



Theory of Change

1. Situation analysis: What is the problem/issue GoCRP is trying to tackle?

Historically, trains and public transport formed a vital part of community infrastructure—connecting people, enabling mobility and fostering social cohesion. Public transport usage patterns have fluctuated significantly in recent years, with rail journeys reaching record highs pre-pandemic before experiencing a sharp decline during 2020-2021. While urban rail has shown stronger recovery, rural public transport services continue to face challenges. In counties like Gloucestershire and Oxfordshire, residents often contend with limited service frequency and coverage, particularly in areas outside main transport corridors (Campaign for Better Transport, 2022).

Research indicates that despite 1 in 4 people in the UK not having access to a car (Department for Transport, 2019), public transport usage continues to face challenges. Rural areas are particularly affected, with residents in these locations having approximately 40% less access to public transport options compared to urban dwellers (Campaign for Better Transport, 2021).

There are specific demographic groups who have notably low public transport usage rates. These include:

- Older adults (particularly those over 75)
- People with disabilities and mobility impairments
- Low-income households outside urban centres
- Ethnic minority communities in rural areas

Young people, while relatively frequent users due to lower car ownership, often report negative attitudes toward public transport systems. A 2022 Transport Focus survey found that only 37% of 16-25 year olds rated their local public transport as "good" or "very good" in terms of reliability and value for money.

Policy changes in the last decade have focused on service rationalisation, with reductions in station staffing and rural route frequency. This has created a disconnect between policy decisions and community needs. There appears to be:

- Limited user voice in transport planning, especially from young people and underrepresented groups
- Insufficient understanding within the rail sector about the benefits of community engagement
- Poor recognition across sectors (health, employment, education) of how public transport limitations represent a significant barrier to access

Despite these challenges, growing concerns about climate change, air quality and congestion have led to increased central and local government policies aimed at boosting public transport usage. The UK Government's "Transport Decarbonisation Plan" (2021) explicitly recognises the need to shift travel habits toward sustainable options. However, this policy direction has yet to translate effectively into community-level action and impact.

The implications of low public transport usage are multi-faceted:

- Environmental impact: Transport accounts for approximately 27% of UK greenhouse gas emissions, with private vehicles being a major contributor (Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy, 2022)
- Social exclusion: Limited mobility restricts access to employment, education, healthcare, and social opportunities, particularly for the 25% of households without cars
- Economic costs: The Transport Select Committee (2023) estimates that congestion costs the UK economy approximately £31 billion annually
- Public health: Evidence suggests that public transport users typically walk 3-4 times more than car users as part of their journey, contributing to improved physical activity levels (Public Health England, 2020)
- Community vitality: Areas with poor public transport connections experience reduced economic opportunity, visitor numbers, affecting local businesses and community vibrancy

2. Target groups: Who are the people GoCRP needs to work with to tackle these issues?

As a small organisation with limited resources, GoCRP must take a strategic approach to its work. While our ultimate goal is to increase public transport usage across Gloucestershire and Oxfordshire, we recognise that achieving systemic change requires working at multiple levels. Approximately half of our work focuses on organisations and policy makers who can amplify our impact.

Our target groups include:

People with limited public transport usage in Gloucestershire and Oxfordshire:

- Young people (16-25), who represent future transport users and decision-makers
- People with protected characteristics who face specific barriers, including:

- Those with disabilities and mobility impairments
- Ethnic minority communities
- Older adults (particularly those living alone)
- Low-income individuals and families who would benefit economically from improved public transport access but face confidence or information barriers

Policy makers who can influence local and national transport frameworks:

- Local authority transport planners and councillors
- Train operating companies and management
- Bus operators and companies
- Department for Transport representatives

Organisations that can help engage target populations:

- Youth organisations and schools
- Community groups and charities working with underrepresented communities
- Tourism organisations and visitor attractions
- Employers and business networks
- Health and social care providers

Our work specifically focuses on addressing barriers to public transport use, which include:

- Lack of confidence and travel skills
- Limited awareness of available services
- Negative perceptions about safety, reliability and comfort
- Information accessibility issues
- Financial constraints
- Physical accessibility challenges

3. Activities: What does GoCRP do?

Research and consultation:

- Surveys, focus groups, and community conversations to understand specific barriers
- Youth forums to gather insights from young people
- Accessibility audits with people who have diverse needs
- Data collection and analysis on current usage patterns and barriers

Community voice amplification:

- Establishing platforms connecting communities with decision-makers
- Youth forums providing direct input to transport providers
- Access panels representing diverse user needs
- Creating opportunities for community members to share experiences directly with policy makers

Resource development:

- Travel guidance materials tailored to specific user groups
- Toolkits for organisations to support transport access (e.g. Destination Toolkit, black history map of Gloucestershire)
- Policy briefings based on research and community consultation
- Case studies showcasing successful approaches

Travel confidence programmes:

- Guided group trips for those with limited public transport experience
- Skills development workshops for independent travel
- Youth-led content creation about local transport options

Place-making initiatives:

- Development of stations as community gateways
- Public art and heritage projects that create welcoming spaces
- Safety and accessibility improvements based on user feedback
- Connecting stations with surrounding communities through active travel links
- Community events that reclaim stations as public spaces

All activities maintain a distinct focus on engaging and supporting those who currently make limited use of public transport services.

4. Change mechanisms: How will GoCRP's activities cause its outcomes?

GoCRP's approach is grounded in several evidence-based change mechanisms:

Needs-led development: Our work is fundamentally driven by community voice, research and consultation. This approach aligns with findings from the Community Rail Network (2021) that community-led initiatives achieve 60% higher engagement rates than top-down transport interventions.

Participatory governance model: We serve as a bridge between multiple sectors, bringing together community members, policy makers, industry representatives and organisations through county steering groups, youth forums and access panels.

Representation and inclusion: Our clear focus on underrepresented groups ensures that traditionally marginalised voices influence transport planning.

Action learning approach: We implement initiatives based on research and user experience, evaluate outcomes, share findings and refine approaches—creating a continuous improvement cycle.

Trust-based community connections: We build trust locally by working closely with grassroots organisations, taking time to develop relationships, and maintaining independence from the transport sector.

Behaviour change theory: Our approach is informed by established behaviour change models, particularly the Transtheoretical Model (Prochaska & DiClemente) and COM-B framework (Michie et al., 2011), which recognise that sustainable behaviour change requires addressing capability, opportunity and motivation factors simultaneously.

5. Outputs

- Number and diversity of resources produced
- Number of organisations engaging with resources/meetings/trips
- Number and demographic diversity of people reached and engaging
- Number and diversity of people reporting increased awareness/confidence
- Number and diversity of people participating in guided public transport trips
- Number of events/activities held at stations, online and at local places
- Number of station adopters and community volunteers involved
- Number of policy submissions and consultations influenced

6. Outcomes

People (particularly those from target groups) demonstrate:

- Improved perceptions of public transport
- Increased confidence in using public transport services
- Progressive movement along the behaviour change cycle toward regular usage
- Greater awareness of available services and how to access them

Organisations show:

- Increased awareness of transport barriers facing their stakeholders
- Adoption and utilisation of resources to encourage and support public transport use
- Integration of transport considerations into their planning and service delivery
- Collaboration on joint initiatives to improve transport access

Policy-makers implement:

- More community-informed transport planning processes
- Policy adjustments that reflect diverse user needs
- Increased investment in accessibility and user experience improvements
- Greater emphasis on social value alongside economic considerations in transport decision-making

7. Impact

Primary impacts:

- Increased use of public transport, particularly among previously underrepresented groups

- Reduced car dependency for local journeys
- Organisations prioritising public transport access in their operations
- Policy changes driven by and responsive to community voice

Wider consequences:

- Reduced transport-related carbon emissions and improved air quality
- Greater social inclusion through improved mobility options
- Enhanced community cohesion through shared transport spaces
- Economic benefits through improved access to employment and services
- Healthier communities through increased active travel components of journeys

8. Enabling factors

- Supportive policy environment for sustainable transport
- Collaborative relationships with transport providers
- Active community networks willing to engage
- Secure, multi-year funding allowing for long-term planning
- Evidence base demonstrating the multiple benefits of public transport
- Effective cross-sector partnerships