing vandalism and trespass. They also help address environmental, personal health and regeneration issues and work with other transport providers to encourage better integration across all modes.

As an increasing number of services become more centralised, it's also vital to consider how rural populations can access colleges, hospitals and

training facilities, without undue cost penalty. CRPs work closely with other agencies to ensure that local rail is always considered as a key transport mode.

In rural areas, young people under 17 are often the most disenfranchised, with little or no public transport available to enable them to live independent lives. This is the next generation of rail travellers and we ignore them at our peril. If rural communities are to be sustainable, we need to find ways of encouraging young people to return from university or training with skills they can use in their home locale. Little or no public transport will not provide that encouragement.

A report commissioned by ACoRP (*'The Value of Community Rail Partnerships'*) showed that for every £1 invested, a well-run CRP can return £4.60 benefit.

A second report (*'The Value of Community Rail Volunteering'*) demonstrated that community rail volunteers supply a staggering £27m per annum added-value to the rail industry

Since 2007 -08, five community rail lines have delivered growth of more than 70%, with the top two showing increases of 123% and 110% respectively. Over the same period, this compares favourably with Network growth of 19.9% and Regional growth of 19.3%

Community rail delivers a lot with very little and there is a need to appreciate that local rail provides a completely different service to the main network and meets far more basic needs. In short, community rail allows local communities to thrive and survive and this needs to be recognised by other agencies and government departments.

Additional Information

- **ACoRP** website – www.acorp.uk.com
- **DfT** Community Rail web pages - www.dft.gov.uk/topics/community-rail
- **Network Rail** Community Rail web pages -
www.networkrail.co.uk/aspx/983.aspx
www.networkrail.co.uk/5848_Communityschemeupdate.pdf
- There are over 40 CRPs across the UK
- There are 50 Station Adoption Groups currently registered as members with ACoRP. We suspect there are many more.
- There are currently 32 routes designated as Community Rail lines under the government's Community Rail Development Strategy.
- The ACoRP reports 'The Value of Community Rail Partnerships' and 'The Value of Community Rail Volunteering' can both be downloaded in PDF format from www.acorp.uk.com/projects.html

Neil Buxton

General Manager

Association of Community Rail Partnerships

T: 01947 811800

E: neil@acorp.uk.com