

Station Social & Commercial Development Plan

2024 Plan Update for FY 24/25

31/03/25

Background Summary – 10-year Plan

In September 2022, GTR created its first Station Social and Commercial Development Plan (SSCDP). Endorsed by the Department for Transport (DfT), this outlined our vision to transform redundant or under-utilised spaces across our stations and repurpose these to best suit the needs of our customers and the communities we serve. With a clear 10-year strategy, we are committed to aligning these spaces with evolving business priorities and industry standards, ensuring they deliver value.

Key Strategic Objectives

Our key objectives remain as follows:

1. Ensure as many potential spaces are utilised as possible for community, social, commercial, or internal efficiencies.
2. Offer currently vacant commercial spaces for short term community use.
3. Be agile and adapt to industry, customer or social changes as they develop over the next 10 years, to be reviewed and updated annually, with a comprehensive review of the plan every three years.
4. Develop multi-use spaces from under-utilised station space that support both commercial and social objectives.
5. Support the longer-term Sustainable Rail Strategy to put rail at the heart of communities, ensuring space is made available for multi-purpose community hub use where possible.
6. Pursue an outcome-led approach that focuses on the social and environmental, as well as economic impact.
7. Embed social value into all decision-making and evaluation.
8. Drive long term rail recovery through continuous improvements to the station environment, optimising any underused space.

Deliverables To Date for 24/25

In line with our Annual Business Plan 24/25, GTR remains committed to its strategic endeavours across our property portfolio. By sustaining and expanding partnerships with rail estate and industry stakeholders, GTR ensures a consistent flow of new opportunities for its property estate, contributing to a robust and diverse operation and avoiding unattractive empty units. Our collaboration with Rail Estate Search has resulted in over 50 new tenancies across GTR stations since April 2023. GTR aims to continue to develop station spaces through 25/26. The following initiatives have been underway since the start of the year and will continue for the foreseeable future:

1. Implementation of a fully paid-for electric vehicle (EV) charging service

GTR has upgraded to new, more modern EV charging equipment at 24 car parks across the network, in addition to the further six locations already in play. This is a key community offering and fundamental to the vision of stations as mobility hubs.

2. Evolution of the strategic approach of the Station Social and Commercial Development Plan, aligning social and commercial benefits in car parks

The Urban Hubs programme of parcel locker installations at our stations has resulted in clear community and social benefits. We have worked with InPost, Amazon, BuyBox, Yeep and Quadiant/Royal Mail, as well as completing schemes to fit Salvation Army donation bins, and “We Buy Any Car” installations.

3. Availability of under-utilised car parking spaces for other community and commercial ventures

GTR has let out part of Eastbourne station car park as an ice rink since December 2021, which has proved to be a popular festive experience for the local community. Minor modifications have been made to utilise a low occupancy area of the car park at St Albans station for padel tennis, which have now progressed on to the design and permissions phase with the local authorities.

4. Attracting shoppers to station environments at off-peak times

GTR lets out the station forecourt at West Hampstead for a busy weekly farmers market each Saturday. A well-attended Sunday Market also operates at Dorking station.

5. Commitment to develop Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SME), local and independent retail at stations alongside higher-paying national chains

GTR is committed to providing a diverse choice of retail facilities to our customers. We work to support small and medium sized businesses wherever viable and have been able to introduce local businesses within our stations which have proved popular within their local communities. We also welcome recognised national brands which can increase footfall, thus benefitting nearby tenants. GTR’s tenancy types are currently split 80% small and medium sized businesses and 20% national chains.

6. Continual review of the range of eating/drinking options available on stations

GTR continually reviews its station offerings to ensure that retailers are offering good value for money and customer service to travellers, compared to alternatives outside the station environment.

7. Implementation of flexible Tenancy at Will (TAW) agreements

TAWs provide for short notice periods for terminating tenancies, offering newer or smaller businesses a low-risk opportunity to trial their commercial concepts. They also allow GTR to actively manage new tenants, ensuring their alignment with our customer experience goals and their contribution to a meaningful community proposition.

8. Space & People

Charitable opportunities are provided through GTR’s collaboration with SpaceandPeople. This means that charities benefit from exposure in high-footfall transport hubs. In addition, station teams make arrangements locally for organisations as diverse as the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God and Hertswood Rotary Club to make collections.

9. GTR continues to install vending machines and photo booths

Unattended vending gives customers and other stakeholders quick and convenient 24/7 access to snacks, beverages and other services. There are now nearly 200 units across the GTR network.

10. Retail units will continue to be marketed on a fully transparent basis with details available online

GTR continues to offer appropriate incentives and inducements to maximise the marketability of units and improve the tenant mix between well-known national brands and independents/SMEs.

Corporate Social Responsibility, Community & Stakeholder Activity

GTR has adopted an integrated approach to its commitment to fulfilling its corporate social responsibility (CSR) while strengthening community partnerships. Recent activities include:

Angmering Station – Arun Youth Projects aims to foster a positive change around Angmering station through its Detached Youth Work initiative. By engaging with young individuals in their own spaces, this project seeks to reduce anti-social behaviour. Through proactive engagement, trained youth workers will build relationships and offer support to address underlying issues contributing to disruptive conduct.

Brighton Station – Brighton Toy and Model Museum is embarking on an exciting scheme to regenerate the underpass on Trafalgar Street which forms part of Brighton station. The project will greatly improve an area which has been neglected for many years to encourage additional footfall to and from the station and the gateway to the North Laine, creating a welcoming and more inviting environment for residents, businesses and visitors. Brighton station will also benefit from a project with Clock Tower Sanctuary, the only day centre in Brighton and Hove providing vital practical and emotional support to 16 to 25 year olds who are homeless or insecurely housed.

Brighton and Sutton stations – GTR's tenant, Select Service Partners, has partnered with Olio, which connects businesses to the community to share surplus food. This food donation project will be implemented at Brighton and Sutton stations. Other food outlets on those stations will be able to 'piggyback' onto the food waste collection, and in due course SSP will report the tonnage of food redistributed. This means that GTR is contributing in a small way to helping to avoid food waste and combat food poverty.

Coulsdon South station – An area of ground adjacent to platform 1 of the station is currently unused and in its present run-down state, acts as a gathering area for anti-social activity. The Coulsdon South Station Partnership will be radically rejuvenating the space to bring colour and life, promoting community engagement, healthy living and environmental sustainability.

Westcoastway station – The Dame Kelly Holmes Trust will be delivering a bespoke version of their On Track to Achieve mentoring programme at Alternative Provision Colleges (APCs) in West Sussex, identified as having a high number of pupils who have been involved in antisocial behaviour on trains and at stations along the south coast.

Ore station – The Ore Station Community Garden project is a transformative initiative aimed at revitalising a neglected space and fostering a sense of community pride at the station. Serving as a hub and an aspiration space for residents and train users, the garden promotes social connections, environmental education and a shared commitment to growing food sustainably with a community working kitchen garden on the platform and converted disused land outside the station.

Stevenage station – Stevenage FC Foundation is to provide targeted interventions within education settings, alongside open access opportunities utilising space close to Stevenage station, to engage with young people aged 14-18 who are disengaged from mainstream education or need support to make positive life choices. Work with the students will create key messages that will be translated into art pieces at the station. In addition, Junction 7 Creatives (J7C) will facilitate spaces for people to come together in Stevenage to enjoy art, music, poetry, performance and more – through 'pop ups' in vacant spaces on Stevenage station.

Moulsecoombe station – Over the past couple of years, on a very limited budget, Moulsecoombe Forest Garden and Wildlife Project have been creating a bee and butterfly bank on a patch of overgrown wasteland at the station with adults with learning disabilities and children who struggle in a classroom setting.

Haywards Heath station – Borde Hill Garden is running a project to develop a new Green Travel Route for cycles and pedestrians, in physical and digital form, creating car-free access to Borde Hill from Haywards Heath for the first time.

Bedford station – Citizens Advice Bedford is piloting a new outreach. Interventions by the outreach staff in the station will be a first step in the process to securing settled accommodation and life-changing support for people living on the streets around the station area.

Across the GTR network – Navigating a railway station can be a daunting prospect for blind and partially sighted (BPS) people. The primary aim of the Thomas Pocklington Trust is to improve the rail experience for BPS travellers so that they feel more able to leave their homes and get out into the community safely.

GTR hosted its annual Community Conference – This was held on 19 September 2024. Partners from community rail groups, station partnerships, charities, local authorities and the rail industry joined GTR. The attendees learned about revitalising station spaces from the Darent Valley CRP and Friends of Bishopstone Station.

Spaces unsuitable for rental as commercial units – Small and non-standard units in low footfall areas may present opportunities for community project hubs or social spaces, provided that business rates can be mitigated.

Facilities & Infrastructure Activity

GTR continues to proactively explore avenues for securing funding for infrastructure improvements. Existing budgets face a multitude of competing demands, making it imperative to identify external financial resources to bolster the implementation of the SSCDP.

One notable funding source is the 'Industry Revenue Generating Initiatives' (IRGI) fund. The objective of the IRGI fund is to provide targeted investment to projects which will increase rail usage or reduce industry costs (or both) and it is earmarked specifically for enhancing station infrastructure. GTR's primary objective in engaging with the IRGI fund is the transformation of redundant spaces and sub-standard retail units into vibrant, revenue-generating assets which are operationally viable for prospective occupants. The bid description was primarily around 'white boxing' units so that they are brought up to standard, with the transformation focusing on essential upgrades to electrical connections, re-wiring, smart metering solutions and white boarding of walls.

The IRGI has funded GTR to make limited improvements to station retail facilities at five sites across four locations; the extent of works at each location varies due to asset condition. The locations are: Sanderstead station platform unit, two units at Elephant and Castle, the retail unit adjacent to the ticket office at Nunhead station, and a unit in the booking hall at Thornton Heath station. Works are ongoing and will be completed by end March 2025.

Next Steps

In line with all the above, we will continue building on the progress made, exploring new opportunities to make the best use of station spaces and working with stakeholders to support both commercial and community initiatives. Our approach will remain flexible to adapt to changing needs and priorities across the network.

Funding options will continue to be considered and presented in line with our forthcoming 25/26 business plan commitments, related to social and commercial development opportunities across our network; where any progress will be made publicly available.