



Community Rail Report

2025/26

AVANTI
WEST COAST





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Introduction

Welcome to the Avanti West Coast Community Rail Report for 2025–2026.



This report celebrates the dedication and hard work of our Community Rail Partnerships who continue to go above and beyond to enrich the journeys of our passengers and the lives of those in the communities we serve. Through their commitment to community-led projects, support for local initiatives and the nurturing of lasting relationships, they drive meaningful change and create a positive and lasting legacy.

As you explore this report, we hope it offers a window into the remarkable impact of our partners, made possibly by the funding we provide and collaboration that shape everything we do.

Whilst we take pride in this year's successes we remain committed to growth, progress and continuous improvement. By working closely with our partners and communities, we believe we can shape a railway that is inclusive, resilient and rooted in the needs of the people it serves today and into the future.

A handwritten signature in dark ink, reading 'Andy Mellors'. The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first letters of the first and last names being capitalized and prominent.

Andy Mellors
Managing Director, Avanti West Coast

Summary

This report highlights the significant role played by Avanti West Coast in enabling a wide range of projects that encourage sustainable travel, strengthen community engagement, and enhance educational outreach.

Active participation in partnership meetings and the provision of timely industry updates continue to demonstrate our commitment to effective collaboration and strong stakeholder relationships.

Our Regional Growth Managers will remain instrumental in stakeholder engagement and in advancing a collaborative, community-focused railway and our Community Manager will continue to oversee the coordination and delivery of all funding streams and projects.

Looking ahead to 2026–2027, we are committed to working closely with our 18 CRPs to deliver an ambitious programme of innovative initiatives which deliver against the four pillars of the Community Rail Development Strategy:

- 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.

To further strengthen the connection between local communities and their railway.

Jo Buckley

Community Manager



At Avanti West Coast, our mission is to be the transport of choice, connecting customers and communities along the West Coast.

As a responsible business, we are committed to delivering meaningful social value that creates lasting benefits for the communities we serve. To date, we have generated over £1 billion in social value and continue to build on this strong foundation.

We use the Rail Social Value Tool (RSVT), as recommended by the Rail Safety and Standards Board (RSSB), to measure and understand the impact of our activities. Over the past financial year, we have focused on embedding consistent social value measurement across the organisation. This has led to increased engagement from colleagues across multiple departments, with the number of activities recorded in the RSVT rising by more than 60%.

This strengthened approach ensures that social value is not only captured but actively considered in everyday decision-making across the business.

From 1 April 2025 to 31 March 2026, Avanti West Coast delivered a total operational, environmental, and economic impact valued at £468,714,737. This reflects our ongoing commitment to supporting communities, creating opportunities, and driving sustainable growth along our route.

Our Social Value Report highlights progress across key areas including community engagement, employment and skills, diversity and inclusion, and environmental sustainability. These collective efforts demonstrate how our people and partners are working together to meet the needs of society and deliver positive outcomes for the communities we serve.

In recognition of this progress, Avanti West Coast was honoured at the Social Value Awards 2025, where we won the Private Sector Leadership category. The judges commended our success in embedding social value throughout the organisation, our use of robust measurement through the RSVT, and our work to influence positive change across our supply chain and wider industry.

This achievement reflects the dedication of our colleagues and partners in placing social impact at the heart of our business, and reinforces our ambition to continue delivering meaningful, measurable value for society.

Dr. Theresa Robbarts

Social Value Lead
with her guide dog Kaz



| Key *Highlights*

Feel Good Futures

Feel Good Futures has continued to deliver significant impact since its launch in April 2025, providing fully funded Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) outreach opportunities for young people aged 14–18 while increasing awareness of careers within the railway industry.

To date, the programme has engaged with 31 schools and directly reached 772 students. Through a combination of educational visits, engineering workshops, and career and safety presentations, the project has successfully connected young people with meaningful opportunities within the rail sector. Support from Avanti West Coast has been instrumental in extending this reach and ensuring that schools can access high-quality experiences free of charge.

Students have participated in a range of high-profile activities delivered in partnership with organisations including Network Rail, London Transport Museum, and Alstom. These experiences have included engineering days at the Acton TfL Depot, visits to operational rail depots, and sessions aboard the Rail 200 Inspiration Train, where students explored railway innovation, science, and future careers through interactive exhibits and virtual reality activities.

Feedback from both teachers and students has been overwhelmingly positive, with many describing the programme as inspiring, engaging, and influential in shaping future career aspirations.



We would also like to extend our thanks to Dave Savage, Community Rail Officer at Community Rail Lancashire, for his continued passion and commitment to identifying and creating inspirational opportunities for young people.



| Key Highlights

Railway 200



During the year, the Rail 200 Inspiration Train visited a number of stations on the West Coast Main Line, including London Euston, Crewe, Edinburgh Waverley, Glasgow Central, and Stockport.

Dave Savage, Community Rail Officer at Community Rail Lancashire, played a central role in co-ordinating the logistics of the programme, helping to facilitate visits for more than 50 schools and over 1,000 students. The train provided an engaging opportunity for young people to explore 200 years of railway innovation through a combination of interactive exhibitions and hands-on learning activities.

The Partner Zone enabled students to engage directly with railway employees, gaining insight into their day-to-day responsibilities and the broad range of career pathways available within the rail industry.

A particularly popular feature of the experience was the opportunity for students to dress in a variety of railway uniforms, complemented by goody bags designed to encourage continued learning beyond the visit.



Feedback from both teachers and students has been overwhelmingly positive, with many participants reporting an increased interest in careers within the railway sector, including engineering, coding, and operational roles.

Charley Fredericks, Senior Project Manager, Autograph Events, said: "I just wanted to send a quick email just to pass on our massive thanks to Dave! Honestly, he has been absolutely incredible not only with the schools but volunteering his time to come and help us when we have been short of volunteers e.g. Blackpool. He has been a massive support to us and so engaging with the schools. He's so friendly and a great person to be around and we can see how much the schools have benefited from his presence. I believe this is his last time with the train and we have given him our upmost thanks, but we just wanted to pass on to you too. How amazing he is and what good feedback we've always had about him!"

Danielle Lahan, Customer Account Manager, Network Rail, said: "My heartfelt thanks for allowing us to have Dave onboard with this project. He really is an inspiration."

| Key *Highlights*

Annual Community Rail Conference

We hosted our fifth annual Community Rail Conference championing accessible travel and its importance in creating opportunity in local communities.

Chairs and Rail Officers from each of our Community Rail Partnerships (CRPs) were invited to the conference in Preston to share their insights on social mobility. They used the event to explore how charities and organisations in their local areas can collaborate with Avanti West Coast to raise awareness around accessible travel and its vital part in creating a gateway to opportunity in their communities.

The conference was hosted in Vault Youth Zone, Preston's new space for young people. Attendees were welcomed to share their thoughts on the inclusive aspects of the building's facilities shining a light on how integral accessibility is in creating opportunity for younger generations within the area.

Guests on the day took part in a dedicated workshop focused on social mobility, which showcased some of the operator's ongoing work around accessible travel. The session invited CRP representatives to share their insights on improvements that could be made within their local areas.

They also heard from Avanti West Coast Managing Director, Andy Mellors, as he spoke passionately about how the collaborative work with the CRPs helps to foster close ties with communities across the West Coast Main Line, a vital tool to delivering social benefit.

To highlight the positive impact the long-distance operator has made within the communities it serves, Mark Tomlinson from Pear Tree School, an education hub for children and young people with learning difficulties spoke at the conference and praised Avanti West Coast in its support for the school, especially in his role as Travel Trainer in which he accompanies pupils on trips using the rail network to build their confidence around travel.



Key Highlights

The Box on the Bay: Creating a Railway Stem Centre at Hest Bank

CRP: The Bentham Line (Leeds to Lancaster and Morecambe)

Project Cost: £14,000

(£4,000 from Avanti West Coast, TransPennine and Northern) and £2,000 plus in-kind support, donations and loaned items.

Project Summary:

Initially the CRP was approached by Network Rail in the autumn of 2023 with a view to finding and helping to find funding for a new use for the box. It instantly felt right to create an education centre with the West Coast Main Line and Morecambe Bay.

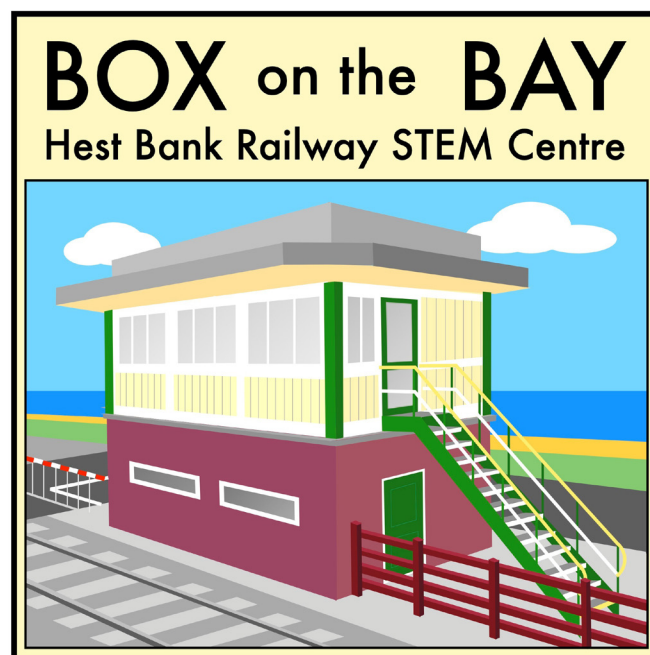
In the coming months the CRP prepared a detailed paper for Network Rail on its proposal which was well received. Network Rail then set about gutting the upper floor back to a basic shell. After an initial coat of paint, they set about installing kitchen units and a sink along the back wall of the box. A new toilet and wash basin were added to bathroom. Water heaters were provided for the sink and basin.

With that work completed, the LMCRP made successful grant applications to the community funding pots provided by Avanti West Coast, TransPennine and Northern in 2025, each of the applications being for £4,000, to create a £14,000 funding pot for the project which also included £2,000 funds.

It was then possible to put together a suitable budget for the refurbishments and equipment. Purchasing of equipment began in the last quarter of 2025 and items were temporarily stored at LMCRP HQ, Bentham Station.

Several donations of equipment, furniture and artefacts have also been invaluable to the project. These have come from various sources including, Avanti West Coast, Network Rail, the CRP, Brian Haworth CRPO and Paul Salveson (Friends of Kents Bank Station). Some items are on loan to the CRP.

Since being given the key to the box in January, the CRP has worked determinedly to prepare the box ready. More than 150 hours of volunteer time has



gone into those preparations, with more than 50 hours going towards the development of the curriculum and teaching materials.

Project Aims:

To convert the disused upper floor at Hest Bank Signal Box into a STEM educational centre focusing on the railway and the ecology of the adjacent Morecambe Bay.

To work with Network Rail LNW and the three main train operating companies; Avanti West Coast, TransPennine and Northern using the West Coast Main Line to bring this to fruition.

To provide a modern study environment for up to 18 pupils and accompanying staff with appropriate technology, materials and decorations to stimulate 'hands-on' learning, including technology to display the train movements outside the box, and elsewhere, on an inside screen.

To provide opportunities for over 50 local schools, within a five-mile radius of the box, in the Lancaster, Heysham, Morecambe and Carnforth areas, to experience the railway and Morecambe Bay at close quarters and undertake related activities.

To offer a curriculum encompassing rail safety, history and engineering and the ecology, ornithology and meteorology of the Bay, (a box of 'ologies), with opportunities to raise ideas around sustainability, the environment and climate change.

To engage with the schools and appropriate organisations to provide ideas and materials for the curriculum, including Morecambe Bay Partnership, Morecambe Bay Curriculum (Lancaster University and local schools), RSPB Leighton Moss and Hest Bank, and Eden Morecambe.

Project Outcome:

This is believed to be the first project of this kind between Network Rail and a CRP.

This has proved to be one of the bigger practical initiatives for the partnership, which has brought together a diverse range of rail and local bodies with the CRP.

Thus far, the project has involved around 50 people in its design, development and delivery; CRP directors, officers and volunteers, local trades people, local education representatives and conservation organisations.

Participant Feedback:

During repurposing all those participating in the preparations of the box have praised its refurbishment and repurposing and were particularly pleased to note its dual role and the value of the resource to the local communities and further afield.

Local trades people were keen to participate in the transformation and share the project's ideas. Volunteers contributed enthusiastically to supporting the work on the box.

Residents and visitors to The Shore at Hest Bank are pleased to see the box being put back into use and are delighted that it is to have an educational purpose.

The Bay Partnership, The Bay Curriculum and the RSPB at Leighton Moss and Hest Bank were encouraged to see that the curriculum for the box would include not just the Railway but also Morecambe Bay. All provided resources and reference material and are happy to investigate ways of working in partnership.

Network Rail LNW is encouraged by the effort, dedication and high standard of the work undertaken by the LMCRP in repurposing the box. Local educationalists have praised this new and unique resource and the input to the local curriculum it can offer.

Lessons Learnt:

It was good to be approached by Network Rail LNW in the first instance and good to work with them throughout. Something which does not occur often enough in Community Rail. Their steady pace has governed the speed of progress of the project to an extent, leaving the LMCRP to pick up the pace from the end of 2025 onwards, to get the box in an operational state by April.

A CRP can work with Network Rail and train operating companies to create a meaningful and extensive project.

It felt appropriate at the outset to create a funding pot for the project from CRP community grants, and it proved pleasing that Avanti West Coast, TransPennine and Northern all contributed equal amounts to this with a further amount from the LMCRP.

It was rewarding to receive several substantial donations of equipment and artefacts to the project, together with items on loan. They came to in excess of £2,000 of value.

Careful purchasing and use of local trades people led to getting good value for money and greater purchasing power amounting to £1,700.

The education challenge now begins!



Key Highlights

Sensory Bags for Rail Passengers

Project Summary:

For many people, rail travel can feel overwhelming—particularly for those who are neurodivergent or experience sensory sensitivities. Community Rail Lancashire and Avanti West Coast worked together to develop sensory bags designed to make journeys more comfortable and accessible. Each bag contains simple, practical items to help reduce sensory overwhelm and support passengers to travel with greater confidence. The project was shaped through co-production with a SEND group from Bury College, ensuring the contents reflected real experiences and needs. In total, 500 sensory bags have been produced and are now being introduced across the Avanti West Coast network.

Project Aims:

- To encourage confidence in rail travel for neurodivergent passengers and those with sensory needs.
- To provide practical support to help manage sensory overwhelm during journeys.
- To develop a co-produced resource shaped by people with lived experience.

Project Outcome:

The project has developed and produced 500 sensory bags designed to support passengers who are neurodivergent or experience sensory sensitivities, providing practical tools to improve comfort and confidence when travelling by rail.



CRP: Community Rail Lancashire

Project Cost: £5,000

A key strength of the project was its co-production approach. A workshop with a SEND group from Bury College, involving approximately 10 students, enabled participants to share their experiences of rail travel and directly influence the design and contents of the sensory bags. This ensured the final resource was shaped by lived experience and reflects real needs.

The sensory bags include items such as ear defenders, fidget toys, a soft toy, colouring materials, sunglasses and a chew necklace. These items were carefully selected to offer practical, in-the moment support during journeys, while also being quiet and non-disruptive in a shared travel environment.

The project also benefited from strong partnership working between Community Rail Lancashire and Avanti West Coast, combining community insight with operational knowledge.

Engagement at accessibility events further informed the development of the packs. In total, the project has:

- Produced 500 sensory bags ready for distribution.
- Engaged approximately 10 SEND participants through co-production activity.
- Developed a resource shaped by lived experience and real travel needs.

Sensory bags are being introduced across Avanti West Coast services, with distribution through stations, Passenger Assistance and onboard teams to ensure they are accessible to passengers who may benefit.

Development of a sensory book was explored as part of the project but not taken forward within this phase. Both partners are keen to revisit this as a future opportunity.

Overall, the project has:

- Created a practical resource to support more inclusive rail travel.
- Strengthened understanding of passenger needs through co-production.
- Established a foundation for further development and delivery.



Participant Feedback:

Students from the Bury College SEND group were enthusiastic about being involved and welcomed the chance to share their ideas. Their input helped shape the contents of the sensory bags, highlighting what items would be most useful.

Lessons Learnt:

- Involving people with lived experience helped make the sensory bags more relevant and useful.
- It's important to design resources that are easy to store, hand out and use on trains.
- Early conversations with partners and suppliers helped shape what was possible.
- Building in enough time for development and testing is important, especially for more complex ideas such as the sensory book.

Key Highlights

Platform Portraits: A Creative Journey with Pear Tree School

Project Summary:

For many young people at Pear Tree School, travel is not just about getting from A to B, as it can feel unfamiliar, unpredictable, and at times overwhelming.

Platform Portraits set out to change that.

This creative project invited pupils to explore the world of trains, stations and journeys through something more familiar, their own experiences.

Working with artist Gosha Gibek, pupils began by talking about where they go, how they travel, and the places that matter to them. Conversations quickly filled with excitement, with stories of day trips to Blackpool, visits to parks and museums, favourite foods from Greggs or the chippy, and the simple joy of getting the bus or train with friends and family.

These conversations became the starting point for a series of creative workshops, where pupils transformed their ideas into colourful portrait artwork. Each piece reflected not just who they are, but how they connect to the world through travel.

Their artwork was later developed into professionally designed postcards, stickers, badges and notebooks, creating tangible outputs that celebrate both the young people and their experiences of travel.

Project Aims:

At its heart, Platform Portraits was about opening up rail travel in a way that felt safe, engaging and personal. The project aimed to:

- Build confidence and familiarity with trains and stations.
- Help SEND learners explore journeys through creativity and storytelling.
- Encourage positive and accessible perceptions of rail travel.
- Connect young people with destinations across the Avanti West Coast network.
- Create opportunities for pupils to see themselves as confident future rail users.

CRP: Community Rail Lancashire

Project Cost: £2,450

Project Outcome:

Across the workshops, around 25 pupils took part in exploring travel in a new and meaningful way.

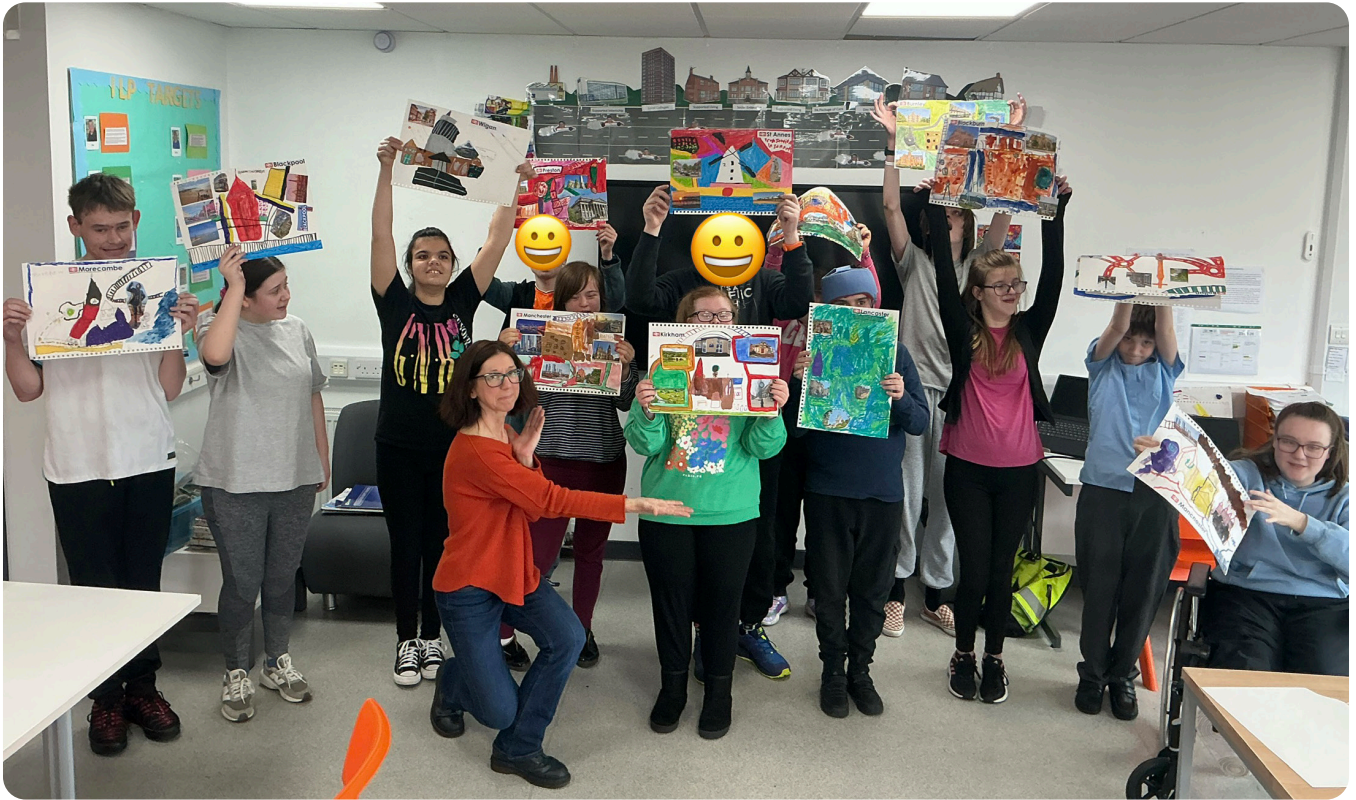
Rather than focusing on timetables or tickets, the project focused on what journeys feel like, where they lead, what you do when you get there, and why they matter. Pupils spoke about visiting places such as Blackpool, Preston and Lancaster, often linking these experiences with memorable moments such as eating out, spending time with family, or exploring somewhere new.

Trains, buses and stations became part of these conversations, not as something unfamiliar, but as everyday gateways to the places they enjoy most. This shift helped pupils feel more confident in talking about travel and more connected to the idea of using rail as part of their lives.

Through creative activities including drawing, painting and collage pupils explored trains, stations and destinations in a way that felt accessible and enjoyable. They developed confidence in expressing their ideas, while also building familiarity with the rail environment.

The project resulted in a collection of professionally designed printed materials inspired by the pupils' artwork, including postcards, stickers, badges and notebooks. These outputs celebrate both the young people and their journeys, while also offering a way to share their perspectives with a wider audience, including passengers and the local community.





Participant Feedback:

From the very first session, it was clear that the project had struck a chord.

"I hope you enjoyed this morning, I know the students did."

Pupils were eager to talk about:

- Where they travel and how they get there.
- Favourite destinations and activities.

Their experiences of trains and buses Staff observed that pupils became more confident in expressing their thoughts, particularly when conversations were rooted in real-life experiences.

There was also a strong sense of pride as artwork began to take shape, especially when pupils realised their designs would become real printed items.

Lessons Learnt:

One of the strongest insights from Platform Portraits is that journeys are best understood through experience, not explanation.

For SEND learners in particular:

- Talking about destinations rather than transport systems makes rail feel more relatable.
- Linking travel to enjoyable activities such as food, days out and familiar places builds positive associations.
- Creative activity provides a safe way to explore unfamiliar environments.



The project also reinforced the value of:

- Turning participant work into high-quality, real-world outputs.
- Positioning rail as part of everyday life, not something separate or intimidating.

| Key Highlights

Resilience Grant

Project Summary:

Together with match funding from the CRP, a total of £20,000 was made available to local charities, CICs and grass roots organisations along the North Wales Coast Line and Conwy Valley, applications were received for up to £1,000 to support / deliver community benefit related projects.

Project Aims:

- To provide financial support of up to £1,000 to local charities, CICs, and grassroots organisations along the North Wales Coast Line and the Conwy Valley.
- To enable community led projects that deliver tangible benefits to local residents.
- To strengthen community engagement and participation across the region.
- To ensure fair and accessible distribution of funding to a diverse range of organisations.
- To maximise the impact of the £20,000 funding pot through targeted, high-value community projects.
- To foster collaboration between local groups and stakeholders to enhance community outcomes.

Project Outcome:

In total, 27 local community organisations were supported through this funding which created:

- Increased delivery of community-led projects across the North Wales Coast Line and Conwy Valley.
- Improved wellbeing and quality of life for local residents through accessible, grassroots initiatives.
- Strengthened capacity of local charities, CICs and grassroots organisations to deliver impactful work.
- Greater community engagement, participation, and collaboration among local groups.
- Successful distribution and utilization of funding, ensuring maximum local benefit from the £20,000 fund.
- Creation of sustainable projects with lasting positive impact beyond the initial funding period.
- Enhanced visibility and support for smaller organisations within the local community sector.

CRP: Conwy Valley and North Wales Coast

Project Cost: £10,000

Participant Feedback:

The Joshua Tree: this grant has allowed Counsellors to offer home visits to families struggling with their child's diagnosis. Their 'at home' counselling sessions mean the family are not put at risk entering a non-sterile environment or have the stress of the cost of public transports or fuel costs travelling to and from appointments. Sarah, Counsellor at the Joshua Tree said: *"These sessions are vital to people living in rural communities who struggle to get to us for much needed counselling. Often one parent will have to give up work, meaning a reduction in household income, and the cost of getting to us adds to an already stressful situation for the family."*



Shirley, Project Manager, Stepping Stones, said: *"This grant has allowed us to reach more people from across the counties. We can support more people with art therapy sessions in Denbighshire, in which we have survivors from Conwy attending. Every day we receive a call from someone seeking support. We have used the funds to purchase more materials for our sessions."*



The Community Rail Officer was shown was shown a collage and clay model made by one female survivor. From looking at the work, it was clear to see how the subconscious mind had played its part in what was produced. Extra materials offering protection on certain areas of the body and leaves and other materials to offer camouflage for hiding.



Llanrwst Utd FC have set up all female football team for women and girls aged 16+ living in Llanrwst. It has allowed the club to purchase balls and smaller goals which can be used in the North Wales Women's Recreation League. Bryn Jenkins, Team Manager, said: *"This money has allowed us to buy the kit we needed to be part of the Recreational League. We have training sessions on weekday evenings with games at weekends. We have a range of ages from 16 to 40+. We have ladies who have left the town for university, return and join the team. We have young women who have struggled with their confidence at the beginning, who were reluctant to play who are now playing regularly and are hesitant to be substituted! It's great to see women supporting and encouraging other women to take part."*

Ryan Neale, Lead Coach, Penmaenmawr Pheonix FC, said: *"We have several children from the area attending these lunchtime sessions. We have children of all abilities, from novice to local club players who attend to keep up their skills. This is invaluable as they can mentor and nurture the less confident children. I wanted to host these sessions for this exact reason. The older guys also play for local teams and help me run the sessions. They will be completing their coaching courses soon, which means we will be able to support more young players. I come here and do this in my lunchbreak from my full-time job."*

Lessons Learnt:

- Small scale funding can have a significant impact when directed toward grassroots organisations with strong local knowledge.
- Simple and accessible application processes encourage wider participation from smaller or less experienced groups, especially when partnering with CVSC who have access to all counties across the region.
- Clear communication, support and guidance are essential to ensure applicants understand eligibility and expectations.
- Demand for funding is likely to exceed available resources, highlighting the need for clear selection criteria and prioritisation.
- Providing support beyond funding can enhance project success and sustainability.
- Collaboration between organisations can increase reach, avoid duplication, and strengthen overall outcomes.
- Flexibility in funding criteria allows projects to better respond to local needs and emerging community priorities.

| Key *Highlights*

White Ribbon at Rugby Station

Project Summary:

Building on previous White Ribbon artwork at Birmingham International and other stations along the route and after an ask from Rugby Station Manager to create brighten up some blank poster boards, we commissioned Emily K Illustrates to create a mural championing the White Ribbon message. The mural reinforces White Ribbon's message that everyone can be a positive changemaker, promoting equality, respect, and the prevention of violence against women and girls. Following a workshop with local young people exploring self expression, unacceptable behaviour towards women, and healthy relationships, Emily used the Rugby Colour Palette to produce an impactful artwork visible both from the platforms and passing trains.

Project Aims:

- Increased awareness of the White Ribbon Campaign.
- Creating a community of change makers by educating and empowering the people who take part in the community engagement aspect of the project.
- Create a mural at Rugby Station that creates conversations as well as improves a formerly blank station space.
- Enhance the passenger experience through improving the station environment with art.
- Increase awareness of men's violence against women and its different forms.
- Promote the meaning of the White Ribbon and an invitation to make the White Ribbon Promise.
- Create a project where communities work collaboratively with the CRP, White Ribbon UK, and Avanti West Coast that makes a social difference and enhances the environment at Rugby.



CRP: Heart of England

Project Cost: £15,315

Project Outcome:

With the mural having been installed only at the end of March, it is not yet possible to measure how many people have used the QR code on the mural to access the White Ribbon Promise. However, positive feedback has already been received from the local MP and project partners involved in its delivery. When Emily delivered the community workshop, it was to a group of young people aged 10+, who were a part of Rugby Borough Council's On Track program. 14 young people took part in the workshop where Emily explored the different forms of intervention and encouraged the group to think of ways to be part of the solution. Participants created artwork and collages that expressed their feelings on the subject and any messaging they felt could be included in the mural.

Emily then used these discussions to help shape the messaging on the finished mural. As this is an extremely sensitive subject, and one that may have been relevant to some members of the group, care was taken to ensure that participants understood they could dip in and out of the session whenever they wished. Three members of the On Track team were also present to provide support and a listening ear should any participant require it.

Following the workshop, Emily created the mural incorporating colours from the Rugby Colour Palette and worked with White Ribbon UK to ensure that the wording accurately represented the White Ribbon messaging. The main slogan for the upcoming White Ribbon campaign, "It Takes All Of Us". was also included.

The mural was officially unveiled and was attended by Emily, White Ribbon UK, and the local Labour MP, John Slinger, who was highly supportive of the project.

This project has been a continuation of work with White Ribbon UK, and there are now seven stations between Rugby and Birmingham New Street featuring White Ribbon artwork created by Emily on display on the platforms, including at Birmingham International. Supporting such an important charity through collaboration with a local artist, multiple TOCs, and Network Rail to champion the White Ribbon message is considered a significant privilege. The mural has enhanced the station's appearance while raising awareness of a prominent issue not only within the local community, but also among those passing through on trains.



Participant Feedback:

Megan Lock, White Ribbon UK, said: "It's amazing to see what can happen when communities and partners come together to raise awareness and this installation is a great example of how partnerships can bring important conversations into everyday spaces. By working together, we can challenge harmful attitudes, engage more people, and help build a culture where everyone feels safe, respected, and free from violence. We're grateful to Avanti and artist Emily Marlowe for helping bring this important message to life."

Emily Marlow, Artist, said: "It's so rewarding to see how art and illustration can be used to spread important messages like the White Ribbon campaign. I'm happy to be able to play a small part in helping to end violence towards women and girls and I hope that people find the artwork bright & inspiring and that it encourages people to find out more about the work of White Ribbon. Thanks to the Heart of England Community Rail Partnership, Avanti and White Ribbon for bringing me on board."

John Slinger, MP for Rugby, Bulkington and the Villages, said: "Thank you very much to Avanti and the Heart of England CRP for giving space for this important mural themed on the White Ribbon charity campaign #ItTakesAllOfUs, in the prominent location of Rugby train station. The mural highlights the need for men and boys challenge misogynistic and aggressive behaviour towards women and girls wherever it happens and now visitors or people transiting our station can see the artwork and hopefully be inspired by its vital message. It was great to meet the artist, Emily Marlowe, whose creative talent has created a positive image encouraging everyone to take action on this important issue. She's even used the Rugby palette colours!"



Dave Whitehouse, Safety Director at Avanti West Coast, said: "We're committed to providing a safe railway for everyone, and this mural is part of our work with White Ribbon to raise awareness of preventing violence against women and girls. Working with community partners, and a talented artist once again, we want to engage the people of Rugby on this important topic in society and highlight how they can help support White Ribbon's campaign."

Lessons Learnt:

In the initial funding proposal, it was specified that the artwork would be painted directly onto the boards, and a key element of the engagement plan was based on commuters being able to speak with Emily as she worked. However, this was later changed to a design that could be printed and installed on boards instead. If the project were to be repeated, the method of installation would be confirmed with all teams involved prior to submitting the funding application.

| Key *Highlights*

Birmingham International mural refresh

CRP: Heart of England

Project Cost: £3,500

Project Summary:

In 2021, as part of the Avanti West Coast funded project Careers, Creativity and the Commonwealth, the Heart of England CRP wanted to provide an inspirational and eye-catching mural for people travelling to Commonwealth Games events by train and arriving at Birmingham International. In addition, we aimed to improve the station environment, support local artists, showcase contemporary street art and have a piece of art that represents how the railways connect our communities. Having liaised with the station manager, there are now areas of the mural that have become more faded with time, so we were asked if Brink could refresh the mural as it provides a point of interest at Birmingham International for those arriving and passing through the station.

Project Aims:

- Increased sense of pride in local stations as their appearances are improved through art.
- Improved appearance / customer experience.
- Visual impact when arriving at Birmingham International Station.



Project Outcome:

This project was a strong example of collaboration between Avanti West Coast, the CRP, and Brink. It was supported throughout by various teams at Avanti, including with requirements such as the Risk Assessment and Method Statement (RAMS), and Tim from Brink was able to remain flexible with timings to ensure delivery within the project timeframe. As it was refreshing an existing piece of artwork, it was a relatively straight forward project to plan and manage and, having only just been installed in March, it is too early to have had any more feedback from passengers. Visually, the station platform has improved, and the mural is more visible again from the trains and other platforms, making it an impactful feature of any passenger's journey.

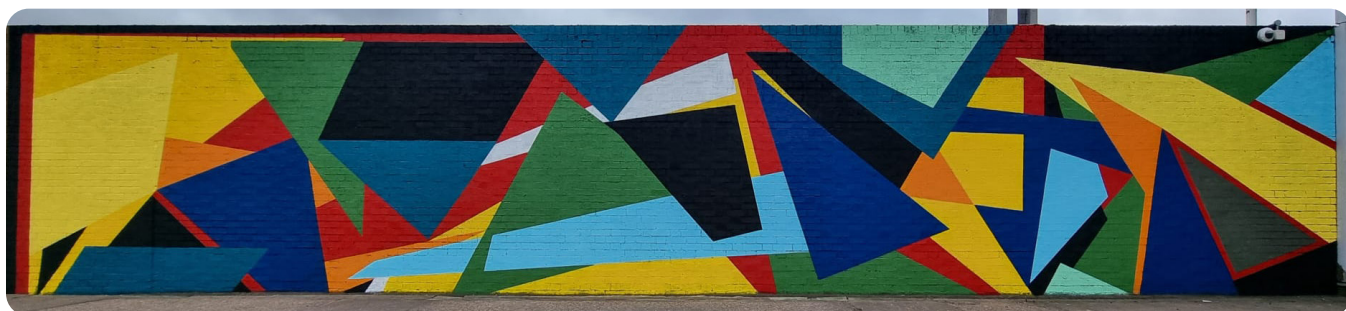
Participant Feedback:

Tim Robotom MA. BA Hons aka Lord Numb, Brink Contemporary Arts Founder, said: *"Such an honour to be commissioned to create a mural on Platform One of Birmingham International railway station, that celebrates the rich diversity of the Commonwealth and the cultural communities across the world. A huge thank you to everybody who contributed to the administration, logistics and production of this large piece of public art entitled: 'Movement'."*

Craig Mortiboys, Regional Growth Manager (West Midlands), Avanti West Coast, said: *"It was great to refresh a stunning eye-catching mural that has proved popular with passengers travelling through Birmingham International station over the last few years."*

Lessons Learnt:

This was a relatively straightforward project, and fortunately the weather conditions were favourable, allowing the painting to be completed in a single day.



| Key Highlights

Creative Journeys

CRP: High Peak and Hope Valley

Project Cost: £4,500

(£2,000 Avanti West Coast / £2,500 HPHV CRP)



Project Summary:

The Creative Journeys project was designed to support disabled and neurodivergent early-career creatives across the Midlands and inspire passengers to travel by train and engage creatively with the places they pass through. The activities in the printed leaflets engage passengers in local histories and stories, and offer gentle, mindful prompts that may help to ease travel anxiety, while encouraging new ways of connecting with the Buxton line.

Project Aims:

To support disabled and neurodivergent early-career creatives, to enhance the passenger experience on the Buxton line and to expand our engagement to a more diverse audience through new formats.

Project Outcome:

Developed through Midlands arts organisation No Jobs in the Arts and a dedicated creative rail residency, the leaflets follow the journeys of two Midlands-based disabled early-career creatives, River Glade and Alice Hackney. Each creative spent time travelling along the line between Stockport and Buxton, exploring the stations, towns, and changing landscapes where the railway meets the edges of the Peak District National Park. Their observations, reflections and creative responses have been transformed into imaginative and mindful activities, designed to encourage creativity on the move.

Participant Feedback:

"The project has been a wonderful opportunity for us to test out a new residency format. We're incredibly grateful for the support from Avanti, CRP and Northern. After distributing the leaflets, we've already received feedback from venues that they have been extremely popular, and many have already been picked up!"

Alice Hackney, Artist, said: *"I have really enjoyed being part of such a valuable local project. The Buxton line has always been special to me, and it is wonderful to see it celebrated in this way. Thank you for spotlighting disabled early-career creatives, and for taking such care and professionalism throughout the process. I think this model of working has real potential to expand, and I will look forward to seeing future projects."*

Lessons Learnt:

A range of lessons were learned through this process, including a greater understanding of the audience and the accessibility features that can be incorporated. A particularly important learning point arose through the development and interpretation of the artist brief. As this was a new project, it was challenging to clearly articulate what was expected from artists within the residency; however, this has since highlighted how the brief can be simplified in future projects in response to the outputs delivered.

Key Highlights

Bee Friendly Stafford

Project Summary:

To enhance the station with visually engaging, pollinator-themed artwork and a recycled garden, involving the local community in design and creation while supporting Stafford's Bee Friendly status. The project combined creativity, sustainability, and education to create a more welcoming, nature-focused station environment.

Key elements included:

- Replacement of 11 Dibond panels with pollinator artwork.
- Flower and pollinator murals on the station overbridge.
- A 3D floral installation made from recycled cans.
- Planters made from recycled pallets with pollinator friendly planting, maintained by a local Scout group.

Young people helped select designs through workshops, while adults contributed to creating the recycled artwork. Volunteers from Network Rail, Alstom and Avanti supported construction activity. The Bumblebee Conservation Trust delivered sessions to Scouts, who selected and grew plants, building knowledge of biodiversity and environmental care.



CRP: North Staffordshire

Project Cost: £12,640



Project Aims:

- To create vibrant, community-led artwork enhancing the station environment.
- To strengthen partnerships with schools and community groups.
- To support Stafford's Bee Friendly Town initiative.
- To promote sustainability through recycled materials.
- To educate young people about pollinators and their importance.

Project Outcome:

Over 150 people participated, including schools, Scouts, charities and community groups, reaching new audiences and encouraging inclusive engagement. The project has transformed the station into a colourful, welcoming space, improving the experience for passengers and staff while fostering community pride and ownership.

The 3D installation and "Stafford" display provide a strong visual identity and interactive feature. The Scout-led garden creates a lasting wildlife habitat while developing skills and long-term connection with the station. The project has also generated wider interest through social media, local press coverage, and school engagement, extending its impact beyond the station.



Participant Feedback:

- "Thank you for bringing community together."
- "Great fun workshop. Brilliant use of recycled materials."
- "An excellent idea – very therapeutic."
- "A fantastic time... has improved my mental health."
- "The workshop was brilliant... inspired [children] to create some brilliant pieces of art."
- "The children absolutely loved the session."

Lessons Learnt:

- Earlier planning for operational requirements (e.g. night work) is essential to avoid delays and added costs.
- Improved coordination and early engagement with stakeholders will help streamline approvals and delivery in future projects.

Key Highlights

Tracks Through Time

Project Summary:

Tracks Through Time was a community-led heritage project that explored and celebrated 200 years of railway history by highlighting the often-overlooked contributions of women, disabled people, and ethnically diverse communities. Delivered in partnership with New Vic Borderlines, Foxfield Steam Railway, the University of Portsmouth, North Staffordshire Community Rails Partnership and Avanti West Coast, the project aimed to make railway heritage more inclusive, accessible, and representative.

The project culminated in a successful exhibition held at Crewe Station from 15–19 January 2026, attracting over 2,000 visitors. The exhibition featured a mix of photographs, oral histories, audio recordings, and co-created artwork, alongside interactive elements that encouraged public participation and storytelling. A digital platform, including a website and SoundCloud channel, has also been established to ensure wider and ongoing access to the collected materials.

Tracks Through Time has strengthened partnerships across cultural, academic, and rail sectors while engaging diverse audiences, including school groups and local communities. Visitors contributed personal stories, participated in activities, and connected with the social history of the railways in meaningful ways.

Despite challenges such as relocation, tight delivery timelines and reduced capacity due to illness, the project adapted successfully and maintained strong audience engagement. Looking ahead, plans are in place to tour the portable exhibition to additional venues and expand both research and digital resources, ensuring a legacy and continued community impact.

Project Aims:

- To uncover and share underrepresented stories within railway history, particularly those of women, disabled people, and ethnically diverse communities.
- To create an inclusive and accessible heritage experience through exhibitions, performance, and digital platforms.
- To engage local communities, schools, and visitors in exploring and contributing to railway heritage through interactive and participatory activities.
- To develop a portable exhibition and digital archive that ensures long-term access and wider reach of collected stories.

CRP: North Staffordshire

Project Cost: £4,640

- To foster partnerships between cultural organisations, academic institutions, and the rail industry to support collaborative research and storytelling.
- To inspire future interest in railway careers and heritage by connecting audiences—especially young people—with historical and contemporary rail stories.
- To build a legacy by preserving oral histories and community contributions for future generations.

Project Outcome:

Tracks Through Time was innovative in its approach to railway heritage by centring underrepresented voices, particularly women, disabled people, and ethnically diverse communities within a traditionally narrow historical narrative.

It combined oral histories, and archival research into a portable, flexible exhibition that could be displayed in both indoor and outdoor environments. The integration of interactive elements, such as visitor storytelling, dress-up activities, and the "Lost and Found Luggage" contributions—allowed audiences to actively shape the content. In addition, the creation of a digital archive (website and SoundCloud) ensured accessibility beyond the physical exhibition, extending the project's reach and legacy.

This was also the only time that alongside the Inspiration Trains visits across the country that there was a local exhibition coinciding with the train exhibition. This also aided with busier times on the train as visitors were able to come and see Tracks Through Time while they waited for their slot on the Inspiration Train.

- Over 2,000 visitors attended the exhibition at Crewe Station.
- Multiple partner organisations were involved, including New Vic Borderlines, Foxfield Steam Railway, University of Portsmouth, North Staffordshire Community Rail Partnership and Avanti West Coast.
- Volunteers and facilitators (including Foxfield Railway volunteers and New Vic Borderlines staff) supported delivery and audience engagement.
- School groups and community participants contributed to interactive activities and shared stories.
- Additional stakeholders included local historians, heritage groups, and organisations such as The National Caribbean Heritage Museum and the North Staffs Railway Study Group.

The project inspired audiences by making railway history relatable and inclusive. Visitors engaged personally with the stories, often contributing their own memories and experiences.

Interactive elements, such as trying on costumes and handling historical objects helped bring history to life, particularly for younger audiences. One school pupil reported feeling inspired to explore a future career in railway engineering. By highlighting diverse role models from the past and present, the project encouraged broader participation and interest in the rail industry and heritage sector.

It improved:

- **Representation:** Increased visibility of underrepresented groups within railway history and heritage narratives.
- **Access to heritage:** Made railway history more engaging and accessible through interactive, multi-sensory formats and digital platforms.
- **Community engagement:** Strengthened connections between communities and their local railway heritage, encouraging participation and storytelling.
- **Partnership working:** Built and deepened collaborations across cultural, academic, and rail sectors.
- **Learning and awareness:** Enhanced understanding of social history and inspired educational engagement, particularly among young people.

Participant Feedback:

Participant feedback from the Tracks Through Time exhibition was highly positive, with visitors engaging enthusiastically with both the content and interactive elements. Over 2,000 attendees visited the exhibition, many of whom actively contributed their own stories and reflections.

Interactive activities were particularly well received. The opportunity to try on railway costumes created a memorable and engaging experience, especially for younger visitors. One young participant spent time comparing herself to historical figures in the photographs, while families appreciated the added photo opportunities. School groups responded strongly to the hands-on elements, such as handling historical objects and engaging with volunteers, one pupil reported feeling inspired to pursue a career in railway engineering.

The "Lost and Found Luggage" activity encouraged visitors to share personal and often meaningful experiences, ranging from light-hearted moments, such as seeing a "pigeon eating fries" on a journey, to significant life events like discovering a pregnancy while travelling. These contributions demonstrated the strong emotional connection people have with rail travel.



Visitors also showed interest in the historical content and research, engaging in conversations with volunteers and experts, and responding positively to additional displays such as the "Women of World War One" exhibition and railway memorabilia.

It was also commented on that it was excellent to have a local exhibition with the national exhibition as it gave a larger picture of the railway network.

Overall, feedback highlighted that the exhibition was engaging, inclusive, and thought-provoking, successfully encouraging participation, sparking curiosity, and creating meaningful connections between audiences and railway heritage.

Lessons Learnt:

The delivery of Tracks Through Time provided several valuable insights for future project development. One of the key lessons was the importance of allowing sufficient lead-in time, particularly when coordinating exhibitions in live environments such as railway stations. The short timeframe between project relocation to Crewe and delivery, over the Christmas period, created pressure, highlighting the need for earlier planning and contingency time.

The project also demonstrated the importance of flexibility and adaptability. Challenges such as staff illness, which prevented the use of costumed characters, required quick thinking and alternative approaches. Inviting visitors to try on costumes themselves proved to be an effective and engaging solution, showing that participatory approaches can sometimes be more impactful than planned performances.

Another key learning was the value of interactive and hands-on engagement, particularly for younger audiences. Activities such as handling objects, sharing stories, and contributing to exhibition content significantly increased engagement and enjoyment.

The project reinforced the importance of strong partnerships and collaboration. Support from partners, volunteers, and stakeholders was essential in delivering the exhibition successfully, especially within a live rail environment. Building and maintaining these relationships will be crucial for future touring and development.

Finally, the project highlighted the need to balance ambition with capacity, particularly in relation to staffing and audience engagement. Ensuring adequate resources and contingency planning will help maximise engagement opportunities in future iterations.

| Key *Highlights*

Staffy Trail

Project Summary:

Staffordshire Day is an annual event celebrating the county's culture, creativity, attractions and sense of pride. 2026 is the 10-year anniversary of Staffordshire Day and to mark the occasion a new public art experience, the "Staffy Trail", was launched by the Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent Visitor Economy Partnership (LVEP) in partnership with Making Trails and local artists.

The heritage and arts trail features large-scale sculptures of 'Staffy', Staffordshire's Bull Terrier mascot, designed by local artists and schools. The Staffy's are located at a number of sites around the county, including Stoke-on-Trent and Stafford, and are connected by easy transport links. Visitors are encouraged to explore the trails; discover stories and attractions, access rewards and spend time with local businesses along the way. A printed map and mobile app help visitors take the self-guided walking tours.

There are Staffy's located just outside Stoke and Stafford stations, as gateways to their respective areas, and Avanti part-funded sponsorship of the Stafford Staffy as well as donating a prize of free train travel for the rewards and competitions that can be accessed by QR code on the Staffy's.

Project Aims:

- To promote Staffordshire businesses and visitor attractions with each trail bringing footfall into town centres, encouraging longer visits and giving businesses a visible presence.
- Support community pride by celebrating the stories and places of Staffordshire, strengthening pride of place.
- Showcasing creativity and supporting local artists and makers with the Staffy's designed by local artists and schools.
- The Trail provides a free, family friendly activity over a ten-week period encouraging exploration to find out more about local areas, history and attractions.
- Encouraging the use of by public transport to complete the Trail, raising the profile of the train stations and encouraging travel by train between the Stafford and Stoke locations.

CRP: North Staffordshire

Project Cost: £1,000

Project Outcome:

The Staffy Trail is the largest public art trail of its kind in Staffordshire, and it is expected to attract around 30,000 visitors over the ten-week period it is in place.

With increased footfall to local town centres, it is expected to generate more than £600,000 for Staffordshire's economy, based on projections of the success of previous local trails. It is estimated that visitors will spend on average £20 per person, delivering a significant boost to local shops, cafés, attractions and businesses.

It is hoped that many people will visit the trail using the train and rail travel is being promoted via social media, on Staffordshire County Council's promotional materials and through a social media team accompanied visit with a family who will complete the Stoke and Stafford trails by train.

Participant Feedback:

There has been positive social media engagement with lots of people taking selfies with the Staffy's and posting using the following **#FollowStaffy** **#StaffordshireDay10**

Lessons Learnt:

It would have been helpful to have had a longer lead in period prior to the start of the trail to support promotion and to have had time to look at options for siting the sculptures at Stoke on Trent and Stafford Stations.



| Key *Highlights*

Travelling Classrooms – Making Tracks to Inclusion (Railway 200)

Project Summary:

To celebrate 200 years of railway history while promoting social inclusion, Rail 74 delivered the Travelling Classrooms project, providing inclusive, rail-based learning experiences for communities across Lanarkshire. Alongside this, the project has successfully created and launched a digital Historical Line Guide, offering a stop-by-stop journey of the line, now fully accessible and permanently hosted on the Rail 74 website as a legacy resource.

Project Aims:

- Break down barriers to rail travel for disadvantaged and neurodivergent individuals.
- Provide engaging, real-world learning experiences beyond the classroom.
- Promote autism awareness and inclusive travel.
- Celebrate Railway 200 through local heritage and storytelling.
- Create a sustainable digital learning resource linked to the rail network.

Project Outcome:

Travelling Classrooms – Making Tracks to Inclusion exceeded its targets, supporting more than 240 participants across Lanarkshire, over two-thirds of whom were from economically deprived communities. The project successfully engaged children, young people, families, ASN schools and individuals supported by social work services, many of them first-time rail users, through a programme of structured rail journeys and a large-scale partnership event involving more than 70 participants.

What Was Innovative

The project transformed train journeys into “travelling classrooms”, combining rail travel with learning on autism awareness, rail safety and local heritage. Co-designed with autistic consultants, it also created an accessible digital Historical Line Guide for neurodivergent users, featuring sensory-informed journey information.

CRP: Rail 74

Project Cost: £11,050
(£4,050 Avanti Contribution)



How It Inspired

The project increased confidence and inclusion, helping participants feel more comfortable using public transport and improving understanding of autism among peers. Families and schools reported positive impacts on travel confidence and engagement, while the initiative also strengthened partnerships and inspired further interest in inclusive rail travel.



What It Improved

1. Travel Confidence and Behaviour

Participants gained confidence using trains, reducing anxiety and increasing independent travel, particularly among neurodivergent individuals.

2. Awareness and Inclusion

The project improved understanding of autism and inclusive behaviours among participants, families, educators and volunteers.

3. Access to Opportunities

Participants accessed new educational, cultural and social experiences, with barriers to travel reduced.

4. Community and Engagement

The project strengthened connections between communities and the railway, promoting rail as accessible and inclusive.

5. Lasting Digital Legacy

An accessible, sensory-aware Historical Line Guide, hosted on the Rail 74 website, provides a lasting resource to support learning, journey planning and inclusive rail travel.

Travelling Classrooms exceeded participation targets, reaching those facing the greatest barriers to travel through an innovative and inclusive rail-based learning programme. The project improved confidence, awareness and access to rail travel while creating a lasting accessible digital heritage resource. Overall, it demonstrated how rail can support inclusion, education and community connection, providing a strong model for future Railway 200 initiatives.

Participant Feedback:

Feedback from Travelling Classrooms highlighted increased confidence, a stronger understanding of autism and inclusion, and a positive emotional impact. Many participants were first-time rail users and felt more confident travelling again, with comments including:

"I learned that trains can feel really hard for some people."

"I never thought about how loud it could be."

"I think I understand more now about why my friend wears ear defenders."

Feedback also highlighted the project's inclusive atmosphere:

"It felt good that everyone was included, nobody left out."

"It gave me a different way of looking at trains."

"Thank you, this has been the best day ever."

Parents, carers and teachers reported reduced anxiety, calmer journeys and greater confidence planning travel. Overall, feedback showed lasting improvements in confidence, empathy and inclusion, with many participants keen to travel by rail again.

Lessons Learnt:

- Experiential learning significantly increases engagement and confidence.
- Inclusive design must be shaped by lived experience.
- Rail journeys provide a powerful platform for social inclusion.
- Digital resources strengthen sustainability and extend reach.
- Partnership working is essential to successful delivery.

| Key Highlights

Settle-Carlisle 150 Art Timeline Project

Project Summary:

This project brought together 150 children from school along the Settle to Carlisle line to work with an award-winning, local artist to create a 150-year timeline to celebrate 150 years of the Settle-Carlisle line. Their artwork is being reproduced to be displayed at all the stations along the line, including Carlisle Citadel station.

Project Aims:

This project aims to commemorate the 150 years of the Settle-Carlisle Railway and provide an opportunity for young people to connect with the railways, their history, and their future. Through workshops with local schools, the project worked towards engaging 150 young people in creating artwork that captures the past 150 years, from historical events to railway history and related themes. The project involved collaboration with local artist Karen Babayan and five schools along the line to celebrate the history of the Settle-Carlisle Railway. Once the art boards are installed, each class will also be taken on a trip along the line to view their artwork and receive rail safety education.

Project Outcome:

This was an innovative project, designed to gather input from 150 young people across the communities along the 72 miles of the line from Yorkshire to Cumbria. With the theme of "Connecting Communities," the project ensured representation from different communities through schoolchildren, captured in a permanent piece of artwork displayed in a version at every station. Rather than individual pieces of artwork, the design is jointly owned and shared along the line.

Participant Feedback:

Feedback from the schools has been very positive, and all participating schools have now joined the Safety Friends project, which provides online rail safety sessions for all age groups.

CRP: The Settle-Carlisle Railway Development Company

Funding Contribution: £7,475



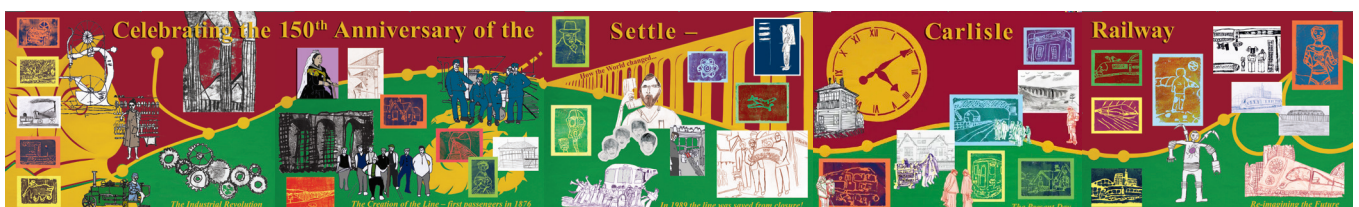
The headteacher from Robert Ferguson Primary School in Carlisle said how privileged they were to be part of a permanent commemoration for the 150th anniversary, and how the project fitted into many elements of their National Curriculum, including art and history.

Many of the children said they had never travelled on a train, and they are looking forward to visiting their artwork by train.

Lessons Learnt:

Headteachers and teaching staff are very keen to work with CRPs; however, the difficulty lies in reaching them, as emails often have to go through administrative teams. With direct contact with headteachers now established, future projects are expected to be much easier to set up.

Bringing groups together along the line to work on one specific project provides great opportunities to connect communities. The children and schools liked the idea of being part of something bigger.



Key Highlights

Write about Wigan

Project Summary:

Following the successful completion of two large-scale community art murals in the underpass areas at Wigan North Western, there was still space available to create text panels to be added to the most recent "Wonders of Wigan" photography-based artwork.

A competition entitled "Write about Wigan" was launched, inviting local writers to submit short poems about why they love their town, and 36 submissions were received. With the help of professional poet Dave Morgan, 10 winning poems were selected to be printed and displayed as part of the existing mural, as well as in one of the waiting rooms on platforms 5 and 6.

In addition, an anthology of all entries was produced, featuring bespoke illustrations by artist Alison Timmins to accompany each of the 10 winning poems. A launch event for the anthology was held at The Swan and Railway Hotel, which has partnered on previous Community Rail projects funded by Avanti West Coast, and included an open mic evening, providing contributors with the opportunity to perform their work.

Over 500 books have also been printed and distributed to various venues across Wigan, including the station where they are readily available for customers and staff.

Project Aims:

- Develop a creative writing competition inviting local writers to participate in celebrating reasons why people love their local area.
- Create text panels to be included in the existing mural and installed in one of the waiting rooms on platform 5 and 6.
- Compile all submissions to produce an anthology including illustrations.
- Provide copies of the anthology to venues across Wigan to promote the project.

CRP: South East Lancashire

Project Cost: £6,000

(using funds remaining from Wigan Mural Phase Two CRP Project)

Project Outcome:

Once again, there was satisfaction at the opportunity to involve local communities in an innovative way to generate local pride through outputs that also improved the station environment and celebrated local heritage.

Support from professional poet Dave Morgan was welcomed in promoting the competition among local writing groups, alongside the use of social media platforms to spread the word.

As a result, a strong level of participation was achieved, with a total of 36 submissions received from local writers across the Wigan borough.

Contributors also brought family and friends to both a celebration event for the winning poets held at the station in April, and a poetry evening launch event for the illustrated anthology in May, which was attended by over 50 guests and included performances from a local musician. It is hoped that many more people will now read the books that have been printed and distributed across Wigan.

Overall, there is satisfaction that the visual welcome at Wigan North Western has been further enhanced, and that an additional output in the form of an anthology has been produced, which can continue to be circulated to promote the project into the future.





Participant Feedback:

George Melling, one of the ten winning poets, said:
"Thank you, I'm humbled and I must admit I shed a tear or three... I shall use this as my badge of honour for the next few years."

Isobel Clarke, one of the ten winning poets, said:
"I'm totally over the moon to hear my entry has been successful, I can't tell you what it means to me."

One participant wrote a poem about the anthology launch event:

Write about Wigan evening. (27/5/26)

*Gathered in a domain with refreshments on tap,
 An evening of poetry with the words on my lap,
 They each follow the other, they know where to go,
 And talking to the strangers who put their words on show.
 An evening of echoes written upon the wind,
 With history in attendance of which it has been twinned,
 To a town of such beauty in a rustic kind of way,
 A pleasurable evening to finish off the day.*

Ken Abraham

Employee Feedback:

Dr Steph Dermott, Senior Community Rail Officer / Project Manager, said: *"It has been a pleasure to again engage with the wider community of Wigan in another arts-based project at Wigan North Western. The writing competition generated a range of fantastic submissions, some of which are now proudly on display at the station among our existing mural work and in one of the waiting rooms. The text panels are a wonderful addition and have already been grabbing people's attention. I am also pleased to have been able to produce an anthology of all the entries, which can now be distributed to further promote and celebrate the project, and to share the wonderful work of local writers in Wigan."*

Lessons Learnt:

As with any project, timing issues and delays for various reasons can often disrupt planning and delivery schedules. As more funded projects are undertaken, allowance has been made for such disruptions based on prior experience, and they are now anticipated in advance.

| Key Highlights

Stockport Music Story: Stockport Underpass

Project Summary:

This project was designed to improve the aesthetics and customer experience at Stockport Station through arts in the underpass. It is a celebration of Stockport's rich musical heritage and a result of direct engagement with the community, celebrating musicians who played, lived or were born in Stockport.

Stockport Music Story artwork was completed in March, with a VIP / press day and a special event held for the public to officially mark the launch of the artwork.

Created by six Stockport artists, forty pieces of art were installed in the underpass, leading to all the platforms at Stockport.

Project Aims:

The key aim of the project was to brighten the underpass with art, covering no fewer than 33 of the existing panels. This was in response to feedback from the Department for Transport (DfT)'s mandated framework, which identified the underpass as an area requiring improvement.

The intention was to create something that would resonate with the community and illustrate a significant aspect of Stockport's heritage, celebrating both the recognised and unrecognised heroes who have lived, worked, played, or grown up in the area.

Following discussions with station staff, it was also understood that there had been ongoing reports of anti-social behaviour. It was hoped that by improving the aesthetics of the underpass and fostering a sense of pride among station users, the number of anti-social incidents could be reduced.

Stockport is and has been undergoing many significant improvements and developments, it was hoped that this project would be a celebratory piece that would create some positive PR for all involved, especially the station, being the heart of the town.



**CRP: South East Manchester and
Crewe to Manchester**

Project Cost: £29,983

Project Outcome:

The creation of the artwork was drawn from the memories and knowledge of Stockport people, all of which are unique to the area. It captures decades of musical heritage, that without such documenting, may have been forgotten in years to come.

Six local artists were involved in the creation of the artwork, each with their own unique style. Over 100 people were spoken with to capture their memories of the significant artists that lived or played in the area. From the Beatles to Bowie Hendrix to Hardy, it was innovative because not every town can boast such a rich musical heritage and demonstrate its influence on the music industry over the decades.

During the VIP/Press Day, over 20 people attended the unveiling of the artwork, including three musicians who were portrayed in three of the displayed pieces. The launch event, held a few days later, was attended by over 70 people who viewed the artwork and heard from and spoke with three of the musicians featured. This was a paid, ticketed event, with 50 attendees. The funds raised from the event, along with 20% of art merchandise sales on the day, were donated to Stockport Station's chosen charity, Mentell, raising £700 for the charity.

Since the introduction of the artwork, many people have been observed stopping to look at and take photographs of the images, with numerous comments noting that they were previously unaware of the richness of Stockport's musical heritage, or that they had learned something new about the area in which they live. Both staff and users have commented that the artwork has improved the appearance and atmosphere of the underpass, and that people have remarked on how much better the area feels as a result.

This project has been regarded as both interesting and rewarding, and it has been viewed as only the beginning. Discussions have already taken place regarding the next possible phase, including curated heritage music walks at the station, a David Bowie bench, and potential improvements to the underpass flooring through further artwork. With the Brit and MOBO Awards coming to Manchester for the first time, and Stockport's own recording studio, Strawberry Studios, approaching its 60th anniversary, there are considered to be many opportunities to ensure Stockport Station remains central to these celebrations.



While it is still too early to determine outcomes, it is anticipated that the following results will be achieved:

- To reduce anti-social behaviour at the station.
- See an improvement in scoring of the DfT's mandated framework.
- To positively raise the profile of Stockport Station and the key partners of the project (Avanti West Coast / Seven Miles Out Art CIC / South East Manchester CRP).
- Improvement of customer experience at the station.
- Increase in cultural tourists to the Station.
- To strengthen the connection between communities and railway.
- To create positive social value.
- To support diversity and inclusion.
- To invest funds locally and improve local economy.
- To make the underpass move visually appealing for the passing commuters.

Participant Feedback:

"I have found out so much about Stockport that I didn't know before!"

Pam, participant of launch event, said: *"One of the best afternoons. You can tell by all the smiling faces how we all enjoyed ourselves. Thank you for helping to keep our musical history alive for us oldies and future generations."*

Andrew, participant of launch event, said: *"Thank you for a wonderful few hours. Everything was superb – especially all the artwork on the underpass and the fascinating talk from the musicians/stars."*

"You are doing an amazing job preserving our musical heritage and bringing people together – town treasures!"

"It certainly brightens up the underpass. I walk through it regularly."

"Looks great and full of fascinating facts."

Lessons Learnt:

This project was delivered in a short timeframe. Whilst delivered on time and in budget (overdelivering on the number of artworks initially planned), more time is always helpful. In an ideal world we would have applied for funding at the beginning of the financial year to help extend the timeframe and allow for any delays (thankfully this wasn't necessary!)

To agree early on about roles and responsibilities amongst all involved, such as who will lead on press and communications, who can sign off on art and events etc. Again, Avanti staff were amazing at helping to ensure this was delivered on time, but earlier agreements would have enabled less duplication of work.

Working with local artists and CIC's, with strong connections and local knowledge make for a successful project! We also used independent businesses (such as for printing and installing) as well as local artists from them area, which gave us good economic and financial value.



| Key Highlights

Rocket: Past, Present, Future

Project Summary:

Whilst accompanying a group of sixth form college students from Carlisle on a Feel Good Field Trip to the King's Theatre, Glasgow, the Community Rail Partnership Officer was surprised at comments from an actor leading a short workshop with the students.

This experience, and that of TVCRP working with other schools, suggests that young people are often lacking the opportunities to develop both people-to-people skills and an understanding of a 'pride in place'.

As part of Railway 200 celebrations, TVCRP wanted to acknowledge the strong heritage of the Newcastle-Carlisle route and to use this heritage to create an inspirational project involving secondary school students to:

- Inspire young people to consider a career in rail.
- Highlight innovation in the rail industry, both today and in the past.
- Develop confidence and transferable skills of young people including communication, research, event organisation, performance.

With this in mind, TVCRP commissioned two professional singer-songwriters, Gareth Davies-Jones and Bronwen Davies-Jones to work with Year 10 GCSE Music students at William Howard School in Brampton (8 miles east of Carlisle).

Leading the project Gareth and Bronwen helped the students to explore the little-known history of the connection between Brampton and Stephenson's Rocket. Rocket gained national recognition when winning the Rainhill Trials in 1829 but ended its working life on the mineral railways near Brampton, before being left to languish and decay. Fortunately, Rocket was subsequently saved for the nation.

This project explored pride in place, and pride in performance. It also brought the story up to date and looked at the innovations in the rail industry today and the wide range of potential career paths in the industry.

The knowledge gained by the students was then used as they created the lyrics for a song cycle of new songs with the support of Gareth and Bronwen. Lyrics to be accompanied by the students playing a wide range of musical instruments.

CRP: Tyne Valley

Project Cost: £8,830



The spoken and musical performance of Rocket: Past, Present and Future was delivered to a packed Fraternity Hall at Carlisle Cathedral in February.

Also in attendance at the event were staff and children from two primary schools from the catchment area of William Howard School. They performed songs from A Song for Edmondson (another TVCRP Railway 200 project). These children were able to see the opportunities which lay before them as they progressed to secondary school education.

This project has also enabled TVCRP to install an information board at Brampton Station so that passengers and visitors to the station can also learn and be inspired by Rocket.

Looking to the future celebrations, TVCRP has now passed 'the baton' for Rocket to the Rocket 2029 team!

Project Aims:

- Showcase and inspire young people to consider a career in the rail industry.
- Highlight some of the technical innovation which has taken place and continues to do so.
- Develop confidence and transferable skills of the young people involved, be that face-to-face communication, research, public performance, or organisational.
- Celebrate the railway heritage of Stephenson and his links to the Newcastle and Carlisle Railway (Tyne Valley Railway).

Project Outcome:

Involving secondary school students in projects can be difficult, the demands of the curriculum frequently mean that schools do not have the capacity to get involved. Fortunately, the school appreciated how the project could enhance the knowledge and skills of the student within their GCSE music syllabus.

Inspiring students to learn about the history of their local area, railway innovation from the 19th to 21st centuries and about career opportunities, the singer songwriters were able to support the young people to learn develop their talents and skills, writing three lyrics for three new songs about Rocket and the railway of the past, present and future.

Around 120 invited guests and family and friends of the students attended an event at Carlisle Cathedral's Fraternity, where the students performed the three songs, accompanied by Gareth, Bronwen and teaching staff. The students were able to showcase their skills of oratory, singing and playing musical instruments during a performance enthusiastically applauded by the audience.

Through the medium of music, song and the spoken word, everyone had the opportunity to understand more about today's railway and the importance of their local area in terms of railway history with attendees receiving a programme containing the lyrics of all the songs performed.

In addition, there is a greater awareness of teaching staff, students and their families of the opportunities provided by rail travel and career paths available in rail.

The project has strengthened the relationship between TVCRP and William Howard School; it is hoped that it will lead to more engagement in areas such as rail safety, careers awareness and encourage those living in a rural area to consider travelling by train.

An interpretation board has been installed at Brampton station marking the project and the role Brampton played in the history of this iconic and well-loved locomotive. The board features the lyrics of the three songs. These will enlighten visitors to the station and rail users of Rocket's railway heritage, today's railway and future opportunities and innovation in the rail industry.

SONG ONE: THE PAST

I am Rocket. I was saved for the nation. I changed the world. I have watched mankind grow and develop at unprecedented speed, since I set the world land speed record. The moment I was set free of my carriages and Stephenson let me fly, I glided past the crowds at the Rainhill Trials and set in motion 200 years of global rail transport development. I am Rocket. I sped along the tracks, but I was never made for regular passenger service. My light frame was sent North to Lord Carlisle's railway, to haul coal waggons and ultimately languish, parts removed, until my creator remembered me again.
I am Rocket. I was saved for the nation.

Participant Feedback:

Immediately after the performance in The Fraternity, parents of one of the students personally thanked members of TVCRP for providing an opportunity for their daughter to learn new skills.

Sara MacLachlan, staff at William Howard School said: *"The students were absolutely buzzing after yesterday's performance. Thank you again for giving us the opportunity to be part of this brilliant project, I'm sure they will treasure the experience for years to come. I think they were not only proud of the performance itself, but also of the part they played in shaping the composition; they really felt a genuine sense of ownership, which made it even more special. It will be fantastic to have a recording of the performance too. Please stay in touch, it would be great to do another project in the future."*

Susanna Cooper, Head of Music, William Howard School, said: *"I just want to echo everything Sara has expressed so beautifully. Our students absolutely loved working with Bronwen and Gareth and truly valued the chance to create and perform together. Thank you so much for giving us this wonderful opportunity. We look forward to collaborating with you again in the future. We were also incredibly impressed by the performances from the primary schools — the students showed such confidence, and every performance was truly fantastic! Lexi and Claire- please pass on our congratulations to all your pupils. I look forward to working with them in the future (our annual primary feeder schools summer concerts are coming up in July!) With kind regards to all of you."*

Lessons Learnt:

- National curriculum demands mean that there is limited time for projects such as these.
- Fitting project sessions into school timetables is difficult and demanding.
- Schools have a long lead time to schedule projects into their plans.



Feedback from our CRPs



Partneriaeth Rheilffordd
Cymunedol Dyffryn Conwy
ac Arfordir Gogledd Cymru

Conwy Valley and North
Wales Coast Community
Rail Partnership



3 Sir
Gysylltiedig
3 Counties
Connected



High Peak and Hope Valley
COMMUNITY RAIL PARTNERSHIP



Feedback from our CRPs



3 Counties Connected CRP

Thank you for your support over the past year. Funding from Avanti West Coast has played an important role in enabling 3 Counties Connected CRP to deliver a diverse programme of activity across our network, helping us connect communities with the railway in meaningful and accessible ways.

A key highlight has been the Tours by Rail – Step into the Story programme, funded by the Community Rail Development Fund, TfW, and core funding. This initiative brought together Green Badge tour guides, local communities, and independent businesses to develop sustainable, rail-based tourism during the quieter winter months. In total, eight themed tours were delivered, including heritage, women's stories, and Rail 200 themes, engaging 55 participants. The tours were highly popular, with several oversubscribed, and included trials of multimodal travel combining train and bus routes. Focused on the Chester to Wrexham line, the programme supported local

businesses while building confidence in public transport use. We are now exploring opportunities to expand, including along the Crewe to Chester route.

Your support has also contributed to wider community engagement, including school partnerships, volunteer activity, and Railway 200 celebrations. This includes a station art project at Prees with Lower Heath Prees Primary School, and a Rail 200 mural with Ysgol Y Waun in Chirk, both celebrating local heritage and the railway's role in the community. We also supported the unveiling of the Thomas Brassey statue at Chester station in May 2025.

We greatly value our ongoing partnership with Avanti West Coast, whose support continues to enable and strengthen our work.

Josie Rayworth,
Community Rail Officer

Abbey Line CRP

Abbey Line Community Rail Partnership is extremely grateful for the continued support of Avanti West Coast during 2025–26. Their core funding has provided a vital foundation for our work, enabling us to maintain effective delivery across all four pillars of community rail while responding to local priorities. This support has underpinned a wide range of impactful activities throughout the year, from community engagement and education to sustainability and heritage projects, helping us to strengthen connections between people and their railway.

With Avanti's support, we have delivered a varied programme of initiatives that have directly benefited our communities. Highlights include projects celebrating Railway 200 and our own 20th anniversary, such as the Abbey Line Tales heritage project and associated award-winning film, alongside creative exhibitions and community events held across the line. We have also continued to build travel confidence and accessibility through stakeholder engagement, guided activities and targeted sessions with schools and colleges, complemented by wider initiatives promoting inclusion, sustainability and community wellbeing.

Avanti West Coast's non-financial support has been equally valuable. Complimentary travel has enabled community groups to take part in confidence-building and enrichment opportunities such as Feel Good Futures trips. In addition, attendance at the Avanti West Coast Community Rail Conference has provided invaluable networking opportunities, allowing us to share best practice, learn from partners across the West Coast Main Line, and bring back ideas that influence our own project delivery and long-term planning.

Together, Avanti West Coast's financial investment and in-kind contributions have played a key role in enabling us to deliver a dynamic and inclusive programme of activity across the Abbey Line. This partnership continues to ensure that community rail remains a powerful tool for social value, supporting local people, promoting sustainable travel and helping the railway better serve its diverse communities.

Kate Swindells,
Community Rail Partnership Officer



Feedback from our CRPs



The Bentham Line (The Leeds to Lancaster Morecambe CRP)

Core funding from Avanti West Coast remains essential to the Leeds–Morecambe Community Rail Partnership (LMCRP), supporting two part-time Community Rail Officers and enabling delivery of a wide range of activities, alongside project costs and operations from Bentham station.

LMCRP continues to make strong progress across several initiatives. At Lancaster station, two new pictorial panels—Lancaster’s Locomotive Legacy and The Lancaster and Glasson Dock Branch Line—have been developed, with plans to extend displays along the former branch line, now a walking and cycling route.

In 2025, the partnership marked Railway 200 and the 175th anniversary of the Bentham Line with a 1950s-themed excursion from Leeds to Morecambe.

This year, LMCRP celebrates its 20th anniversary, alongside 10 years of dementia-focused work and 15 years of the Friends of Bentham Station, with commemorative materials in development.

A major 2025/26 project, Box on the Bay, has transformed a disused signal box at Hest Bank into a STEM education facility with support from multiple rail partners, including Avanti West Coast.

LMCRP is also supporting the Marsh community in Lancaster through a station map, information panel, and mural project.

The partnership looks ahead to a productive 2026/27, building on these successes.

Gerald Townsend, Chairman



Community Rail Cumbria

Community Rail Cumbria (CRC) continues to warmly welcome both financial and non-financial support from Avanti West Coast and builds upon the relationship with the team year on year. The core funding and project funding streams enable CRC to actively engage with station staff at Carlisle, Penrith, Oxenholme and Lancaster stations to collaborate on various projects and infrastructure developments.

Examples of projects during the past year include:

- Installation of an iconic piece of local art at Carlisle station celebrating the city’s community spaces and the importance of rail in Carlisle’s history; launch event held on.
- Supporting the development of Carlisle station adoption groups Andy’s Man Club and Mencap.
- Investigating opportunities for Andy’s Man Club to get involved with events and activities at Oxenholme station.
- Artwork for Oxenholme underpass finally commissioned and due to be installed within the next month or so.
- Participation in the Earth Day Clean Up at Oxenholme station.

- Facilitated the installation of the new bus timetable display on the island platforms.
- Facilitated a Victorian themed event with traditional characters enjoying a modern ride through the Lakes from Oxenholme.
- Supporting and welcoming visitors to the Inspiration Train featured for several days at Preston and Blackpool.

Stakeholder engagement, sharing of information and general supportive contact has been excellent and our collaboration with Avanti together with their passion for Community Rail is very positive.

Complimentary travel enables our team to attend various Avanti and Community Rail conferences and events held across the UK and for us to support Community Rail Network Board activities which take place across the UK.

We have regular engagement with the Stakeholder Manager for our area and excellent links with the station Community Ambassadors. The financial support enables Community Rail Cumbria to engage with the communities and station staff along the West Coast Main Line and the willingness of staff to engage and support community activities is much appreciated.

Dawn McGough, Community Rail Manager

Feedback from our CRPs



Community Rail Lancashire

Community Rail Lancashire (CRL) works with four Community Rail Partnerships (CRPs), three of which connect directly with Avanti West Coast services at Preston and Wigan North Western: the South Fylde Line (Preston–Blackpool South), East Lancashire (Preston–Colne/Burnley/Manchester), and West of Lancashire (Preston–Ormskirk/Wigan–Southport). The fourth, Clitheroe Line CRP, runs between Clitheroe and Manchester via Blackburn.

CRL and its partner CRPs are grateful for continued core funding from Avanti West Coast, which supports one full-time and three part-time Community Rail Officers working across routes linked to the West Coast Main Line. Additional funding for the Feel Good Futures project enables a further full-time role. In-kind support also allows staff to attend key meetings and conferences, including regular 'On Track' sessions in Birmingham.

During 2025/26, key collaborations have included supporting visits to the Inspiration Train at locations including Euston, Blackpool, Preston, Southport, Crewe

and Stockport, facilitating over 50 school groups and more than 1,000 pupils. CRL also maintains the community information panels at Preston station.

Using Avanti community grants, CRL delivered confidence-building activities for SEND pupils at Pear Tree School through creative arts and accompanied rail travel, and worked with Bury College students to create sensory travel bags to improve passenger comfort. Over 700 pupils also benefited from STEM sessions through Feel Good Futures.

CRL continues to deliver 'Steam to Green: The English Queen' sessions with Lancashire Archives, often including tours of Preston station, and recently presented at the Avanti West Coast Community Rail Conference.

CRL values Avanti West Coast's ongoing support and looks forward to strengthening collaboration, particularly with the Preston station team.

Richard Watts, Chair

Conwy Valley and North Wales Coast CRP



Partneriaeth Rheilffordd
Cymunedol Dyffryn Conwy
ac Arfordir Gogledd Cymru

Conwy Valley and North
Wales Coast Community
Rail Partnership

Having the financial support from Avanti West Coast has enabled our Community Rail Partnership to extend its partnership working across the North Wales coast. We have been able to support small grass root community projects and build relationships on which we can increase the work we do and reach more people.

Avanti West Coast colleagues have been tremendously supportive during the year, providing complimentary travel on Avanti West Coast services to enable the CRP to attend RSSB meetings in London as we take part in a pilot social value trial with 6 other CRPs from across the UK. We have also been able to attend a variety of engagements hosted by AWC using the complimentary rail passes.

We were also supported by Avanti West Coast colleagues in the transportation of a local SEN school to the Inspiration train in Crewe. Supported by Nick Smith, Joanna Buckley, Phil Saunders, and David Savage; the school children had the most wonderful day out and the interaction with them was outstanding. We look forward to working with Avanti West Coast this year and appreciate the funding we receive. Without it we wouldn't be able to support the people and communities we do.

**Karen Williams,
Community Rail officer**

Feedback from our CRPs



**Heart of
England** || **Community
Rail Partnership**

Heart of England CRP

Avanti West Coast have provided invaluable core and project funding to the Heart of England CRP again over the past 12 months. The core funding we've received contributes to our day-to-day activities as well as continuing programs like LearnLive where 35 of the sponsored schools have engaged with our Rail Safe Friendly project. 29 have achieved Bronze level, five schools have now achieved Silver and 1 gold. A total of 19,780 young people have watched content in the last year, across 35 schools. We were also fortunate to secure a place to showcase our work on the partner carriage of the Inspiration Train when it visited Birmingham Moor Street.

Thanks to project funding provided from the CRP fund, we have installed two major pieces of artwork at avanti managed stations. In partnership with White Ribbon and Emily Kaye Illustrates, there are now two large murals at Birmingham International and Rugby Stations championing the White Ribbon message.

The support from colleagues at Avanti was fantastic and it is always a pleasure to work with a team committed to using the railways to improve the lives of their local communities.

The community room at Coventry Station continues to be a great asset to the area, with our station adopters from the Life Path Trust using it for their weekly meet ups. We are also using it as one of the venues for our Travelling with Confidence projects and, next month we'll be hosting Coventry and Refugee Migrant Centre at the station to give their newcomer's group a tour of the station. The introduction of a community room at Rugby Station is going to be a huge asset as well and we hosted the launch of the White Ribbon mural there with the local MP in attendance.

Julia Singleton-Tasker,
Lead Community Rail Partnership Officer



High Peak and Hope Valley
COMMUNITY RAIL PARTNERSHIP

High Peak and Hope Valley CRP

We are grateful to Avanti West Coast for additional project funding which supported the Creative Journeys project. Creative Journeys gave early-career disabled artists an opportunity to design activity booklets for passengers to enjoy whilst travelling along the Buxton line. The project was launched at Stockport station with kind permission of Lisa Musgrave, Station Manager.

Friends of Station groups along the Buxton line benefitted from our small project grants and used them to enhance their stations, involve their local communities and engage visitors. At Disley the local primary school created colourful banners for the platforms, a new panel at Buxton acknowledges local resident Gunther Zuntz who saved the heritage fanlight at the station from being bulldozed- this was a part of the group's Railway200 celebrations. Hanging baskets were replaced at Chapel-en-le-Frith and the group have printed a new 'Walks from Chapel Station' booklet. A similar booklet for New Mills stations has also been reprinted due to popular demand.

Our popular line guides were refreshed and reprinted last year along with the Buzzing Stations booklets which offer bumblebee and nature-spotting walks from stations across our CRP area. Last year our funding enabled us to work with a leaflet distributor which has given us a much wider reach across the Midlands.

We are hugely appreciative of the opportunity our funding gives us to work with a Marketing and Communications Co-ordinator on a part-time freelance basis. Vicky Frost's work for us last year was really impactful, her fresh take on social media gave our communications a big lift and increased our following.

Helen Wright,
Community Rail Officer

Feedback from our CRPs



Marston Vale CRP

Marston Vale Community Rail Partnership (MVCRP) is extremely grateful for the continued core funding from Avanti West Coast, which enabled delivery of three performances of the award-winning Railway 200: The Show in Bletchley and Bedford in November 2025. The events attracted over 150 attendees and raised more than £300 for the Railway Benevolent Fund and Alzheimer's UK.

Audience feedback was highly positive, including:

"Great fun – a whirlwind tour of history... I enjoyed the musical numbers – very Gilbert and Sullivan!"

"Excellent...informative, funny, entertaining and educational... what more could you want..."

"Superb and enjoyable. A great trip through history told with the heart."

"A fantastic event... the show really helped to educate as well as entertain... well organised and felt like a real community event."

The project also established a new partnership with the Place Theatre in Bedford and increased awareness of Railway 200 resources among trainee teachers. One Programme Lead noted: *"I am also going to be using them as an example of high quality resources... We have over 60 schools in our partnership."*

MVCRP also attended the Avanti West Coast Community Rail Conference in Preston, gaining valuable insight into accessibility and travel training initiatives.

The partnership looks forward to continuing collaboration with Avanti West Coast, particularly for the Marston Vale Line's 180th anniversary celebrations from late 2026 into 2027.

Stephen Sleight, Transport Team Leader (Rail)

Mid Cheshire CRP

Mid Cheshire CRP is grateful for the continued funding and support from Avanti West Coast, which has enabled a range of projects supporting communities, wellbeing, and confidence in rail travel along the line.

The funding supported attendance at the Avanti West Coast Community Rail Conference in Preston, providing valuable inspiration and insight into projects across the network. A key current initiative is the development of a sensory garden at Stockport station in partnership with Crewe to Manchester and South East Manchester CRPs. Funding has been used to commission Groundwork to design the space, with further support sought for delivery. The project will transform an existing border into a wildlife-friendly, calming environment for passengers.

Avanti funding also supported a Christmas tree project at Chester station, delivered with North Cheshire and 3 Counties Connected CRPs. Artist Sue Guildford led

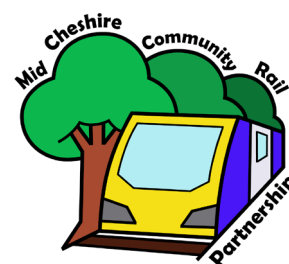
workshops with young people from Cheshire Buddies and LIVE Cheshire, creating handmade decorations that were later displayed at the station.

Additional support enabled a Railway 200 baton relay event, with walking routes linking stations along the Mid Cheshire Line, encouraging active travel and rail use.

Funding also contributed to Music Train events, including three special services for charitable organisations, providing live music and social opportunities to groups at risk of isolation while building confidence in using public transport.

Mid Cheshire CRP looks forward to progressing the Stockport sensory garden and developing further opportunities with Avanti West Coast to support communities and promote the line.

Sarah Muir, Community Rail Officer



Feedback from our CRPs



North Cheshire CRP

Over the past 12 months, North Cheshire CRP (NCCRP) has developed a strong volunteer network supporting a wide range of activities, from station improvements at Helsby and Ellesmere Port to heritage, education, and administrative work. As this model becomes established, it is expected to be replicated across other stations in the partnership area.

Collaboration with partners has been a key focus. In partnership with the University of Chester, NCCRP supported research into visitor travel patterns to the Sandstone Ridge and Delamere Forest areas. Insights from this work informed the creation of a 'Line Guide' promoting sustainable access by public transport. NCCRP has also worked with the Daniel Adamson Preservation Society to connect railway passengers with local maritime heritage.

The partnership has supported several cultural initiatives, including a Chester Station Christmas exhibition featuring a Railway 200-themed art project delivered with Mid Cheshire CRP. Music Train events between Widnes and Liverpool, delivered as part of Halton's Year of Culture 2026, proved highly successful and will be expanded to the Runcorn–Chester route.

Wayfinding improvements include an Active Travel display at Helsby and a new travel and facilities map for Frodsham, which will serve as a template for wider use.

Internally, NCCRP has strengthened its communications through targeted social media and awareness campaigns, successfully increasing community engagement and volunteer recruitment, while supporting greater rail use for leisure and business travel.

Mark Warren, Director

North Staffordshire CRP

North Staffordshire Community Rail Partnership appreciates the ongoing support from Avanti West Coast including the core funding that contributes to the employment of two part-time Community Rail Officers, project funding that enables us to deliver community focused projects and support from Avanti staff in facilitating engagement and activities at stations and in the community.

In 2025/26 Avanti's funding and support enabled us to deliver a pollinator themed art project at Stafford station working with local artists and the community to create a 3D display featuring metal flowers and insects made from recycled cans, a mural on the station overbridge and large Dibond panels all featuring pollinator artwork to link with Stafford's Bee Friendly Town status. Local community groups and schools were involved in generating the ideas for the artwork and in creating the 3D elements.

With support from Avanti we were able to deliver a range of activities celebrating Railway 200, including station tours and history talks that attracted over 200 people, art displays featuring work from community groups and an Avanti funded, community-led heritage project that explored and celebrated 200 years of railway history by highlighting the contributions of women, disabled people, and ethnically diverse communities on the railway. The project, titled Tracks Through Time, culminated in an exhibition at Crewe Station, coinciding with the station hosting the Inspiration Train. The exhibition featured a mix of photographs, oral histories and audio recordings alongside interactive elements that encouraged public participation and storytelling. Elements of the exhibition will be used again this year and displayed at Stoke station.

**Emma McIntosh,
Community Rail Partnership Officer**



Feedback from our CRPs



Rail 74 CRP

Avanti West Coast's continued support has played an important role in helping Rail 74 Community Rail Partnership deliver inclusive, community-led rail projects across the Glasgow-Lanarkshire corridor. Through a combination of project funding, complimentary travel support, staff engagement, and access to wider Community Rail networks, we have been able to expand opportunities for local people to access and engage with the railway in meaningful ways.

During 2024-2025, Avanti's support directly enabled delivery of our "Travelling Classrooms – Making Tracks to Inclusion / Railway 200" programme, supporting over 240 participants through more than 10 supported rail journeys. The programme focused on reducing barriers to travel, increasing confidence on public transport, and creating positive experiences for families, young people, and individuals from economically disadvantaged communities. Complimentary rail travel and practical support from rail partners were essential in making these activities accessible and affordable. This project has been shortlisted for the Scottish Transport Awards in June 2026.

Avanti's wider support has also strengthened our ability to build partnerships, develop accessible educational resources, and increase awareness of rail travel across the communities we serve. Alongside our Stop-by-Stop Line Guides, Rail 74 Travel Passports, and community engagement events within nature at Newton Greenspace, this has helped create a stronger sense of connection between local people and the railway while supporting social inclusion, learning, and sustainable travel.

We greatly value the positive and collaborative relationship we have developed with Avanti West Coast. Their support continues to demonstrate how the rail industry can work alongside Community Rail Partnerships to deliver lasting social value and meaningful local impact beyond the railway itself.

Suzie Mccheyne, Development Officer



South East Lancashire CRP

South East Lancashire Community Rail Partnership are grateful to have again received a range of support from Avanti West Coast over the past 12 months. Firstly, we are always thankful for the essential annual core funding that contributes to the employment of our two full-time officers, so they can undertake both ongoing daily tasks and specific project management for the CRP.

Secondly, South East Lancashire Community Rail Partnership are pleased to have been granted CRP Project funding for 'Wigan Mural Phase Two', in which we have produced more large-scale artworks for Wigan North Western station. This time using a mixture of modern and archive photography that celebrates 'Wonders of Wigan', local buildings from past and present across the Wigan borough nominated by the community, which is now on display in the walkway towards the underpass. In addition to this we have also developed a creative writing project entitled 'Write about Wigan', asking local writers to submit short poems about why they love their town. Ten winning poems were selected and are now on display amongst the photographic mural and also in one of the waiting rooms on platform 5/6. We were

also pleased to have produced an anthology of all the competition entries, with bespoke illustrations by artist Alison Timmins to accompany each of the ten winning poems. Following a launch event, the books will be distributed to various venues across Wigan including at the station.

As well as financial support, South East Lancashire Community Rail Partnership also values the relationships that have been built and maintained between Avanti staff and the CRP, in particular with our CRP Officers. We are also grateful to be invited to the annual Avanti Community Rail Conference which always provides a great opportunity to share our work and learn about other fantastic initiatives being supported by Avanti West Coast.

We greatly value the ability to approach, ask for assistance and gain input from Avanti in a variety of ways, and are pleased to continue into this financial year with Avanti West Coast as a key stakeholder for our community rail partnership.

**Dr Stephanie Dermott,
Senior Community Rail
Development Officer**

Feedback from our CRPs

South East Manchester CRP and Crewe to Manchester CRP



The support, commitment, knowledge and professionalism provided by the staff at Avanti West Coast has enabled our Partnership to grow from strength to strength throughout 2025/2026. As always, we remain grateful for the financial support provided, which allows us to reach more audiences and communities, connecting a diverse range of people to rail. However, it is the passion and dedication of its people that provides us with the true value, enabling us to deliver and make a true difference to the people and communities we serve.

Thanks to Avanti West Coast, this has been a very successful year for our Community Rail Partnerships (CRP's). We saw the renaming of Thomson Street Bridge in Stockport, to Driver John Axon Bridge, in memory of the heroic Stockport locomotive driver who was awarded the George Cross posthumously following his death in service in 1957. The renaming ceremony saw the installation of a blue plaque and a sign for the bridge, and welcomed Lord Hendy, the government's Rail Minister, John Axon's family, local councillors, and members of the railway community to mark the occasion. Thanks to funding by Avanti West Coast, we installed over 40 unique pieces of art in Stockport Stations underpass, supporting 6 local artists to showcase Stockport's rich musical heritage. We were able to engage with thousands of people, thanks to the Inspiration Train being at both Crewe and Stockport, our CRP provided entertainment and activities during the bank holiday weekend, helping raise the profile of both CRP and Avanti West Coast. Our 'Views Through a Train Window' arts project was recognised at this year's Cheshire's Best Kept Station awards, winning in the Art Project category. We could go on...

Avanti West Coast are keen to see their spaces used for the benefit of the community and we continue to use Stockport Station as a base for our group meetings, Friends of groups and project launches, such as Cheshire Best Kept Station's AGM and during Community Rail week, when we partnered with neighbouring CRPs to promote the work we do.

Our relationship with Avanti West Coast feels like a true partnership, they are great at communicating and involving us with the right level of information and at the right time. The Community Rail Conference, which was held at Preston Youth Zone, offers another example of how community is central to what Avanti West Coast does, ensuring their work is central to the community it serves and is accessible and inclusive for all to engage in and attend. The conference provided a great opportunity to network, forge partnerships and hear about previous projects developed or funded by them showing how connecting communities to rail is central to what they do. It was a great source of inspiration! From the support they give at our Partnership meetings, to the 'Ask Andy' webinars, it is clear that Avanti West Coast are proud of the work they do, and collaboration is at the heart of it.

We thank you for this year's support and look forward to seeing where 2026/2027 takes us!

**Gillian Renshaw, Community Rail Officer / Senior
Transportation Officer**

Feedback from our CRPs



The Settle - Carlisle Railway Development Company CRP

The communities that the Settle Carlisle Railway Development Company CRP serves have benefited greatly from the support of Avanti West Coast this year. They have enabled us to run a community art project to celebrate our 150th anniversary, involving 150 children creating a timeline artwork for 150 years, and they have supported our development to make our website more accessible to all.

Through their Community Rail Conference, they also inspired us to develop a new project working with young adults with special educational support to gain life skills.

Avanti also supported our project to promote our line when the West Coast Main Line was rerouted along the Settle Carlisle line. Our banners at each station were seen by thousands of passengers, to encourage them to come back by train to visit the beautiful places along the Settle Carlisle line for leisure and pleasure.

Karen Morley-Chesworth, Community Rail Officer



Tyne Valley CRP

A highlight of 2025-26 for Tyne Valley CRP was the Railway 200 related project Rocket, Past Present Future. The project funding provided by Avanti West Coast allowed the partnership to engage singer songwriters to lead a project with GCSE music students from William Howard School, a secondary school at Brampton, near Carlisle.

The students researched the final working days of word-famous Rocket hauling minerals near Brampton, how it was saved for the nation whilst being inspired to learn more about the railways of today and vast range of career opportunities in the rail industry. This research formed the basis of songwriting sessions which culminated in a performance at Carlisle Cathedral of three new songs, The Past, The Present and The Future. The students were able to showcase their musical abilities and public performance skills when they sang the songs and played a range of musical instruments to a packed audience of invited guests.

Not only has the project enlightened the students and their families about the opportunities the rail industry can offer in terms of travel and career opportunities,

but it has strengthened the links between TVCRP and the school; hopefully creating more opportunities for working together in the future.

Other initiatives have benefitted from the ongoing support provided by Avanti West Coast. A leaflet was produced illustrating the career opportunities within the rail industry and supply chain; this proved extremely popular as officer, Fiona, and volunteer Director, Anne, attended a careers fair at Carlisle engaging with students from schools, colleges, their parents and adults looking for career change.

TVCRP are appreciative of the support in providing travel to rail events. In December, travel was provided to the National Railway Heritage Awards in London. The shortlisted project, supported by Avanti West Coast some time ago, to transform the Water Tower at Haltwhistle to a café was highly commended.

Anne Ridley, Marketing Director

Principles of Funding



The positive relationship between Avanti West Coast and Community Rail Network, built together over several years has continued again throughout this year.

We confirm the allocations of CRP core funding (the 'CRP Amount') as listed in this report were discussed with Community Rail Network and that sufficient account has been taken of our views, particularly that a small uplift in core funding has again been possible, which is appreciated to support the financial stability of our CRP members.

Provision of a generous fund for community rail projects is welcomed by CRPs with several high-profile projects supported which are making a social impact across the network this year.

The in-kind support of Avanti West Coast has also been appreciated, such as complimentary rail tickets and the free use of their community rooms as meeting spaces.

Over the last year we have been pleased to share ideas and work closely with the Community Manager and Regional Growth Team on station adoption, joint funding schemes for CRP projects and at their annual Community Rail conference.

Recognition through all these initiatives shows the importance placed on community rail by staff at all levels of the business and assists CRPs to work collaboratively with the TOC.

Paul Webster
Regions Support Manager
Community Rail Network



Project Funding

In line with the Franchise Agreement, we provided three sources of funding to our Community Rail Partnerships:

- CRP Amount.
- Station Community Fund.
- CRP Project Fund.

The CRP Amount refers to the funding allocated to each Community Rail Partnership, as determined by Community Rail Network and the DfT, as previously outlined.

Payments are made annually and issued within 30 days of the start of the contract year. These funds are intended to support CRP operations and activities and are provided without restriction on how they are used.

In 2025/26, we allocated £110,883 to support the delivery of 14 projects, as highlighted in the case studies earlier in this report.

Funding allocation guidance was obtained from DfT and Community Rail Network. The table below outlines the funding distribution based on the CRP amounts allocated to each of our Community Rail Partnerships:

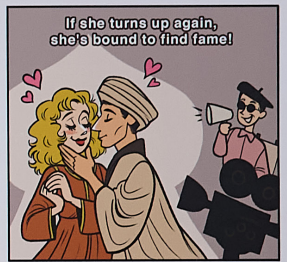
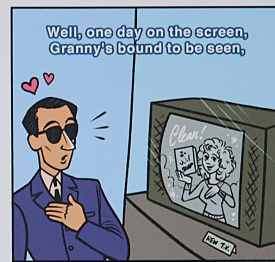
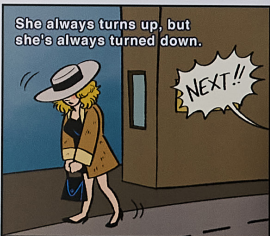
Community Rail Partnership	Annual Allocation
Abbey Line CRP	£7,344.78
Bentham Line CRP	£7,344.78
Community Rail Cumbria	£14,689.54
Community Rail Lancashire	£14,689.54
Conwy Valley North Wales Coast CRP	£14,689.54
Crewe 2 Manchester CRP	£14,689.54
Heart of England CRP	£14,689.54
High Peak and Hope Valley CRP	£7,344.78
Marston Vale CRP	£7,344.78
Mid Cheshire CRP	£14,689.54
North Cheshire CRP	£14,689.54
North Staffordshire CRP	£7,344.78
Rail 74	£7,344.78
South East Lancashire CRP	£7,344.78
South East Manchester CRP	£7,344.78
The Settle-Carlisle Railway Development Company	£7,344.78
Tyne Valley CRP	£7,344.78
3 Counties Connected CRP	£14,689.54
Total	£190,964.12



THE PURPLE GANG
presents:

GRANNY TAKES A TRIP!

written by Joe Beard
& Geoff Bowyer
illustrated by
Tamsyn Kushner



THE END

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