

## Chair's Report



2022-23 saw TVCRP engaged in a wide ranging and diverse workstream. Resuming our face-to-face work with so many groups, it seemed as though life was returning to normal after the Covid years.



Figure 1 Northern say thank you to our volunteers.

Sadly, a freight derailment on Petteiril Bridge, just outside Carlisle, on the evening of 19 October resulted in severe disruption until 7 December. Not only did this involve us in re-arranging groups and school parties, but it also saw TVCRP Directors, volunteers and staff spend over 250 hours providing feedback to Northern, circulating updates to passengers and communities and opening the Old Booking Hall at Haltwhistle to provide a warm space for disrupted passengers<sup>1</sup>.

Industrial action across the rail industry has disrupted our work and has become a serious issue to the many businesses along the route who rely on customers who travel by train.

Dialogue has been maintained with Northern about performance shortcomings and the need for improvements to the timetable to meet the needs of passengers.

The major capital project, the re-development of the Waiting Rooms at Haltwhistle continues at a slow rate, despite the huge number of hours which our Company Secretary, Julie, devotes to the project. Our experiences have been presented at several national events highlighting the challenges which CRPs face when working with the rail industry to deliver the Department for Transport's strategy to get new life into out of use railway buildings.



On a more positive note, we were delighted to be re-accredited by the Department for Transport in April 2022, when we were complimented on our level of structural organisation and achievement. Thanks to colleagues at Community Rail Network for their support.

Promotion of rail travel to and within the area to highlight the opportunities for sustainable travel and to support local communities has included participation in promotional events at Edinburgh, Leeds, and Carlisle.

Our work extended across all sectors of education, with engagement with greater numbers of children and young people. We worked with Newcastle College's Rail Academy with CrossCountry to support the Academy's awards ceremony in June. In October, we were back in the Academy to offer a session raising awareness of suicide behaviours, as well as explaining the role of a community rail partnership.



Figure 2 Carlisle May 2022 promoting rail travel with colleagues from Community Rail Cumbria and Settle-Carlisle CRPs.

<sup>1</sup> <https://tvcrp.org.uk/news/524-tvcrp-putting-passengers-first-carlisle-derailment-2022>

Early in the year, we offered a short-term paid internship to a student from Newcastle University. Izzy provided new perspectives of how to use social media to engage with a younger audience and she subsequently secured a place on a masters course at St Andrews University.

We have attended events at secondary schools in Brampton and Hexham as well as welcoming children from nursery to year 6 to the Old Booking Hall to learn about rail safety.



Figure 3 Launch of 2022 competition.

Fiona continues to be influential within the steering group for the annual Backtrack Competition<sup>2</sup>. Izzy and Fiona attended the 2022 competition launch at Glasgow Queen Street station.

It is pleasing to report that a group from the Rail Academy and UCS College in Darlington won joint first prize in the Backtrack competition. To celebrate, the Rail Academy organised a wonderful day, bringing prize winners together and giving an excellent overview of the opportunities which are available in rail. Thanks go to Felicity, Officer for the Bishop Line CRP, Christine at the Rail Academy and several TVCRP Directors who enjoyed working with the students.



Figure 4 Backtrack prize winners.



Our education volunteer, Alison has helped to grow our work with schools at the Cumbrian end of the route. Work on the national education stage has developed with our support of Daffnee – a set of resources for KS2 students on environmental resources<sup>3</sup>. These resources, funded by CrossCountry, are being delivered across the UK.



Figure 5 Rail Minister meets TVCRP and Northern representatives.

We have had a lot of fun with Arlo this year. Arlo is a badger, featured in a rail safety booklet, beautifully drawn and written by Bessie, a train driver in Southampton<sup>4</sup>. It tells the story of Arlo going on a train on his own for the first time. Thanks to a volunteer, we have a knitted jumper and Anne, our Marketing Director sourced a badger mask. In summer 2022, the then Rail Minister, Rt Hon Wendy Morton MP, was greeted by our Officer, Fiona dressed as Arlo when she visited Haltwhistle. We were able to spend the afternoon with Wendy and local MP, Guy Opperman, highlighting a range of concerns and discussing issues we face.

In autumn, we entertained a party from the G-PaTRA consortium, who are looking at green transport and mobility in rural areas<sup>5</sup>. Delegates from across Europe were interested to see and hear about our solar panel re-charging boxes for electric bikes at Haltwhistle and how we help to engage our communities with public transport and rail travel.



Figure 6 G-PaTRA rep's visit Haltwhistle.

<sup>2</sup> <https://backtrackcompetition.co.uk/>

<sup>3</sup> <https://communityrail.org.uk/sustainable-travel-educational-toolkit/>

<sup>4</sup> <https://online.fliphtml5.com/uezec/ppav/?1654633741692#p=1>

<sup>5</sup> <https://communityrail.org.uk/tyn-e-valley-crp-hosts-rural-public-transport-consortium-g-patra/>

Helping people try the train and promoting inclusivity is one of the key elements of the Department for Transport’s Community Rail Strategy. This work was particularly difficult during the Covid years, so it was encouraging to be able to welcome groups such as WECAN (enabling children and adults with special needs) and the Chrysalis Club from Hexham. We have also welcomed the Pie and Poetry Club (of vulnerable men) from St Vincent de Paul in Newcastle as well as refugee groups from the centre.

Our major project and winner of a Community Rail Award in 2020, Lyric and Line re-launched in early 2022 looking at Roman routes. This was partly to coincide with the 1,900<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the building of Hadrian’s Wall and to show group organisers that it is possible to take a small group out to explore our Roman heritage by rail.

Refining the hypothesis, we wanted to understand the barriers to travel which group organisers face when planning to take a group out by public transport, to understand the aspects which participants enjoy using rail and exploring heritage and whether there is a positive wellbeing impact.



*Figure 7 St Vincent de Paul group members experience rail and bus travel and a visit to Hadrian's Wall*

After each day out, our singer songwriter, Gareth Davies-Jones, ran two songwriting workshops. This not only builds a relationship with the individuals and groups, gives participants a skill, and allows time for experiences on the journey and the visit to an attraction to be considered. In July 2022, groups from St Vincent de Paul and Action Foundation performed their songs to an audience at Newcastle City Library. Members of the Hadrian Wall’s 1900<sup>th</sup> anniversary committee were so impressed, that a further budget was made available to fund a professional recording of one of the songs and for the making of a video. An evaluation report will be compiled in late 2023 of Lyric and Line: Roman Routes.



*Figure 8 Action Foundation perform at Newcastle City Library*

Back in 2019, we began to work with Wallsend Local History Society on a project to find and record the memories of children evacuated from Newcastle to the Haltwhistle area in 1940. Society stalwarts George and Phyll did an amazing job in recording the memories from over thirty evacuees. The pandemic restrictions resulted in a change our plans from a large commemoration in Newcastle to something different. With support from North of Tyne Combined Authorities and our first crowdfunding campaign we were able to raise the funds to work with Haltwhistle Film Project, Film Able and Gareth Davies-Jones using the research material and the help of young people from Haltwhistle to produce a 17-minute film. The film has been well received and is available on our website<sup>6</sup> and in DVD format.



*Figure 9 Some of the people involved in the evacuation project.*

<sup>6</sup> <https://tvcrp.org.uk/news/515-it-started-with-a-train-ride>



Figure 10 One of the new display boards at Corbridge

We continue to work with Northern to support station adoption along the route. New display panels have been installed at Corbridge.

In March, Wetheral waiting room had a complete make over thanks to a great team effort by personnel from Northern, Volker Rail, ISS, and students from Newcastle College Rail Academy. It was a wonderful day of partnership working and we hope to be able to repeat this approach at another station.



Figure 11 Arlo (Alison) busy knitting a scarf on the Cycle Knitter

Bringing people together and engaging people in active travel are key in our work. In summer 2022, our ‘secret weapon’ was born. When Julie first proposed asking a local company, Northern Skunkworks, to design and build an accessible version of a bicycle knitting machine which she had seen on You Tube, there was some head scratching! CrossCountry provided support for the project; despite several postponements due to industrial action, their MD eventually had the opportunity of knitting a scarf at the official launch this June.<sup>7</sup>

But what an amazing engagement tool it is, raising smiles, asking the public to knit a scarf whilst we chat about active travel, using trains and buses and listening to their thoughts about rail travel and the Tyne Valley Railway. Designed to travel by train, it has been to stations, conferences, a school, a shop, and community events. It never fails to engage or to raise a smile. And who could put a value on brightening someone’s day? And, yes, I have had a go at knitting a scarf.



Figure 12 The Chair can knit too!

As we look forward, our ambitious plans continue as we signed the lease of the Water Tower at Haltwhistle in early 2023 and we begin to take the necessary steps to work towards opening the building as a small café, gallery, and gift shop. We look forward to welcoming you to an opening ceremony of the Water Tower and the refurbished station buildings.

I am grateful to the support from our rail industry partners, the Directors, CRP officer Fiona, and all the volunteers, without whom the Tyne Valley Community Rail Partnership would not be the success it is today.

**Malcolm**  
Dr Malcolm Chainey, Chair

Figure 14-18 Transformation of Haltwhistle Station Buildings



<sup>7</sup> <https://www.crosscountrytrains.co.uk/community-news-feed/july-2023/tyne-valley-crp-launch-cyclo-knitter>