

Community-led initiatives across the North West making the rail network 'More Than a Railway'

A group of students from a Greater Manchester girls' school will visit one of the North's busiest train depots to learn about opportunities supported by rail, as part of a nationwide 'More Than a Railway' campaign showcasing locally led activity helping communities get the most from their railways.

The event is part of Community Rail Week, shining a light on a grassroots movement that engages 65,000 young people per year, including more than 20,000 in the North West, to build confidence and awareness on sustainable travel and widen access to opportunity.

The class of 30 students from Fairfield High School for Girls in Droylsden, all studying science as part of their GCSEs, will enjoy a tour of Newton Heath TrainCare Centre in Manchester, home to 139 of the 345 trains in the Northern fleet.

The event is hosted by Community Rail Lancashire (CRL), working with train operator Northern to boost awareness and confidence around sustainable travel and using rail to access work and training, while also providing insight into career opportunities in rail. CRL have a track-record of engaging thousands of young people each year, and delivering positive, often life-changing benefits.

Community Rail Week, organised by Community Rail Network and sponsored by Rail Delivery Group, this year involves more than 100 community-led activities nationwide, with more than a quarter – 27 – in the North West. As well as supporting inclusive mobility, these wide-ranging activities help communities to have a voice on rail, bolster sustainable travel and tourism, tackle social isolation, and put railways and stations at the heart of community life.

Jools Townsend, chief executive of Community Rail Network, said: "Rail can be much more than a mode of travel: a catalyst for positive change, unlocking opportunities, connecting communities, and enabling climate-friendly travel. Across the North West, political leaders and local people alike recognise how important our railways are to prosperity, social connectedness, and tackling the climate crisis. Rail, and public transport as a whole, needs to play a bigger role in our transport system and our daily lives if we're to secure a fairer, greener, better future for all, especially young people and future generations.

"This week we're highlighting the important role of the community rail movement - which is thriving and delivering so much across the North West – and generally showing how communities and the transport sector, can work together with amazing results, enhancing local places and changing lives."

Community rail is made up of 75 community rail partnerships and 1,300 station groups, comprising 8,000 volunteers, engaging and empowering an estimated 120,000 people a year in increasing access to rail and sustainable travel and delivering social benefit.

Richard Watts, chair of CRL, which encompasses four of the North West's 16 community rail partnerships, said: "CRL is passionate about engaging with young people and helping them to become confident and independent travellers. Events like today's at Northern's Newton Heath Traincare depot help to showcase the role railways play in the community as well as the exciting career opportunities that rail offers young people."

Tricia Williams, managing director of Northern, added: “The rail industry has a vital role to play in communities across the region. It also offers great career opportunities for those passionate about science and technology – and it’s important we highlight the synergy between those subjects and modern train operations as we seek to attract the best and brightest into the sector. I hope the girls’ visit to Newton Heath has given them a fresh perspective on what working in the rail industry looks like – and that we’ve sparked an interest that will lead to a job application in the near future.”

Since 2022, Newton Heath has been home to Northern’s Intelligent Trains programme, a project to make journeys by railway safer and more efficient, and the students’ visit comes just over a week after the government announced proposals to lower the minimum age requirement for train drivers from 20 to 18.

For more information, visit www.communityrail.org.uk/events-and-campaigns/community-rail-week/

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For further details, images, comments, and interviews contact Rob Lowson on 07985 179605 or news@communityrail.org.uk

Interview/picture/filming opportunities at Newton Heath: details and timings to add.

Notes to editors:

1. Now in its fourth year, Community Rail Week looks to drive change at a community level through the efforts of 75 community rail partnerships and 1,300 station friends’ groups across Britain – working to help people feel confident and positive about rail and sustainable travel and supporting communities to shape a green and inclusive transport future. For information visit communityrail.org.uk/communityrailweek
2. Community rail involves working with train operators, local authorities, and other local and transport partners to involve local communities with their railways and stations, promoting sustainable travel, social inclusion, and local development, helping communities to have a voice on rail and transport development.
3. Established in 2000, [Community Rail Network](http://communityrail.org.uk) supports those working and volunteering in community rail and their partners. It shares best practice and connects community rail partnerships and groups together, while working with governments, the transport industry and voluntary sector to champion community rail and shares its insights on sustainable and inclusive transport.