

Abbey Line Community Rail Partnership



Partnership Report 2025 - 2026

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1. Message from the Chair, Steve Cavinder



This is my first report as the Chair of the Abbey Line Community Rail Partnership (ALCRP), a position I was honoured to be elected to at the Annual General Meeting in June 2025. I'd like to begin by paying tribute to my predecessor Sandy Walkington who during his four-year tenure was very much a 'hands-on' Chair. He led by example, provided clear leadership, enthusiastically involved himself in the work of the partnership, encouraged participation from partners and volunteers alike, and was always ready to listen to what our collaborators had to say. Much of the work which

has been completed during this last year, began under Sandy's stewardship and I'm delighted that he has agreed to remain a member of the Steering Group.

With a long career in transport albeit at airports, I understand the complexities of large transport operations. My journey with the Abbey Line began when I was both a Hertfordshire County Council Councillor and a St. Albans District Councillor. Three of the stations on the Abbey Line, (Watford North, Garston & Bricket Wood) were in my Division/Ward and consequently I regularly received calls from residents regarding issues arising from the service. At a time when the service was unreliable this led me to propose a motion at HCC Full Council requesting the cabinet member for Highways and Transport contact the train operating company to discuss improvements to the service. Subsequent to this I was asked to join the ALCRP Steering Group which of course I was delighted to do and since then, I've been happy to involve myself in various projects, activities and events.

This has been an amazing year for the ALCRP. A year in which, along with the 200th anniversary of the modern railway, we have celebrated our own 20th anniversary. A year in which we have been recognised within the rail industry with two prestigious awards. A year in which we have continued to collaborate with existing partners and connected with some new partners all of whom have had a productive impact. A year in which the number of volunteers who regularly contribute to the work of the ALCRP has increased.

Our overriding objective has and continues to be connecting communities with their railways and stations. During the last twelve months we have delivered projects, provided activities and attended events all of which have had positive outcomes for our communities. We have also supported other organisations and following a couple of years where we have campaigned on White Ribbon Day, I'm particularly pleased that we have now become official White Ribbon supporters. Among other things this reinforces our theme of 'Being kind along the line'.

So, there is much to celebrate however none of this would have been possible without the support of our partners. We are deeply indebted to London Northwestern Railways and Avanti West Coast for the financial and practical support they continue to provide, and to Network Rail for their active involvement. As the local authorities, Hertfordshire County, St Albans District, Watford Borough and St Stephen Parish Councils have all played an important part in our success. We are also grateful to the Community Rail Network for their expert advice and support.

Finally, my thanks to the Steering Group who have been hugely supportive in my first year as chair, to my vice chair Rob Varney whose knowledge of the voluntary sector has been invaluable, to Val Male the outgoing HCC Rail Officer who has always provided timely support and advice, and of course to Kate Swindells our Community Rail Officer who continues on our collective behalf, to make sure that the ALCRP is widely recognised as a high performing partnership. Last but certainly not least a huge thanks to our largely unsung heroes who we get to call our volunteers. Much of what we do we couldn't do without you.

Steve Cavinder

2. A message from Cara Higgs, Community Strategy Manager, London Northwestern Railway

Welcome from London Northwestern Railway to the Abbey Line Community Rail Partnership's 2025–26 Annual Report.

In last year's introduction, I reflected on the significant progress made by the partnership in recent years. This progress has since been recognised with awards from both the Community Rail Network and London Northwestern Railway - an outstanding achievement for the CRP and the communities it serves.

Recent meetings have presented our steering group with some difficult decisions as we work to ensure resources are aligned with the needs of communities along the line. While these discussions are challenging, I am proud to be involved and remain excited about the plans for the year ahead.

Finally, I would like to thank you for your continued commitment to the Abbey Line Community Rail Partnership. We are sincerely grateful for your support of the rail industry and believe that, together, we can strengthen our communities and help restore confidence in rail across the country.

3. About the Abbey Line

The Abbey Line is a 6.5-mile-long railway that serves local communities between Watford Junction and St Albans Abbey. The train, known locally as the Abbey Flyer, also provides a link for those wishing to make onwards connections into London or to Milton Keynes and beyond.

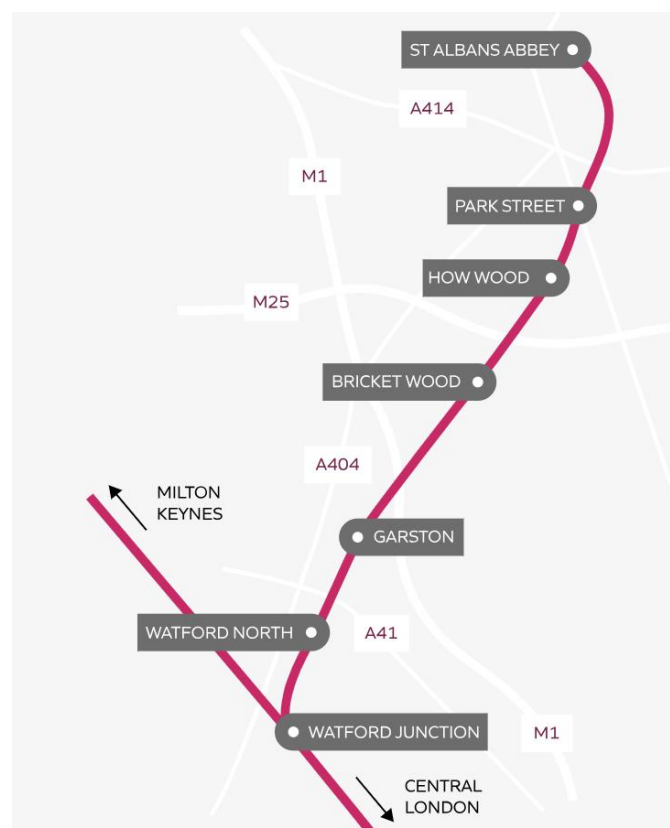
The Abbey Line was the first railway that the ancient city of St Albans received. London & Northwestern Railway (LNWR) received parliamentary powers to construct the 6 mile, 32 chains-long branch line on 11th February 1853. Work started in the early months of 1856 and the line was opened to public traffic on Wednesday 5th May 1858.

Being a branch line, trains were made up of 3 to 4 coaches and hauled by a tank engine until the branch was fully 'dieselised' for passenger trains in 1955.

July 2005 marked the designation of the branch as a 'Community Railway' under the government's 'Community Rail Development Strategy', launched in 2004.

The service is operated by London Northwestern Railway.

More on the history of the Abbey Line can be found on our website.



4. An Introduction to The Abbey Line Community Rail Partnership

Community Rail Partnerships provide a link between the railway and local communities. They are about positive development, bringing together a wide range of interests along the route.

The Abbey Line Community Rail Partnership was established in June 2005 and brings together a number of partner organisations with the purpose of increasing usage of the line and connecting communities to their railway. It also aims to enhance station environments to make them a more pleasant place and to give the local community the opportunity to become more involved in their local railway line.

Community Rail typically involves local people and organisations working in partnership to improve their local railways. Community Rail initiatives such as station enhancements and innovative promotional schemes can help get better value for money from the rail network.

This might include improving bus links to stations, developing walking and cycling routes, bringing station buildings back to life, art and educational projects, organising special events which promote the railway and its relevance to the community.

As per our constitution, 'The Partnership is primarily a development and promotion group not a lobbying organisation', so our work and projects reflect this.

Current members of the Abbey Line Community Rail Partnership are;

Abfly (Rail Users Group), Bricket Wood Station Heritage Trust, Communities 1st, Hertfordshire County Council (also the current host organisation), Watford Borough Council, Watford BID, St. Albans BID, St. Albans City & District Council, St. Stephen Parish Council, Avanti West Coast and the train operator London Northwestern Railway. We also have a number of independent individual members.

Observers from The Community Rail Network (CRN), Network Rail, Department for Transport and British Transport Police support and are also invited to attend steering group meetings.

CRN is the representative body which provides support, advice and information to the Community Rail sector, particularly through membership services and events.

The organisation is an advocate for community rail, providing a link between members and national and devolved governments, partners and industry. Government recognises the important role that CRN plays in helping to deliver strategic outcomes and is a key funder of the organisation. (Source: The Department for Transport).

5. Our Aims and Objectives

- Help secure the long-term future of the Watford Junction – St Albans Abbey railway line through a community-based partnership approach
- Highlight the benefits of fixed-rail transport links
- Link the railway more strongly with the communities it serves, in order to contribute to the economic, social, and environmental wellbeing of those communities
- Reduce the road congestion in the area by enhancing the role of the local railway in delivering local transport solutions, as envisaged in Hertfordshire's Local Transport Plan (LTP) and other local authority economic and wellbeing strategies
- Deliver sustainability benefits associated with the railway and increased active travel
- Promote environmentally-friendly projects which improve the surroundings and biodiversity at the stations along the route
- Meet the objectives set out in the Department for Transport Community Rail Development Strategy

6. Overview of our Work and Projects this Period

A Landmark Year: Celebrating 20 Years of Community Rail

2025–2026 marked a significant milestone for the Abbey Line Community Rail Partnership as we celebrated 20 years of connecting communities with their railway. Alongside the national Railway 200 celebrations, this anniversary provided an opportunity to reflect on two decades of growth while looking firmly to the future.

Throughout the year, we brought communities together through events, storytelling and partnerships – from anniversary celebrations and community gatherings to collaborative projects like our commemorative Abbey Flyer brew. These initiatives highlighted the enduring importance of the Abbey Line not just as a transport link, but as a shared local asset rooted in heritage, sustainability and pride.

You can see all our news on our website: abbeylinecommunityrail.org.uk/news

Telling Our Story: Creative Communications & National Recognition

Our creative campaigns, including the short film celebrating the line and its communities, reached thousands of people and was recognised nationally with a Community Rail Award for Most Effective Communications Campaign.

The Abbey Line Tales project brought together voices from across the community, capturing memories, stories and aspirations for the future, and was showcased at the new Walkway Gallery at Watford Junction as well as online.

We partnered with Pope's Yard Brewery in North Watford to create a special guest beer inspired by the Abbey Flyer - our much-loved local branch line. The brew also celebrated the Peregrine Falcons nesting atop St Albans Cathedral, the original 'Abbey Fliers'. Following a successful debut at the St Albans Beer and Cider Festival, Pope's Yard have committed to continuing production of this unique recipe - marking a genuine legacy achievement.



The Abbey Line as a Cultural & Creative Corridor

Across the route, station spaces are being transformed into platforms for storytelling, with exhibitions, art displays and our Walkway Gallery at Watford Junction helping to showcase local identity and encourage engagement.

Initiatives like Rhymes on the Line and Culture in Colour ensured that stations became welcoming cultural spaces reflecting the diversity and creativity of local communities.

We've strengthened awareness, built pride and placed the Abbey Line firmly on the map as a vibrant community railway.



Growing the Railway: Passengers, Sustainability & Tourism

Passenger growth on the Abbey Line continued to outperform national trends, reflecting both growing confidence in rail travel and the importance of local stations to their communities. Improvements in reliability on the Abbey Line, and the introduction of contactless payments undoubtedly are contributing to the local trends. We will continue to promote these positive changes as we 'Connect Communities With Their Railway'.

We encouraged sustainable travel choices through initiatives such as Community Rail Week and promoting car-free leisure journeys - 'Abbey Line Days Out'. We also added a Sustainability section to our website.

Promoting sustainable walking routes through our Abbey Line Trail resources, alongside our annual sponsored walk with West Herts Hospitals Charity, continues to be a popular way to engage communities. These initiatives also highlight the railway's important role in supporting health, wellbeing, and inclusive community participation.

We contributed to the addition of a Beryl Bike bay at Garston station, which saw strong uptake in its first year. This has strengthened first-and-last-mile connections, making it easier for passengers to access the railway without relying on cars.

Together, these initiatives have helped re-position the line as a gateway to local leisure, work and education - supporting the local economy while reducing environmental impact.



Greener Stations: Biodiversity & Environmental Action

At Garston and other stations, biodiversity projects including wildflower planting and habitat creation are enhancing green spaces for both people and wildlife.

This year also marked the start of a new partnership with Herts and Middlesex Wildlife Trust, signalling a long-term commitment to supporting biodiversity along the Abbey Line corridor.



Community in Action: Partnerships, Volunteering & Engagement

Partnership working remains at the heart of everything we do. This year saw strong collaboration with local authorities, train operators, businesses, community groups, schools and volunteers.

Volunteer activity played a vital role, from station checks and community gardening days to events and outreach. Initiatives such as improvements at Garston Station Community Garden demonstrate the power of collective action in transforming spaces and building community pride. We even won an award for it!

Our stakeholder event further strengthened relationships and established new ones, and helped shape shared priorities for the future.



Our commitment to inclusion extended beyond transport, with initiatives such as our support for the White Ribbon campaign reinforcing our role in promoting safer communities.

We supported travel confidence programmes with community groups and continue to engage with stakeholders and decision-makers on improving accessibility across the line.

School engagement included trips and workshops to highlight rail safety, build confidence and inspire careers in the rail industry.

We warmly thank our volunteers and partners, and welcome any groups or individuals who would also like to get involved in putting something back into their community.



Recognition & Influence: A Stronger Voice Nationally

This has been a year of growing recognition for the Abbey Line CRP. In addition to our national award for communications, we secured reaccreditation - demonstrating our continued excellence as a Community Rail Partnership.

We also strengthened our advocacy role, engaging with policymakers and partners to champion improvements, accessibility and the long-term future of the line.



Looking Ahead: Priorities for 2026 and beyond

Building on a year of celebration and achievement, we are now focused on the future.

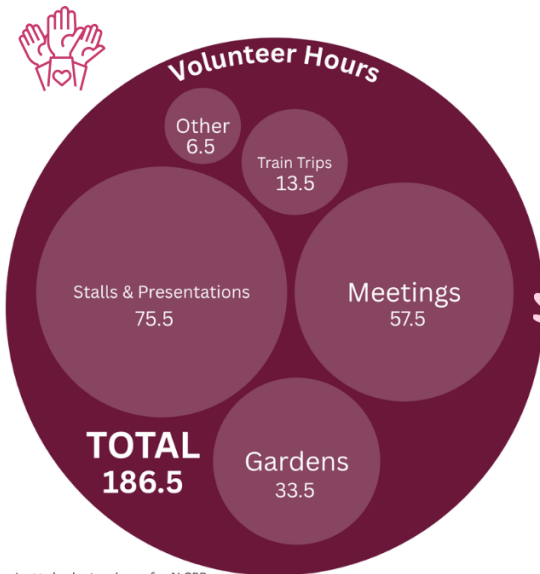
Guided by the four pillars of community rail, our theme of 'Being Kind Along the Line' will underpin the Abbey Line CRP's events and activities. We will be supporting and celebrating kindness, respect and inclusion across people, places and the natural environment. We aim to encourage positive behaviour, community connection and care for nature - helping create a welcoming, respectful railway for everyone while promoting pride in the line and its surroundings.

With strong partnerships, growing recognition and a clear vision, the Abbey Line Community Rail Partnership is well placed to continue delivering meaningful impact for the communities we serve.





Impact Report 2025-2026



Logged volunteer hours for ALCRP
Not including Station Adopter Group Activities



15

Train Trips

487 people travelled

4.6 / 5 satisfaction with trip

Peaceful and easy travel

Fun, as I can sit with friends

It was a smooth journey and the children enjoyed the adventure of being on a train together



70

Presentations, radio interviews, newspaper & community newsletter articles, website news
4 e-newsletters with 183 subscribers



21k

views
1000 new users per month



986

Facebook followers
31k views per month

93 Instagram followers
686 views per month



7. London Northwestern Railway figures

Below are the passenger journeys and public performance measurements provided by London Northwestern Railway

Periods	No. of Days	Period end	Journeys	PPM	Reliability	PPM MAA
				On Time	T3	T15
2025/P01	27	Sat 27/04/2024	17,492	87.8%	98.8%	99.6%
2025/P02	28	Sat 25/05/2024	18,350	87.7%	97.3%	100.0%
2025/P03	28	Sat 22/06/2024	23,960	84.30%	98.60%	100.00%
2025/P04	28	Mon 22/07/2024	20,715	87.20%	98.80%	99.90%
2025/P05	28	Sat 17/08/2024	21,091	87.50%	98.50%	99.90%
2025/P06	28	Sat 14/09/2024	21,973	85.90%	98.60%	99.80%
2025/P07	26	Sat 12/10/2024	23,439	80.60%	98.20%	100.00%
2025/P08	28	Sat 09/11/2024	23,836	73.70%	95.50%	100.00%
2025/P09	28	Sat 07/12/2024	22,239	71.50%	94.40%	99.50%
2025/P10	28	Sat 04/01/2025	18,316	78.90%	96.00%	99.90%
2025/P11	28	Sat 01/02/2025	22,915	85.30%	98.50%	99.90%
2025/P12	28	Sat 01/03/2025	25,038	83.60%	98.20%	100.00%
2025/P13	30	Mon 31/03/2025	29,498	85.70%	97.20%	100.00%
Annual			288,862			

Periods	No. of Days	Period end	Journeys	PPM	Reliability	PPM MAA
				On Time	T3	T15
2026/P01	26	Sat 27/04/2025	25,399	85.9%	98.8%	99.8%
2026/P02	28	Sat 25/05/2025	28,779	84.5%	98.7%	100.0%
2026/P03	28	Sat 21/06/2025	28,651	89.5%	99.1%	100.0%
2026/P04	28	Sat 19/07/2025	24,256	89.1%	99.2%	100.0%
2026/P05	28	Sat 16/08/2025	25,685	86.7%	98.1%	99.7%
2026/P06	28	Sat 14/09/2025	26,779	86.5%	98.7%	99.8%
2026/P07	28	Sat 11/10/2025	27,452	83.6%	96.5%	100.0%
2026/P08	28	Sat 08/11/2025	28,395	80.7%	96.0%	100.0%
2026/P09	28	Sat 06/12/2025	29,660	80.5%	96.9%	99.60%
2026/P10	28	Sat 03/01/2026	20,334	84.1%	97.5%	99.9%
2026/P11	28	Sat 31/01/2025	28,110	83.8%	95.6%	99.6%
2026/P12	28	Sat 28/02/2025	29,003	81.1%	96.6%	99.9%
2026/P13	31	Tues 31/03/2025	31,816	86.2%	99.0%	99.9%
Annual			354,319			

PPM* - PUBLIC PERFORMANCE MEASUREMENT
MAA* - MOVING ANNUAL AVERAGE

8. Finance Information

FINANCE REPORT - 2025/26 END OF YEAR

Author: Trevor Mason

1. Purpose of Report

Individual reports have been produced for each of the quarters throughout the 2025/26 financial year. This report consolidates them to set out the position for the whole of 2025/26.

2. Financial Transactions in 2025/26

A table on the financial transactions carried out in 2025/26 is available on request. Total expenditure was £83,928.

3. 2025/26 Contributions

The total of core contributions received for 2025/26 was £60,844, as detailed below in Table 1.

Table 1 Core contributions for 2025/26

Organisation	2025/26 Contribution (£)
West Midlands Trains	40,000
First Trenitalia	7,344
Hertfordshire CC	10,000
Watford Council	1,500
St Albans C&DC	1,500
St Stephen PC	500
TOTAL	60,844

4. 2025/26 Expenditure

Total expenditure for 2025/26 funded by the CRP was £83,928, as detailed in Table 2.

Table 2 Expenditure for 2025/26

Activity	2025/26 Expenditure (£)
Hosting costs	34,128
Additional running costs	450
CRN Membership	150
Website hosting	840
Annual costs sub total	35,568
Projects (net expenditure)	48,360
TOTAL	83,928

5. Summary of 2025/26 Financial Outturn

The table below sets out the outturn financial position for 2025/26.

It has been agreed that the CRP will hold a Contingency Fund equal to one year's annual running costs, and hence this sum has been deducted from the funds that will be available to use in the next financial year.

Table 3 Summary of Financial Outturn for 2025/26

	£
Balance carried forward from 24/25	(+) 154,302
25/26 Income (Table 1)	(+) 60,844
25/26 Net Expenditure (Table 2)	(-) 83,928
Total balance to carry forward to 26/27	131,218
Contingency Fund	(-) 35,568
Available balance	95,650

9. Abbey Line Community Rail Partnership Members 25/26



Supported by:



10. Resources and links

- Visit our website www.abbeylinecommunityrail.org.uk
- Our social media pages

Find us on:

Facebook and BlueSky: @abbeylinecrp

Instagram: @abbey_line_crp

- London Northwestern Railway
For train times, tickets and customer service contact
Website: www.londonnorthwesternrailway.co.uk
- Avanti West coast trains
For train times, tickets and customer service contact
Website: www.avantiwestcoast.co.uk
- Community Rail Network
Website: www.communityrailnetwork.org.uk
- Network Rail
For information on railway maintenance in your local community /near your home
Website: www.networkrail.co.uk/communities/contact-us/

11. CRP Contact Information

Partnership Development Officer: Kate Swindells

Email: info@abbeylinecommunityrail.org.uk

Office Address: Hertfordshire County Council, Farnham House, SG1 2ST. CHN 216.



Kate Swindells - Partnership Development Officer

*A big thank you to all our volunteers, stakeholders,
partners, the train operator London Northwestern Railway,
passengers and our local community.*