# North Cheshire COMMUNITY RAIL

# Our Strategy

## Introduction

This strategy results from an extensive period of discovery and consultation with our existing Partners, potential stakeholders and consideration of the potential opportunities for the North Cheshire Community Rail Partnership (The Partnership) which took place over the Autumn/Winter of 2024/2025.

As part of the development work, the Partnership resolved to transition its governance arrangements from an unincorporated Association hosted by the University of Chester to a newly formed and registered Community Interest Company (CIC).

Whilst the CIC forms the "engine" for leading and managing the Partnership and its activities, the success of the strategy is critically dependent on the wider partnerships that are described within it.

As with any good strategy we will monitor the outcomes and review both the results and the way we do things to ensure that we can achieve the benefits for our communities that we aspire to.

The strategy's execution can only be achieved through the passion and dedication of the grassroots volunteering that we seek to nurture and grow.   We hope that you find the strategy both interesting and of real relevance to our communities.

*Chris Kimberley & Mark Warren, Directors, North Cheshire Community Rail Partnership CIC*

## Introduction: Community Rail – a national movement for the good of all

Community rail is engaging **125,000** people annually in a huge array of activities worth **£129million** in social value to communities across Britain. The grassroots movement is playing a key role in putting local railways and stations at the heart of inclusive, empowered, sustainable and healthy communities, and from funding of just over £7.2million, is producing a social return on investment of **£17.89 per £1 spent**.[1]

Community rail helps communities derive value from their local railways and stations. It delivers far-reaching and life-changing benefits around increasing access to opportunity, building social inclusion and connectedness, promoting sustainable travel and tourism, enhancing health and wellbeing, and stimulating local economic development.

Around Britain, there are:

- 75+ community rail partnerships, small community-based organisations working along railway routes to connect communities with the railway, promoting their line(s) delivering empowering and enabling initiatives, and helping railway and transport partners put communities at the forefront.

- 1,200+ station friends or adoption groups made up of 10,000+ volunteers, bringing people together through volunteering, community gardening, arts projects and other community-led activities, and creating pride in stations and bringing them into the heart of community life.

- 100+ 'community stations' where the community has spearheaded the development and repurposing of station buildings and spaces, such as for social enterprises and community meeting spaces, turning these stations into thriving community hubs.



For more information on the national Community Rail Network please see Home - Community Rail Network

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[1] The Value of Community Rail Report – September 2024 Link here: Layout 1
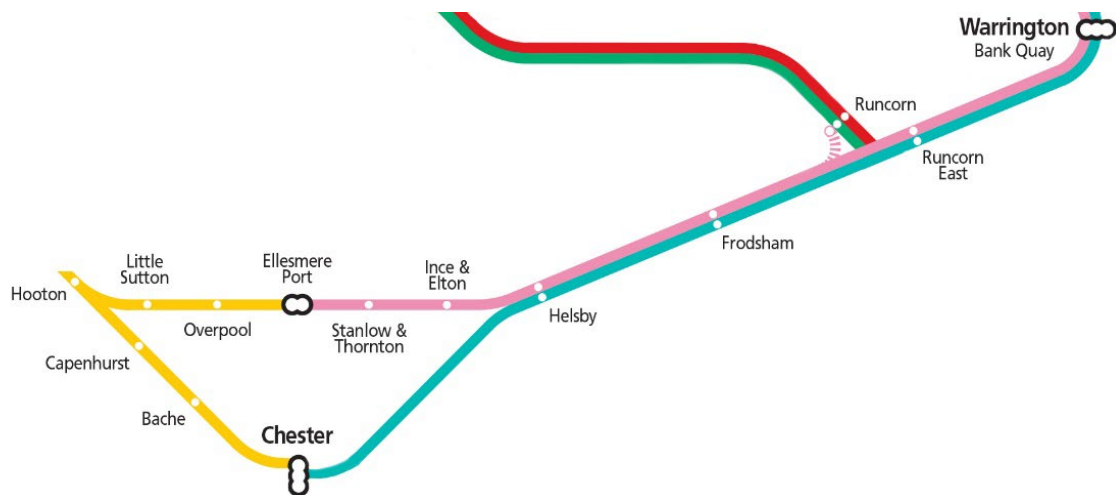
# North Cheshire Community Rail Partnership - Who we are

We are a partnership of various public, private and voluntary sector organisations who have a common Vision to play a positive and proactive part in the communities of North Cheshire, Halton and Warrington.

Our geographic scope is shown in the map below:



The current Partners are:

Academia

- University of Chester

Community based organisations

- North Cheshire Community Rail Partnership CIC
- North Cheshire Rail Users Group

Local authorities

- Cheshire West and Chester Council
- Halton Borough Council
- Warrington Borough Council

Railway industry

- Avanti West Coast (Core Funding Partner)
- Merseyrail
- Network Rail
- Northern Trains (Core Funding Partner)
- Transport for Wales

In addition to the individual local authority plans covering transport and wider community services within the Partnership area, the regional context for the specification and provision of railway services includes:

- Transport for the North's (TfN) overarching Strategic Transport Plan which sets the vision, strategic ambitions and the North's long term strategic priorities up to 2050 Strategic Transport Plan | Transport for the North - Transport for the North
- Liverpool City Region Combined Authority's strategies and transport plans, especially in so far as they relate to the development of Merseyrail services and associated sustainable travel choices Transport | Liverpool City Region Combined Authority (liverpoolcityregion-ca.gov.uk)
- Specifications agreed between the Department for Transport and the Welsh Government for the development and provision of services operating between Liverpool/Manchester, Chester and North Wales
- The proposed devolution of some government functions, including transport, to a new Mayoral Strategic Authority embracing Cheshire and Warrington

Previous and current projects that the Partnership has helped to deliver have included

- Art in the park – physical installation of old railway signals in Castle Park, Frodsham
- Marketing support to help promote the new direct services to and from Runcorn and Liverpool
- Heritage day ay Ellesmere Port
- Volunteering at stations to improve their environments
- Produced and distributed cycling maps linking to Frodsham and Helsby stations
- Presentation of artwork displays at Chester cathedral
- Participation at a climate change conference
- Supporting Christmas events
- Engaging with Ince and Elton communities to facilitate an outdoor gym
- Facilitating collaborative research projects with University of Chester

**Now as we move forwards we have the ambition and the opportunity to build on these solid foundations, set out a bold Vision and a Strategy, and to engage with wider community focused stakeholders to enable success.**

More information about recent and current projects can be found here:

NCCRP - North Cheshire Community Rail Partnership (northcheshirecrp.org)

## Our Vision

## Everyone Proud of our Railways

**How will we know when we have achieved this?**

We will be successful when our diverse communities are proactively engaged with, and proud of, their railways because they recognise the contributions they make to:

- Place – a great place to live, study, or work in; and
- Sustainable economic and social development – enriching lives and allowing our part of Cheshire to thrive.

## Our Mission

As a Partnership our mission is to Identify, develop and deliver projects in support of the Vision, both directly as a Partnership and through enabling collaborative arrangements with wider community stakeholders.

## Our Core Aims

Our Core Aims reflect the UK Government's strategy for Community Rail:

- Providing a voice for the community ;
- Promoting sustainable, healthy and accessible travel;
- Bringing communities together and supporting diversity and inclusion;
- Supporting social and economic development

and specifically for our Partnership we have identified the following within our constitution[2]:

- Carry on activities which benefit communities in Cheshire West and Chester, Halton and Warrington, and in particular but without limitation to encourage collaboration such that those diverse communities are proactively engaged with, and proud of their railways because of the contribution that they make to being a great place to live, study or work in, and in the creation of environmentally sustainable economic and social development;
- Support the development of the railway stations within the Company's geographic area in order for them to thrive as welcoming environments that reassure and delight users, as well as being clear and effective gateways to and from their local communities;
- Promote community activity at stations;

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[2] As contained within the Community Interest Company Constitution

- Inform communities of the affordable travel choices available and to promote increasing accessibility to and usage of public and sustainable transport for the benefit of the people living in, working in or visiting north Cheshire and the communities surrounding the passenger railway lines operating between Chester and Hooton; Chester and Runcorn; Chester and Warrington and between Hooton and Helsby;
- Collaborate with partner organisations and the wider community to support the provision of facilities and services that improve health and wellbeing, particularly, but not limited to those communities which might otherwise feel isolated;
- Collaborate with educational and research organisations in the development of learning about the social, cultural and economic impacts of the railways, the benefits to employment and skills development and the role that they play in providing safe and sustainable forms of transportation for both passengers and goods
- Support the rail industry's goals and ambitions in making the railways safer and more secure, particularly, but not limited to its crime prevention, suicide prevention, anti-trespass and anti-social misbehaviour and vandalism programmes;

## We listen

For us to be successful we must listen and be constantly in a state of discovery.

Our approach is driven by understanding unfulfilled community needs and where the railway has the potential to play a part in meeting these in collaboration with other Partners.

We will also unashamedly learn from, and where relevant copy, best practice from other like-minded community groups and play an active part in the national Community Rail Network to understand the wider political, social, environmental and economic context of our work.

This strategy will continue to evolve as we develop and deliver initiatives, and measure the results of these in order to continuously improve.

## Our call to action

These are the four themes and twelve strategic outcomes which we will seek to develop and deliver through collaboration within the Partnership in order to deliver on our Vision and Core Aims. The twelve strategic outcomes will be measured through a "Results Dashboard"[3] with particular focus on Social Value impacts that all Partners can recognise.

## Stations in their Place

Outcomes:
- Welcoming environments that reassure and delight users
- Clear, effective gateways to and from their local communities
- Seamless way showing and integration with travel to and from the surrounding communities and organisations

## Access to, and promotion of, affordable journey opportunities

Outcomes:
- Knowledge and choice of affordable journey opportunities to and from the Partnership area
- Accessibility for all
- Effective marketing partnerships with leisure attractions encouraging visitor footfall and spend

## Facilities and services supporting health and well-being

Outcomes:
- Provision of opportunities for community volunteering and delivery of local charitable objectives
- Delivery of mental and physical welfare facilities within the railway estate
- Engaging diverse and "hard to reach" communities to ensure truly inclusive engagement

## Research and education

Outcomes:
- Enabling the delivery of railway related educational research requirements, especially but not limited to, the University of Chester
- A holistic schools engagement programme resulting in high awareness of the railway and its potential to enhance personal opportunities
- Curation of the social and economic history of our railways

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[3] The Dashboard will be developed in conjunction with Partners once the strategy is finalised

## Our Development and Delivery Plans

### Constitutional and Governance Arrangements

At the core of the Partnership is the North Cheshire Community Rail Partnership Community Interest Company (the "CIC"). The CIC will develop and maintain the wider network of collaborating Partners as set out in the Governance arrangements below. More details are set out in the Core Management Plan.

The diagram below provides a high-level summary of the Governance arrangement for the Partnership, It can be seen that there are effectively three elements to the overall arrangements:

1. The CIC itself – the legal entity at the centre of the Partnership, with its Leadership Team formed of the Directors, and the Operational Management of the Partnership led by the Community Rail Development Officer (CRO)
2. The Steering Group[4] – the primary group that brings the Partnership "to life" by incorporating the core funding partners with the CIC to give substance to the collaborative arrangements, to set the ambitions and priorities for the strategy, and to promote the Partnership and celebrate its successes. The Steering Group is critical to the successful governance of the Partnership.
3. The Full Partnership – the wider range of key stakeholders and collaborating Partners who engage with the Vision and strategy.
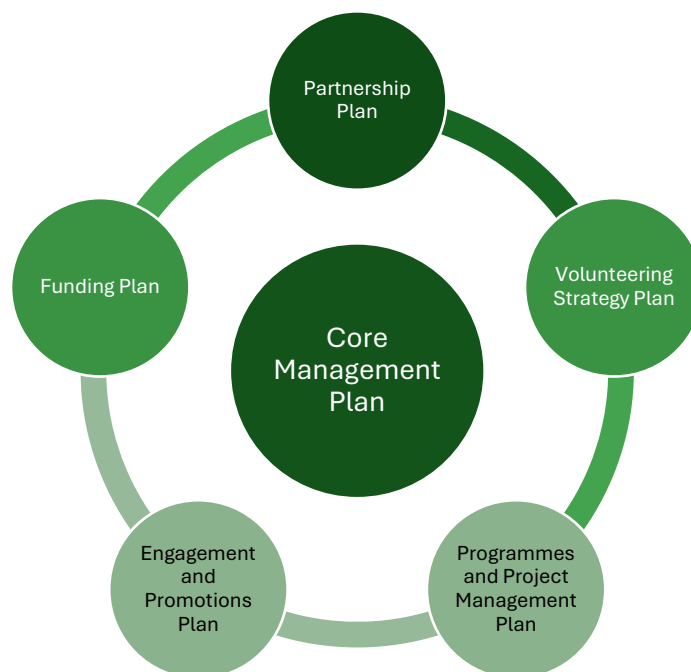


Governance Overview

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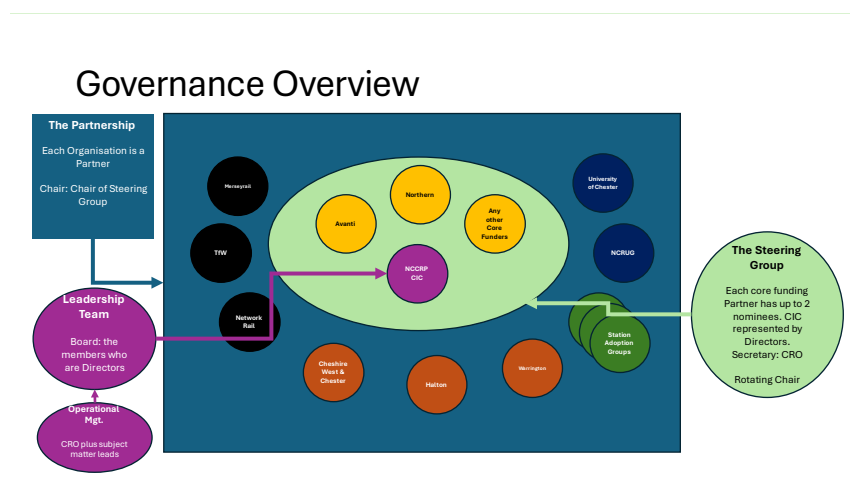
[4] The diagram is currently only illustrative of which Partners will want to be considered as part of the Steering Group and which ones participate solely as part of the Full Partnership. The detail will be resolved in conjunction with all Partners

North Cheshire COMMUNITY RAIL

Only the CIC is a formal entity and all rights, and obligations, are formally entered in to through the Company. The Steering Group and Full Partnership are advisory forums, although the CIC Board will be formally required to ensure that the Steering Group and the Full Partnership are effectively and efficiently administered, and that the guidance of the Steering Group is taken into account when updating this strategy and formulating annual business plans.

As the Partnership was previously an unincorporated association hosted by the University of Chester, this strategy assumes a short period of transition as financial and administrative arrangements for the CIC are implemented.

To deliver this strategy we have six interconnected Development and Delivery Plans as illustrated below.

Partnership Plan

Funding Plan

Volunteering Strategy Plan

Core Management Plan

Engagement and Promotions Plan

Programmes and Project Management Plan

Appendix A provides a summary of the purpose of each of the delivery plans.

APPENDIX A

SUMMARY OF THE DEVELOPMENT AND DELIVERY
PLANS

# Core Management Plan

## Purpose

a. Sets out the Constitution, Governance and Management Arrangements for the Partnership;
b. Establishes the resource requirements (financial, human and non-financial for the Partnership's core activities;
c. Provides for a Management Group formed of the Leadership Team to take accountability for this Strategy and its development, the continued accreditation of the Partnership and other management activities;
d. Establishes the basis for employment of employees and/or procurement of contractors and services.

## Outcomes

• The Partnership functions with good governance and is effective in managing development and delivery of its activities.

# Partnership Plan

## Purpose

a. Sets out the basis for identifying and engaging the Partners of the Partnership;
b. Identifies the needs of each Partner of the Partnership and seeks to establish the areas of mutual interest between Partners in order to ignite interest in collaborative Programmes and Projects;
c. Includes the basis of participation, and the working arrangements between the Management Group and the Partners;

## Outcomes

• The Plan drives Partner specific inputs to the Strategy enabling a coherent, collaborative approach to be taken to Programme and Project Management and provides for how the Partnership functions for communication to wider stakeholders.

# Funding Plan

## Purpose

a. Identifies the sources of potential funds to support the work of the Partnership – covering both on-going costs and "one off" activities;
b. Develops and executes the capture of identified funds, from public, private and potentially other third sector sources;
c. Establishes a risk based approach to management of the future funding sources and commitments;
d. Ensures the funds are applied effectively, efficiently and transparently for the purposes of the Partnership

## Outcomes

- Identifies the sources of potential funds to support the work of the Partnership – covering both on-going costs and "one off" activities;
- Develops and executes the capture of identified funds, from public, private and potentially other third sector sources
- Establishes a risk based approach to management of the future funding sources and commitments
- Ensures the funds are applied effectively, efficiently and transparently for the purposes of the Partnership

# Volunteering Strategy Plan

## Purpose

a. Establishes the volunteer resource requirements both in terms of quantum and skills/experience/ motivation etc.
b. Creates the value proposition for Volunteer roles, both for the individual and for wider Community priorities relating to physical and mental health
c. Promotes volunteering, including recruitment, retention and recognition of volunteers
d. Establishes the formal arrangements for volunteer activity on Partners' assets and services

## Outcomes

- A robust resource base to deliver both core Partnership activities and specific Programmes and Projects;
- Recognition by wider stakeholders of the value that the volunteering brings beyond the direct Partnership outputs;
- Highly motivated and energised volunteers aligned with the Vision and Mission

# Engagement and Promotions Plan

## Purpose
    a. Communication (through multiple channels) to promote the work of the Partnership and its Programmes and Projects;

    b. Interaction and collaboration with communications managed by Partners and wider stakeholders; and

    c. Annual Stakeholder Survey

## Outcomes
- Awareness of the work of the Partnership and the opportunities provided to develop and execute collaborative Programmes and Projects
- Promotion of specific Programmes and Projects as appropriate
- Stakeholder feedback and engagement measures.

# Programmes and Project Management Plan

## Purpose
    a. A light touch, but professional Project Management Office approach to the development and delivery of initiatives through both the "ideas" and "delivery" stages

    b. Identification of interdependencies – including synergies – between individual projects within wider Programmes

## Outcomes
- A resource loaded delivery programme for initiatives and projects from "first idea" to "completion and monitoring"
- Risk and opportunities register
- Inputs required for the Funding and Volunteering Strategy Plans