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### Rail Partnership will bring communities and railways closer

**THE FIRST STEP** that could help transform the face of rail services across parts of Warwickshire, Solihull and the West Midlands has been taken this week as the application by two rail user groups, the Shakespeare Line Promotion Group and Solihull and Leamington Spa Rail Users Association, to form a “Heart of England Community Rail Partnership” has been approved. The Board of ACoRP (Association of Community Rail Partnerships) gave the go ahead for the Partnership on 25 July 2018.

The government has, for some time, been encouraging the formation of Community Rail Partnerships (CRP's) as a means of getting local railway lines and stations adopted by their local community while providing a greater voice for local people with train service operators. There are numerous CRP's in the north of England and in the South West but few in or around the Midlands. That's now set to change with the establishment of a Heart of England Community Rail Partnership covering much of Warwickshire, Solihull and parts of Worcestershire and the West Midlands.



Community rail involves local people and organisations working in partnership to improve their local railways. Nearly 60 Community Rail Partnerships (CRPs) have been set up around the country since 1993, and have helped to revive and reshape more than 80 routes and stations, thanks to volunteers, community engagement and funding from the government and train operators, which last year topped £3 million.

The Department for Transport has encouraged the formation of new CRP's by launching an updated community rail strategy – with millions of pounds of investment available for successful improvement schemes promoted by CRP's. Successful projects promoted, managed and delivered by CRP's have seen passenger numbers boosted, while others have recreated railway stations as important community hubs. CRPs can facilitate a range of things such as:

- Promoting understanding, use of and access to the railways, such as communicating service improvements, running visits and workshops, and promoting tourism by rail.
- Helping communities engage in and have a voice in railway development so it meets their needs, such as coordinating and supporting volunteers and station “friends” to enhance stations, or advising train operators on timetabling;
- Bringing disused station property back into use, such as by achieving renovations, setting up community group spaces, or running social enterprises;
- Running a range of activities to bring people together and promote social inclusion linked to the railways, such as local events, creative projects and educational programmes.

CRP’s draw a wide membership including Local Transport Authorities (County Council’s), District/Borough Councils, Parish Councils. Other key stakeholders such as local Universities, voluntary sector umbrella organisations, LEPs, relevant bus operators, Parish Council’s the Royal Shakespeare Theatre Shakespeare Birthplace Trust, StratforwardBID, Warwick Castle, English Heritage, Stratford upon Avon Town Council and Shakespeare’s England are likely to be considered as playing a part.

Fraser Pithie, Secretary of SLPG said **“What SLPG and SALRUA have done has been to initiate the establishment of a CRP. It’s now up to our local authorities, train operators and key stakeholders to step up to the plate and join with us to develop our local train services and support our local communities and their economies.”**

The key aims that SLPG and SALRUA set out in their application for a CRP are;

The area that has a high reliance upon visitors for its local economy. There is considerable scope and significant local support for improving the numbers visiting Stratford upon Avon by rail (currently around 6%) to the national average of 12 to 13%. **This includes the need to restore direct and frequent train services between Stratford upon Avon and London Paddington.**

There is an increasing need to provide frequent and reliable connectivity between the West Midlands and outer Birmingham, Solihull and Mid/South Warwickshire for home-employment transport connectivity.

Better rail services and effective integrated public transport/ cycling / walking links/facilities to stations will encourage modal shift leading to a reduction in vehicular traffic in central Birmingham which is critical to achieve air quality and environmental targets

Provide a structured format for members to highlight issues and ideas to resolve service problems or issues. Consider new ideas or developments to improve the appeal of rail services across an area which would join up thinking and lead to better overall outcomes for a wide range of both current rail users and socially isolated non-rail users.

Enable currently redundant station estate/buildings to be considered for re-use. In the case of a HOE CRP the station building at Henley in Arden is a prime candidate for restoration and re-use as a community and rail facility with diverse opportunities available including a potential HOE CRP office. Investigations have started with SLPG meeting both West Midlands Railway and Henley in Arden Parish Council, both of whom are keen to pursue the idea. A HOE CRP is the best way for this scheme to be taken forward.

To work with schools to educate young people about the benefits of rail travel, rail safety and the role of the railway in its local community.

A number of other stations have some scope for renovation through adoption or larger schemes. Tyseley station, close to Vintage Trains operating base, has redundant buildings and these could also be considered for re-use as part of a social enterprise scheme (such as seen at Kenilworth) connecting the railway with the local community, its diverse population and cultures and improving local amenities and rail services. This could deliver much greater accessibility, social inclusion, education and creative opportunities and events.

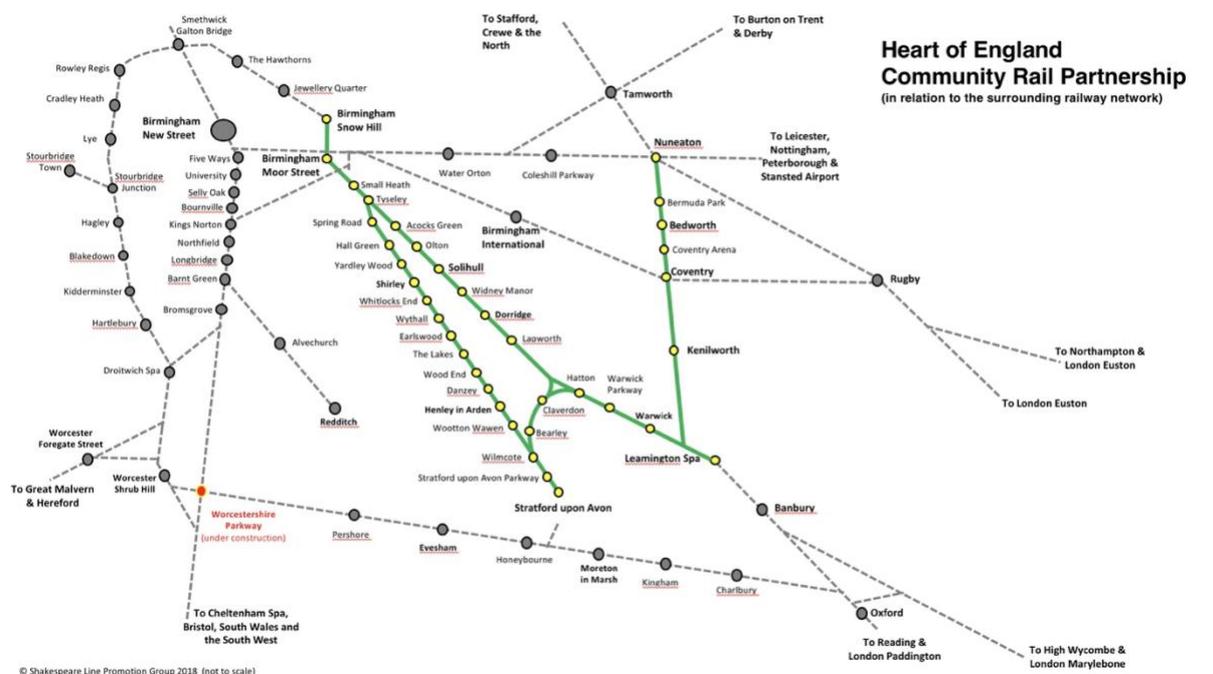
The development of the Nuneaton-Coventry-Kenilworth-Leamington Spa (**NUCKLE**) rail scheme and train service requires to be part of future rail connectivity considerations, development of its existing service and the potential for further extension of services to/from Stratford upon Avon.

The desire to secure 100% adoption of stations within the CRP by the local community as a foundation to locally improve station facilities but also highlight the to the wider community the availability of train services to them.

Support the 'Heritage' element of the West Midlands Rail franchise, in particular working with Vintage Trains at Tyseley to consider how best a CRP can develop the southern 'Snow Hill' routes with local communities in such a way as to contribute to the running of scheduled steam services to/from Birmingham. This will be reinforced once Vintage Trains become a Train Operating Company.

In overall terms a HOE CRP would enable all of the respective key players and stakeholders to come together and determine a much greater holistic approach to managing expectations, ensuring effective communications, dealing with issues, unlocking third party funding, considering solutions, developing improvements and ensuring effective outcomes that are supported by the local communities.

Martin Lambert, Chairman of SALRUA added "The formation of a CRP is crucial to developing a progressive relationship between Birmingham and West Midlands with the communities to the south. We can now consider and promote improvements and services in a joined-up way and that has to be better for both communities and the railway."



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