

Press release | 10th Dec 2021

From Southeast Communities Rail Partnership - SCRP

Community organisation wins top national award for array of railway engagement projects in the South East

A growing 'community rail' partnership operating across Sussex, Kent, Surrey, and Berkshire has won a coveted national award for its innovative work engaging communities with their local railway lines and stations.

Southeast Communities Rail Partnership fought off strong competition to be named joint winners of the 'Outstanding Contribution to Community Rail' prize at the 17th national Community Rail Awards, sharing the accolade with Friends of Buxton Station. The award especially acknowledged how the partnership rose to the challenges of the pandemic, adapting its sustainable travel education work, supporting local resilience, and helping communities return to rail confidently.

Over the past year, the partnership has added an eighth railway line to its roster – the '1066 Line', Hastings to Tonbridge – and supported volunteers from 73 station groups to deliver thousands of volunteer hours, cementing its vision of local communities being fully connected with their railways. Other highlights included:

- continuing their acclaimed rail-based education programmes, including 'Go Learn', engaging 26,000 children and young people since 2015, helping them feel confident combining rail with walking or cycling (with online sessions during the pandemic);
- developing 'Get into Trains', helping adults with additional needs overcome barriers to rail travel; and
- working with rail partners and local schools to ensure students could return to rail safely following COVID-19 lockdowns, including providing a 'virtual schoolbag', an online information service for parents and pupils.

SCRP chair Tim Barkley said :- "This was a fantastic result for us, in what has been a very challenging year for everybody. I'd like to thank our staff and directors for all they have done in the past year, and particularly our very many volunteers, who have done a truly amazing job. They really do put the 'community' in SCRP, and I am delighted that everyone's hard work has been recognised by us receiving this top award."

The Community Rail Awards, organised by Community Rail Network, recognise the important, often unsung, work by community rail partnerships, station friends, and other community rail groups across Britain. They shine a light on vital projects across this growing grassroots movement, highlighting community rail's contribution to sustainable mobility, social inclusion, community development, and wellbeing.

This year held at Southampton's O2 Guildhall and streamed online, the awards were attended by more than 300 guests, including community rail volunteers, officers, rail industry and government representatives. The event was addressed by transport ministers from UK, Welsh and Scottish Governments, including Rail Minister Chris Heaton-Harris MP, plus industry leaders and personalities passionate about community rail, including Chris Tarrant.

Jools Townsend, chief executive of Community Rail Network, said: "Our congratulations go to Southeast Communities Rail Partnership, whose brilliant array of work brings communities together and helps them benefit as much as possible from their railways. They have adapted impressively to

the pandemic, and delivered superb work with schools, children, families, adults with different needs, and rail partners. This all helps to build more inclusive and sustainable communities, served and connected by the railway. We continue to be especially impressed with the way they work with children and young people to help them access green travel by rail and the opportunities it opens up.”

Rail Minister, Chris Heaton-Harris, said: “Our railway offers a vital lifeline for local communities across the UK who depend on it for access to jobs and opportunities, to connect with friends and families, and experience everything the UK has to offer.

“These awards recognise those community rail partners and volunteers that go above and beyond, making a real difference to those that use our rail network, as well as neighbouring communities. I’d like to extend my heartfelt congratulations and gratitude to this year’s winners and finalists for all their work.”