

Press Release

4 December 2025

Avanti West Coast highlights social mobility and accessibility at Community Rail Conference

- *Avanti West Coast hosts fifth Community Rail Conference at new youth zone in the heart of Preston*
- *Community Rail Partnerships invited to discuss the importance of accessible travel as a gateway to opportunity*
- *Attendees encouraged to apply for Customer and Communities Improvement Fund designed to support local initiatives*

Avanti West Coast has hosted its fifth annual Community Rail Conference championing accessible travel and its importance in creating opportunity in local communities.

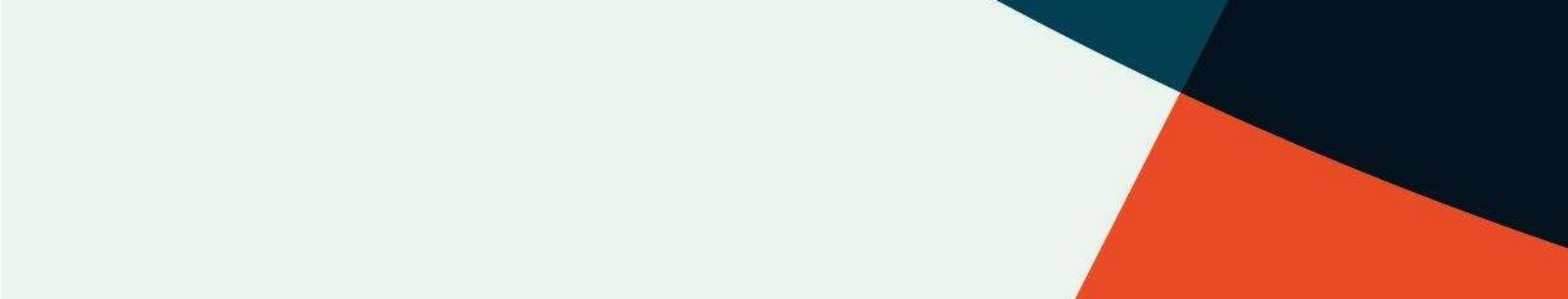
Representatives from local Community Rail Partnerships (CRPs) were invited to the conference in Preston to share their insights on social mobility. They used the event to explore how charities and organisations in their local areas can collaborate with the intercity operator to raise awareness around accessible travel and its vital part in creating a gateway to opportunity in their communities.

Ahead of the official opening in spring 2026, the event was hosted in Vault Youth Zone, Preston's new space for young people. Attendees were welcomed to share their thoughts on the inclusive aspects of the building's facilities – shining a light on how integral accessibility is in creating opportunity for younger generations within the area.

Guests on the day took part in a dedicated workshop focused on social mobility, which showcased some of the operator's ongoing work around accessible travel. The session invited CRP representatives to share their insights on improvements that could be made within their local areas.

They also heard from Managing Director at Avanti West Coast, Andy Mellors, as he spoke passionately about how the collaborative work with the CRPs helps to foster close ties with communities across the West Coast Main Line – a vital tool to delivering social benefit.

To highlight the positive impact the long-distance operator has made within the communities it serves, Mark Tomlinson from Pear Tree School – an education hub for



children and young people with learning difficulties – was invited to speak at the conference. He praised Avanti in its support for the school, especially in his role as Travel Trainer in which he accompanies pupils on trips using the rail network to build their confidence around travel.

As the day was closing, attendees were encouraged to apply for Avanti's Customer and Community Improvement Fund (CCIF) – a dedicated funding scheme set up to support initiatives that will drive a positive change for local people.

This is the sixth round of funding that the operator has made available as part of the CCIF and this year, it invites applications that consider the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals – a blueprint to achieve a better and more sustainable future for all. The closing date for applications is 23:59 on Friday 9 January 2026.

Speaking after the event, Andy said: "Our annual Community Rail Conference is vital to showing our commitment to supporting the communities we serve through Community Rail. Together, we have the power to shape a railway that is inclusive, accessible, and welcoming for all, a railway where every passenger can travel with confidence, regardless of ability, background, or circumstance.

"The outcome of the sessions at our conference has shown that we can continue to collaborate to create a network that people trust, love, and feel proud to use, today and for generations to come."

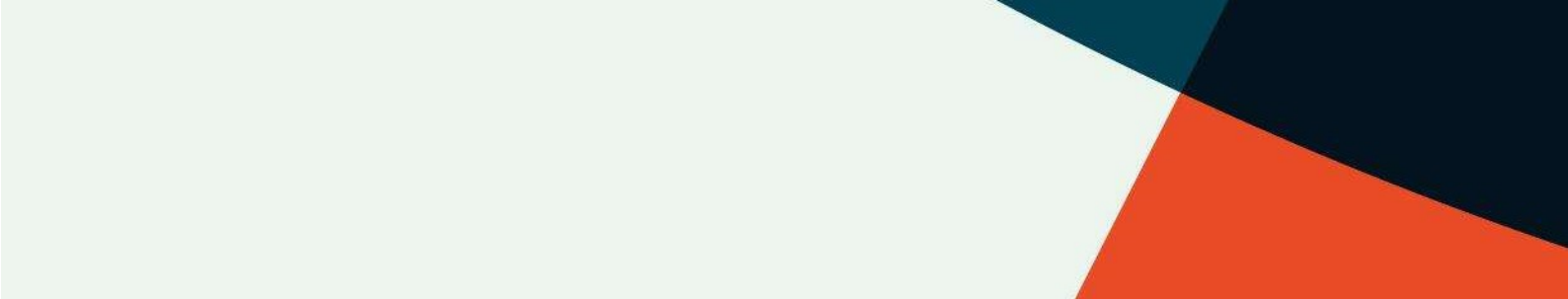
Paul Webster, Regions Support Manager at Community Rail Network, said: "What an inspiring day at the Avanti West Coast community rail conference! The energy and enthusiasm of the community rail partnerships and the leadership of the Avanti team created a collaborative event generating new ideas in a groundbreaking venue.

"This demonstrates just how much people and communities matter to everyone at Avanti and how they care about building meaningful and long-lasting relationships with local charitable organisations and independent business across their network."

You can read the more about how you can apply for the CCIF funding here [*\[link to November press release\]*](#).

ENDS

About Vault Youth Zone



We are Vault Youth Zone. We will deliver life changing youth work and incredible opportunities for Preston's young people. Vault Youth Zone will be a world class space for young people from a diverse range of backgrounds to explore their talents, develop new skills and thrive.

It will be a place that belongs to young people and is wholly dedicated to them. But it won't just be a building, it'll be a safe environment that will inspire them with passionate youth workers offering the support they need. The Youth Zone and its incredible team of youth workers helping and encouraging young people to lead happy and aspirational lives, to feel safe and be themselves.

With every workout or kickabout, every mock interview or muck around with mates, young people will develop the resilience to face challenges and the skills to solve problems. They'll find confidence to aim high and the determination to become who they want to be. They'll build positive

relationships based on being given the space to talk, an understanding of their own self-worth, and a sense of belonging to something bigger. These journeys don't always happen overnight. But that's fine, we are here for the long run.

About Avanti West Coast

Avanti West Coast, operator of intercity rail services on the West Coast Main Line, is a joint venture between FirstGroup and Trenitalia, delivering a cleaner, greener railway that drives the West Coast forward. Avanti West Coast serves key UK cities, including London, Birmingham, Manchester, Liverpool, Glasgow as well as North Wales.

We're on a mission to be the transport of choice – connecting customers and communities along the West Coast. Our award-winning Pendolino refurbishment programme transformed the UK's hardest working fleet with all 56 of the iconic trains providing best-in-class comfort.

Our Evero fleet, which offers more seats, improved comfort, and a substantial cut to carbon emissions, was introduced in June 2024 and is the result of a £350m investment in sustainable travel. Built by Hitachi, the 23-strong fleet, consisting of 10 seven-carriage electric trains and 13 five-carriage bi-modes, serves routes from London to the Midlands, Chester, North Wales and the North West.

We want to make a positive difference to the people and places we serve – helping to drive economic growth, green travel, and break down barriers. Our efforts to contribute to society and enable people to benefit from the opportunities rail offers through purpose-led initiatives including Feel Good Field Trips and award-winning female driver recruitment campaign has seen us create over £1billion in social value impact.

We're tackling climate change wherever we can, from reducing energy and water use to training drivers in eco-driving techniques and sourcing food and drink from local suppliers. Our goal is to be net zero carbon by 2031. We're on track.

For the latest news, visit the Avanti West Coast Media Centre: <https://newsdesk.avantiwestcoast.co.uk/>

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