

CrossCountry Sustainability Strategy

...beyond the Journey
2026



crosscountry 

Contents

Introduction	3
Foreword	4
Strategic Context	5
CrossCountry’s Role in a Lower-Carbon Transport System	6
Our Sustainability Framework	7
Materiality Update	8
Key Enablers for 2026	9
Community Rail as Local Delivery Partners	10
Social Value Forecasting and Measurement	11
Our Pillars	12
#1 People	14
Accessibility	17
Equity, Diversity and Inclusion and Wellbeing	21
Social Mobility and Safeguarding	25
#2 Places	28
Air Quality	31
Biodiversity	33
Climate Adaptation	37
Connected Journeys	39
Sense of Place	43
#3 Planet	46
Carbon	49
Waste	53
Water	57
Looking ahead	58

INTRODUCTION

As the UK’s most geographically diverse long-distance train operator, CrossCountry connects people, places and communities across England, Scotland and Wales every day. Our services link major cities, regional centres, coastal towns and rural communities, giving us a unique view of the country we serve and a powerful responsibility to help shape its future.

At CrossCountry our railway is more than a way to travel. It is a route to opportunity, inclusion, cleaner growth and stronger communities. By reducing our environmental impact, supporting our colleagues and customers, and investing in the places we serve, we can create lasting value beyond the journey.



FOREWORD

CrossCountry's 2026 Sustainability Strategy builds on the foundations we set in 2025. Our three pillars - People, Places and Planet - remain at the heart of our approach, giving us a clear and consistent framework for action. In 2025, we completed a materiality assessment that considered both business importance and stakeholder importance. For 2026, we have strengthened the evidence base with a customer sustainability survey. The findings have been used to test the continued relevance of our 11 modules, sharpen our priorities and strengthen the justification for our framework.

This update comes at an important moment for transport. The national agenda is moving towards a system that is safer, simpler, more accessible, better connected and lower carbon. For CrossCountry, this is an opportunity to show how sustainability can help shape that future: by supporting communities; reducing environmental impact; improving inclusion; and enabling more people to choose rail as a lower-carbon way to travel.

In 2026, we will build on our progress by making fuller use of the levers available to us and the reach of the CrossCountry network. We will use our supply chain to support carbon reduction and wider Social Value outcomes. We will work more deliberately with Community Rail Partnerships to create place-based impact, and use Social Value forecasting and measurement to guide decisions, target investment and demonstrate the value created across our network.

We know sustainability is not a destination; it is a commitment to keep improving, keep learning and keep going beyond the journey.

STRATEGIC CONTEXT

The wider context for rail is changing. Transport is expected to do more than move people from one place to another: it must help grow economies, open access to opportunity, support healthier communities, improve inclusion and contribute to a lower-carbon future by reducing emissions from the way people travel. As a long-distance operator serving communities across England, Scotland and Wales, CrossCountry has a distinctive role to play in that change.

The Department for Transport's Better Connected strategy provides an important national framework for this update. Its focus on safe, reliable, accessible and affordable transport; healthier communities; integrated journeys; empowered local leaders; data; technology; and better appraisal closely reflects the priorities already embedded in CrossCountry's sustainability framework.

Within CrossCountry, this sits alongside our own strategic ambition to **lead positive impact for society and the environment**. Sustainability is not separate from our business strategy; it is one of the ways we deliver it. Through People, Places and Planet, and through a stronger focus on Social Value, we can show how our railway contributes to measurable, meaningful impact for colleagues, customers, communities and the environment.

Our task is to translate both the national context and CrossCountry's own strategy into practical action across the railway we operate every day. That means reducing our footprint, improving accessibility and inclusion, supporting the places we serve and creating partnerships that deliver value beyond the tracks. It means using our reach not only to connect destinations, but to connect people with opportunity, communities with investment and our business with a more sustainable future.

"When we talk about sustainability, it is easy to think first about the environment. But it is much bigger than that. It goes to the heart of why CrossCountry exists and the difference we make every day. This is not a sustainability strategy bolted on to the business plan; it is our reason for being, and the thread running through everything we deliver now and in the future"

Thomas Raynor, Strategy and Transition Director



CROSSCOUNTRY’S ROLE IN A LOWER-CARBON TRANSPORT SYSTEM

Rail has an important role to play in a lower-carbon transport system. CrossCountry’s services already provide a more carbon-efficient alternative to many journeys that might otherwise be made by road or air, particularly across the long-distance markets we serve. By providing millions of passenger journeys and miles travelled each year, CrossCountry helps customers choose a lower-carbon way to travel across England, Scotland and Wales.

Our 2025/26 Emissions Report, published on the CrossCountry website alongside this strategy launch, shows that CrossCountry services are 2.47 times more carbon-efficient than equivalent road transport. This means that every shift from higher-carbon modes to CrossCountry rail services can support wider transport decarbonisation and help reduce UK transport emissions.

This does not lessen the importance of cutting our own operational emissions. We still need to make the existing fleet and our sites more efficient, use resources more efficiently and support long-term fleet transition. But it does place CrossCountry’s sustainability work in a wider context: when rail is attractive, reliable, accessible and well connected, it can help people make choices that are better for both the journey and the climate.

"At CrossCountry, sustainability is about recognising both sides of our carbon story: reducing the emissions from our own operation while helping more people choose rail over higher-carbon ways to travel. Our network gives us a real opportunity to support lower-carbon journeys across the country and create value that reaches beyond the journey"

Jessica Lockwood, Head of Sustainability



OUR SUSTAINABILITY FRAMEWORK

Our sustainability framework is built around three clear pillars: People, Places and Planet. Together, they describe where CrossCountry can create the greatest positive change and where we have the greatest responsibility to act.



PEOPLE

We are a positive force for our employees and wider society

Our Focus Areas

Accessibility - Enabling everyone to access travel with confidence and independence

Equity, Diversity and Inclusion
- Supporting inclusive, fair and representative communities where everyone can thrive

Social Mobility and Safeguarding
- Expanding opportunities and protecting vulnerable people to build safer, more equitable communities



PLACES

We support sustainable community growth across our network

Our Focus Areas

Air Quality - Improving air quality to support healthier environments for communities

Biodiversity - Protecting and restoring nature to enhance local environments and wellbeing

Climate Change Adaptation - Building resilience to climate impacts to protect communities and essential services

Connected Journeys - Making sustainable travel easier to access, connecting people to opportunities

Sense of Place - Celebrating local identity and heritage to strengthen community pride and belonging



PLANET

We reduce the environmental footprint of our operation

Our Focus Areas

Carbon - Reducing emissions to support a cleaner environment and a more sustainable future

Waste - Reducing waste to protect the environment and conserve resources for future generations

Water - Protecting water resources to support healthy ecosystems and communities

People is about being a positive force for our colleagues, customers and wider society. It is how we build belonging, support wellbeing, open access to opportunity, protect vulnerable people and make rail more inclusive for those who use and deliver our services.

Places is about the towns, cities and communities connected by our network. It is how we support local identity, improve environmental quality, strengthen resilience, enable connected journeys and use rail as a catalyst for community benefit.

Planet is about reducing the environmental footprint of our operation and supporting the transition to a cleaner, more resource-efficient railway. It is how we reduce carbon, treat waste as a resource, manage water responsibly for the long term and support the wider shift towards lower-emission transport.

Within our three pillars sit our 11 core modules, first established in our 2025 Strategy. For 2026, these modules have been tested against the evidence from our materiality assessment and strengthened through direct customer insight.

MATERIALITY UPDATE

Materiality has been central to the development of CrossCountry’s sustainability strategy. In 2025, our materiality assessment helped identify the issues that matter most to our business, stakeholders and long-term impact by considering both business importance and stakeholder importance. For the 2026 update, we have strengthened the materiality evidence with a customer survey, using customer priorities, awareness and expectations to test whether the 11 modules remain relevant and appropriately structured.

The customer survey provides strong support for the continued People, Places and Planet framework. It shows that sustainability is a relevant consideration for customers when choosing rail, and that priorities are strongest around affordable and inclusive travel, followed by carbon reduction, protecting nature and biodiversity, accessibility and equality, and job creation and skills development. Taken together, this supports a people-first strategy with visible local impact and clear environmental ambition. The survey also shows that customers understand many of the outcomes we are trying to deliver, customers strongly associate the concept of Social Value with supporting local communities, improving accessibility and inclusion, creating jobs and skills opportunities, supporting wellbeing and health, and reducing environmental impact.

The survey also underlines the importance of evidence-led delivery. Customers place clear value on credible evidence, transparent reporting, independent assurance where appropriate, and simple, consistent communication.

On this basis, the 2026 update does not change the 11 modules.

- People remains the lead priority because customers place the greatest emphasis on affordability, inclusion, accessibility, safety and capacity.
- Places remains important because local community support, connectivity, biodiversity and visible place-based improvements are strongly recognised as part of sustainability.
- Planet remains essential because carbon emissions and net zero are well understood by customers, and reducing carbon was a clear priority.

We will continue to evolve and adapt our strategy in response to the changing landscape we operate in.

2026 CUSTOMER SURVEY: What Matters Most

Affordable and inclusive travel

Sustainability important when choosing rail

Reducing carbon emissions

Clear evidence and data builds trust

KEY ENABLERS FOR 2026

Supply Chain as a Driver of Carbon Reduction and Social Value

Our supply chain is one of the most powerful levers we have for change. The goods and services we buy influence carbon emissions, resource use, employment, skills, community benefit and ethical practice. By working differently with suppliers, we can extend the reach of our sustainability strategy far beyond our direct operation.

In 2026/27, we will strengthen the role of procurement in delivering sustainability outcomes. Relevant tenders will increasingly ask suppliers to demonstrate how they will reduce emissions, use resources responsibly and create wider Social Value through contract delivery.

This creates an opportunity to deliver impact across all three pillars. Suppliers can support apprenticeships and training, create local employment, improve accessibility, reduce waste, use lower-carbon materials, support biodiversity and strengthen community partnerships.

By treating suppliers as partners in delivery, rather than simply providers of goods and services, we can create a stronger, fairer and more sustainable railway supply chain — one that helps CrossCountry deliver value beyond the journey.



CrossCountry, in partnership with Chela, won a Silver Medal in the Environmental Health category at the Commonwealth Environment and CSR Awards 2026 for its innovative Green Washroom Project, which uses plant-based cleaning chemicals to help reduce environmental impact.

Community Rail as Local Delivery Partners

Community Rail Partnerships are one of the most important ways CrossCountry turns national connectivity into local value. They bring trusted relationships, local knowledge and practical delivery capability across the towns and cities we serve, helping us understand what communities need and how rail can support them.

Their role is especially powerful in place-based delivery. Community Rail Partnerships can improve confidence in travel, support access to rail, promote sustainable onward journeys, celebrate local identity, deliver biodiversity projects and create activity that strengthens wellbeing and pride of place.

In 2026/27, we will map Community Rail Partnership activity more clearly against our 11 modules. This will help us align funding and support to strategic outcomes, showing the full value of community rail not just through individual projects, but through its contribution to People, Places and Planet.

Through these partnerships, CrossCountry can help ensure that the benefits of the railway are felt locally - in stronger communities, more confident customers, greener places and better connections.



CrossCountry hosted its annual Community Rail Partnership Conference in March, with speakers including Shiona Rolfe, Managing Director; Jeremy Whitaker from Community Rail Network; and Jessica Lockwood, Head of Sustainability.

Social Value Forecasting and Measurement

What is Social Value?

Social Value is the wider benefit created for people, communities, the economy and the environment through the decisions we make and the activities we deliver. It helps show how CrossCountry’s work creates value beyond the core operations. The “value” comes from translating these benefits into a financial proxy, so different outcomes can be understood, compared and communicated using a common measure.

Social Value forecasting and measurement will be a cross-cutting enabler for the 2026 strategy. It helps us understand the real-world impact of our sustainability work by looking beyond activities and outputs to the value created for people, communities, the economy and the environment.

By translating different outcomes into a common language, Social Value helps us compare the impact of different kinds of activity. Improved access to employment, stronger wellbeing, reduced emissions, biodiversity gains, volunteering, training and local economic benefit can all be understood as part of one wider story: the value our railway creates beyond transport.

In 2026, Social Value will become more than a reporting tool. By estimating the value a project could create before it begins, and measuring what it delivers afterwards, we can make better choices about where to invest time, funding and effort. This will help us compare options, set clearer expectations and focus activity on the outcomes that matter most.

Used consistently, Social Value will strengthen transparency and accountability across the 11 modules, helping colleagues, customers, communities, funders and partners see not only what we have done, but what difference it has made. We recognise that Social Value reporting is still developing across the rail industry, and that partners and suppliers may be at different stages of maturity. We will provide proportionate support and clear guidance where needed, helping delivery partners forecast, measure and report Social Value more consistently. We will also continue to work with RSSB to support the development of the Rail Social Value Tool and framework, ensuring it remains practical, relevant and able to evolve as industry practice matures.

We also recognise that Social Value measurement is not perfect. Not every benefit can be captured accurately through available metrics, and in some areas data may be difficult to collect or not yet robust enough to support meaningful monetisation. For this reason, our approach will combine quantitative Social Value measurement with qualitative evidence, using case studies and storytelling to explain the difference our work makes in practice. This will help us present a fuller and more balanced picture of impact, including outcomes that are important but not always easy to measure. We will publish our annual Social Value Report in May 2027.



OUR PILLARS



#1



PEOPLE PILLAR

People are at the heart of CrossCountry. Every journey we operate is shaped by the colleagues who deliver it, the customers who rely on it and the communities it connects. Our People pillar is about making sure the railway opens doors, removes barriers and helps people feel safe, supported and able to belong.

For CrossCountry, being people-first means more than delivering a service. It means using our role as an employer, operator and regional connector to create opportunity, protect vulnerable people, improve confidence in travel and build a culture where colleagues and customers feel valued. When people thrive, our railway becomes stronger, fairer and more resilient.



CrossCountry celebrates its Women in Rail Award winners: Jane Fentaman, Train Driver, and Lucy Willis, Catering Logistics Manager.

#1a

ACCESSIBILITY

Accessibility is one of CrossCountry's strongest areas of customer-focused progress. We are going beyond compliance by making rail travel easier, more inclusive and more confident for disabled customers.

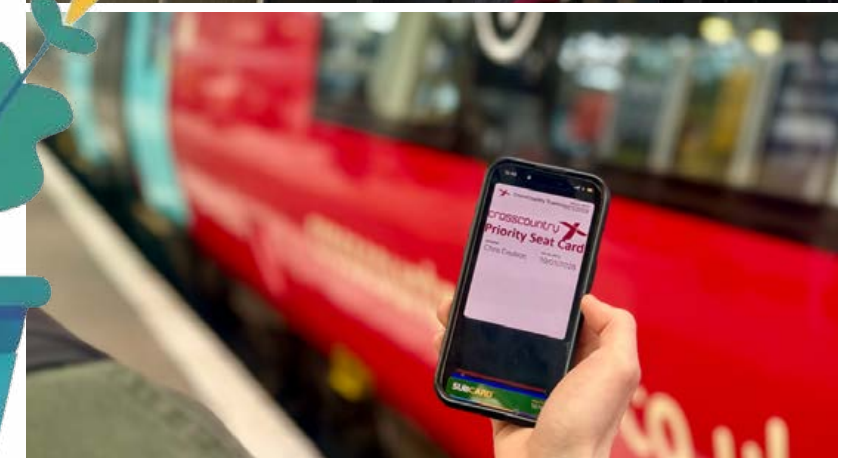
Our 12-month update

Over the last 12 months, the Accessibility Team has delivered a strong programme of innovation and measurable improvement. This includes industry-first initiatives such as E-Priority Cards, which allow customers to save a digital "Priority Seat" card to their phone wallet, and integrated Braille, Large Print and British Sign Language menus, making accessible information easier to find and use.

Passenger Assist has been promoted successfully, with more customers using the service and feedback indicating that assisted travel is becoming more consistent and reliable. Our Accessibility Service Quality regime also shows continued improvement, demonstrating that better accessibility is becoming embedded in day-to-day operations.

The team has strengthened customer insight by broadening feedback analysis and sharing themes directly with Customer Relations and subject matter experts, helping improvements to be identified and acted on more quickly. The renewed Accessibility Panel has also created a stronger voice for disabled customers, supporting regular engagement on policy, performance and projects.

Frontline colleague engagement has improved too, with greater use of the Passenger Assist app giving teams better visibility of assistance requirements and helping customers experience more joined-up support.



In July 2026, we launched our Priority Seat Card scheme, supporting customers who need additional assistance when travelling



Our short-term plan

We will build on this momentum by keeping customer insight, innovation and colleague engagement at the centre of accessibility delivery. The renewed Accessibility Panel will help us test ideas, review performance and identify where further barriers remain.

We will continue to improve accessible information, including Braille, Large Print and BSL formats, while strengthening communication with onboard teams, depots and customer-facing colleagues. This will help good practice, Passenger Assist learning and accessibility improvements be shared more consistently across the business.

Our long-term vision: 2035

By 2035, accessibility will be fully embedded in how CrossCountry designs services, works with suppliers, communicates with customers and supports colleagues. Inclusive travel will be part of everyday decision-making, supported by reliable assistance, accessible information, confident colleagues and strong customer voice.

We will also continue to influence future rolling stock planning, working with stakeholders to ensure accessibility is considered early and helps shape a railway that is easier to use for everyone.



CrossCountry attended Sight Village, a disability expo organised and run by Queen Alexandra College and its students. QAC supports students who are blind or visually impaired, and students with Autism Spectrum Disorder. The event provided a valuable opportunity to share and learn directly from students, exhibitors and accessibility specialists.

#1b



EQUITY, DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION AND WELLBEING

CrossCountry serves diverse communities, and the way we support our colleagues shapes the experience we give to customers and communities. Fairness is not about treating everyone the same; it is about understanding what people need to succeed and creating the conditions for colleagues to feel safe, supported and able to belong. A stronger approach to wellbeing, belonging and inclusion will help us improve colleague experience, support business performance and build a railway that better reflects the communities we serve.

Our 12-month update

Over the last 12 months, CrossCountry has supported ED&I through colleague engagement, awareness events and inclusion campaigns, including Pride and activities that recognise different communities, experiences and identities across the business.

Through our Community Engagement Fund, we also supported Rail 74 Community Rail Partnership's Inclusivity Matters – Making Rail Travel Accessible Through Community Rail programme, which was shortlisted in the Best Practice in Diversity, Inclusivity and Accessibility category at the National Transport Awards 2026. The programme has helped schools, community groups, families, people with Autism Spectrum Disorder and disabled people build confidence in rail travel through supported journeys, accessible resources, sensory-friendly materials and practical travel experiences.

Together, this work has kept inclusion visible while highlighting the need for a more strategic, data-led approach to ED&I, wellbeing and belonging.



CrossCountry supported Rail 74 Community Rail Partnership's Inclusivity Matters – Making Rail Travel Accessible Through Community Rail programme through our Community Engagement Fund. The programme helps people of all ages and abilities build confidence in rail travel through supported journeys, accessible resources and sensory-friendly materials.

Our short-term plan

We will define a true CrossCountry strategy for wellbeing and belonging, including ED&I. This will move us beyond one-off events and awareness activity towards a more consistent colleague offer, with a clearer statement of what colleagues can expect from CrossCountry in relation to inclusion, wellbeing, support, engagement and belonging.

This work will be grounded in data. We will use colleague insight, workforce information and business priorities to understand where support is most needed, where investment can have the greatest impact and how activity can be justified in a way that is meaningful, measurable and aligned to business value.

Across the next three years, we will strengthen the structure and governance around ED&I and wellbeing. A more defined strategy will support better planning, clearer accountability and more consistent delivery across the business. As the rail industry moves towards public ownership and closer alignment with Great British Railways, this module will remain responsive to organisational change while keeping colleagues' lived experience at the centre.

Our long-term vision: 2035

By 2035, ED&I, wellbeing and belonging will be fully embedded in how we lead, manage change and support our people. Inclusion will not be a separate initiative; it will be part of how we make decisions, design colleague experiences and create the conditions for people to do their best work.

CrossCountry's long-term ambition is to be recognised as a workplace where colleagues feel safe, respected, supported and able to contribute fully. Decisions about wellbeing and inclusion will be informed by robust data, colleague voice and clear business value, helping us build a stronger railway for our people and for the communities we serve.



CrossCountry was proud to be part of Birmingham Pride 2025, joining one of the UK's biggest celebrations of love, identity and inclusion





SOCIAL MOBILITY AND SAFEGUARDING

Rail can protect vulnerable people while opening access to skills, employment and community life. CrossCountry's network reaches communities where opportunity and safe travel are not always equal, giving us a clear role in reducing barriers, supporting safer journeys and helping more people see rail as a place where they can belong and progress.

Our 12-month update

Over the last 12 months, CrossCountry has strengthened social mobility through schools engagement, work experience, virtual work experience and targeted partnerships. Activity reached 426 schools in England and 23 in Scotland, covering more than 436,000 students, and included 20 careers fairs plus Spring and Summer publications promoting rail careers, apprenticeships and work experience.

In-person engagement reached 7,106 students across 14 school interactions, targeted towards schools with higher deprivation and Free School Meal indicators. We also supported 16 work experience pupils, two Network Rail graduate placements and the Springpod virtual work experience programme, which achieved 519 enrolments, a 52% completion rate and 67% gold-tier engagement. Targeted activity included the Voyager supported internship with Alstom and Derby College, creating scope to explore further supported internships in Derby.

Safeguarding has continued to mature alongside this work. CrossCountry achieved 100% in its annual safeguarding accreditation, continued White Ribbon accreditation, renewed its partnership with Railway Children and remained active in Safeguarding Action Group forums. We have also maintained focus on Violence Against Women and Girls and unwanted sexual behaviour, expanded safeguarding champions, embedded safeguarding and VAWG training into induction, introduced DBS checks for new starters and delivered safeguarding roadshows.



As part of our Customer and Communities Improvement Fund (CCIF), CrossCountry was delighted to support Great Central Railway in fitting out a new Community Classroom at Loughborough Central station, helping local schools and communities benefit from learning activities.

Our short-term plan

We will bring schools engagement, work experience, virtual work experience and early careers messaging into a more joined-up social mobility approach. We will use data on deprivation, Free School Meals, underrepresentation, gender participation, SEND and care experience to target activity and measure Social Value more consistently. We will also improve how we capture where applicants first heard about CrossCountry, so we can understand which activities translate into applications, placements and employment outcomes.

Across the next three years, we will develop an evidence-led framework that aligns community investment, schools outreach, work experience, supplier partnerships and recruitment pathways. Safeguarding governance will continue to build on accreditation, training, champions and external partnerships, with a focus on the Workplace Violence Strategy, VAWG, unwanted sexual behaviour and support for vulnerable people.

Our long-term vision: 2035

By 2035, CrossCountry will be a railway where background is no barrier to opportunity and safeguarding is embedded, mature and effective across the network. Through schools outreach, early careers pathways, supported internships, supplier engagement, community partnerships and Social Value measurement, we will help create safer, fairer and more equitable communities.



“
Really enjoyed supporting the careers fair at Garth Hill College. Great to see so much engagement and have some exciting conversations around sustainability and engineering.
—”
-George Willis and Javis Lo



Take us on your career journey!



CrossCountry colleagues supporting careers outreach activity, helping students and young people learn more about rail careers, apprenticeships, work experience and future opportunities across the industry

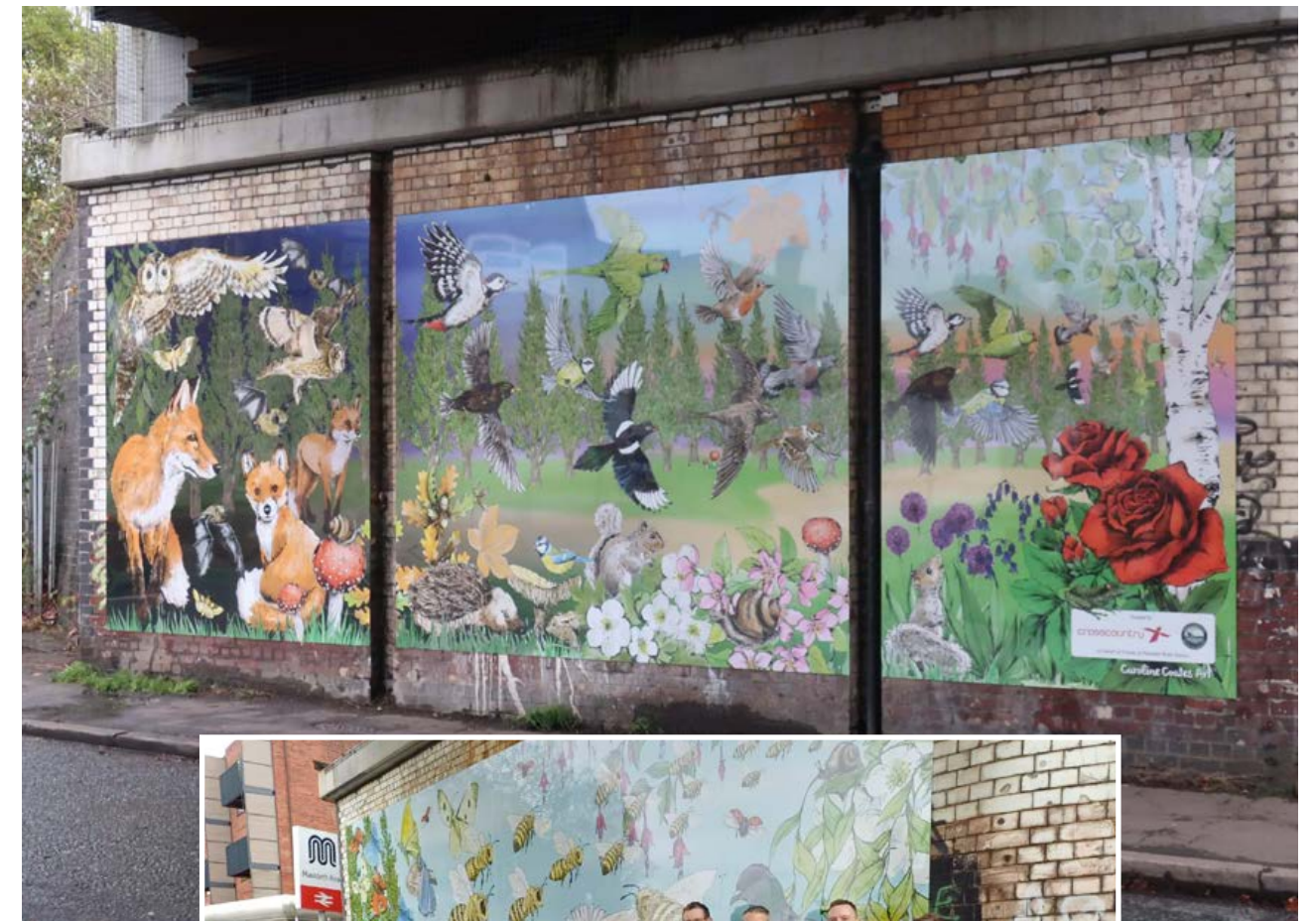
#2



PLACES PILLAR

Places are where the impact of the railway is felt most directly. CrossCountry connects major cities, market towns, coastal communities and rural destinations across the UK, giving us a unique opportunity to support the identity, resilience and wellbeing of the places we serve. Our Places pillar is about making sure those connections create value that lasts.

For CrossCountry, supporting places means working with partners who understand local needs and can help turn good intentions into visible change. Through Community Rail Partnerships, suppliers, local authorities, schools, universities and community organisations, we can improve environmental quality, celebrate local identity, support sustainable travel and help places become more resilient, distinctive and connected.



Artwork under the bridge at Mauldeth Road station in South Manchester, funded by CrossCountry, was officially launched by the Lord Mayor of Manchester, Councillor Carmine Grimshaw. The artwork celebrates local wildlife, including flora and fauna from nearby parks in Ladybarn, and helps create a more attractive environment for rail users and the local community to enjoy.

#2a



AIR QUALITY

CrossCountry's diesel fleet supports long-distance services across the network, but unless emissions are carefully managed, it has the potential to affect the environments our customers, colleagues and communities move through, particularly at stations, depots and enclosed locations where trains dwell or idle. Improving air quality is therefore an important health, operational and environmental responsibility while longer-term fleet solutions are developed.

Our 12-month update

Over the last 12 months, CrossCountry has worked with RSSB and industry partners to strengthen its evidence base, support monitoring and inform the continued development of our Diesel Engine Exhaust Emissions strategy.

We updated the strategy in June 2026, maintaining the annual review cycle and ensuring it reflects current operations, evidence and future planning needs. It continues to guide how we manage air quality risk, reduce unnecessary idling and identify opportunities to lower fleet emissions.

We have also strengthened operational controls around engine idling, reducing the amount of time engines idle at stations by up to 50%. Monitoring has been tightened through closer collaboration with Network Rail, helping us track performance more consistently and identify where further action is needed.

A second key achievement was the installation of Intelligent Engine Stop Start (IESS) across all Voyager units in October 2025. This reduces unnecessary engine running at stations by automatically shutting down engines when they are not required.

We have also progressed plans for independent QSK19 engine testing to understand the air quality impact of blended HVO and diesel. This will provide robust evidence to inform future fuel and investment decisions.

Our short-term plan

We will continue to monitor emissions through our Diesel Engine Exhaust Emissions governance and reporting processes, working with RSSB, Network Rail, station operators and maintenance partners to identify risks and practical interventions.

We will continue to embed IESS across the Voyager fleet, monitor its use and work with partners to develop the system further, helping reduce fleet emissions while improving operational engagement.

Across the next three years, CrossCountry will use testing, RSSB research and wider industry evidence to define a clearer pathway for reducing air quality impacts from the existing diesel fleet. This will include assessing blended HVO, operational controls, technology improvements and targeted interventions at higher-risk locations, supported by annual DEEE strategy updates.

Our long-term vision: 2035

By 2035, CrossCountry aims to materially reduce local air quality impacts from diesel traction through operational controls, cleaner technology, informed fuel choices and progress towards a lower-emission fleet. Evidence from RSSB collaboration, DEEE strategy updates, IESS and IESS+ development, and QSK19 testing will help guide the transition.



#2b



BIODIVERSITY

Healthy ecosystems support climate resilience, resource security and more stable supply chains. They also create attractive green spaces that encourage people to visit, explore and spend time in the places connected by our network. By supporting healthier local environments, biodiversity can help stations and surrounding communities become destinations in their own right, strengthening the link between sustainable travel, wellbeing and place. CrossCountry's trains pass through landscapes where habitats, wildlife and green spaces are under pressure. While we do not own most railway land or station environments, we can still play an active role in protecting and enhancing nature through our approach.

Our 12-month update

Over the last 12 months, CrossCountry has continued to support biodiversity through community investment and partnership-led projects. This has included working with local organisations and Community Rail Partnerships to identify opportunities where biodiversity can be improved alongside community benefit, education, volunteering and station environment improvements.

Through our dedicated Biodiversity Improvement Project fund, CrossCountry supported eight projects across the network, helping partners deliver local nature and community benefits. One example was Scotswood Natural Community Garden's Plants for Pollinators project, which grew pollinator-friendly plants for parks and community spaces across the Newcastle metropolitan area, while supporting volunteering, environmental education and wellbeing for older people and people with SEN.

We have also calculated Social Return on Investment for biodiversity projects, using the findings to guide funding decisions for the 2026/27 cycle and prioritise projects that can deliver clear value for both nature and communities.



In July 2026, our Sustainability Manager, George, joined Staffordshire Wildlife Trust to celebrate the launch of the Bee Friendly Garden at Victoria Park, Stafford. Supported through our Biodiversity Improvement Programme (BIP), the garden provides valuable habitat for pollinators while helping to enhance biodiversity across communities on our network.

Our short-term plan

We will use our enablers more deliberately to build on the biodiversity projects already supported across the network. This means aligning Community Rail Partnership activity, supplier engagement and funding decisions with the Biodiversity module, so future activity is coordinated, deliverable and easier to evidence.

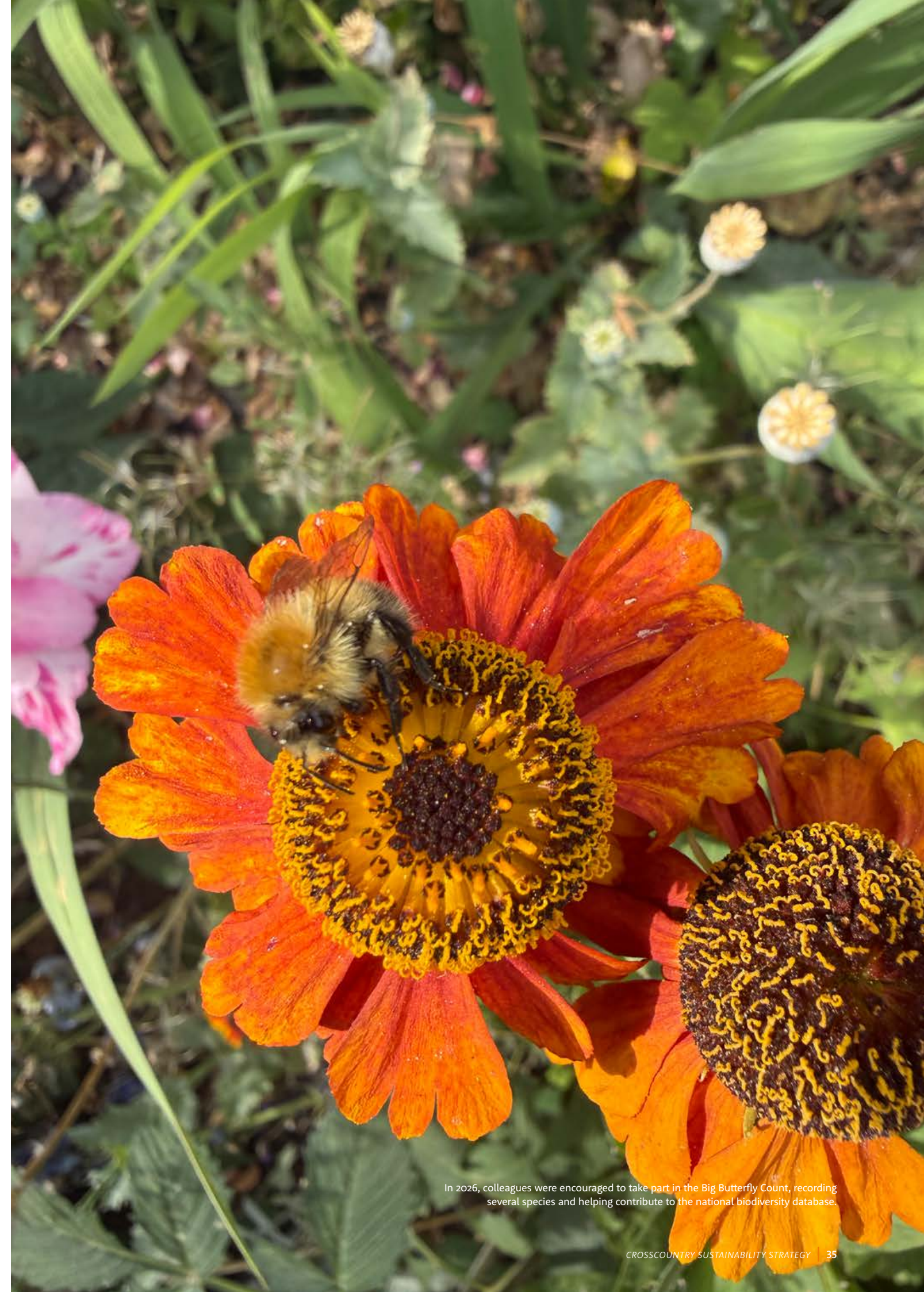
We will continue to prioritise projects that create clear environmental and community outcomes, such as habitat creation or enhancement, pollinator planting, nature-based education, volunteering, green station improvements and activity that connects people with local wildlife and green spaces.

By December 2026, we will create a framework for biodiversity investment. This will set out clearer criteria for how projects are identified, prioritised, funded and monitored, helping us build a coordinated pipeline of nature-positive activity across the network. The framework will inform future years by clarifying our biodiversity priorities and strengthening the evidence base for which delivery models create the greatest value for nature and communities.

Our long-term vision: 2035

By 2035, biodiversity will be a visible and practical part of our place-based sustainability work. CrossCountry's partnerships and funding will support greener, more resilient places across the network, helping communities connect with nature and contributing to wider environmental recovery.

Our ambition is to use CrossCountry's influence, partnerships and investment to help create more nature-rich station environments, community spaces and travel corridors, with biodiversity projects designed to deliver lasting value for both people and the natural environment.



In 2026, colleagues were encouraged to take part in the Big Butterfly Count, recording several species and helping contribute to the national biodiversity database.

#2c



CLIMATE ADAPTATION

Climate change is already affecting the reliability and comfort of rail travel. Extreme heat, flooding, storms and infrastructure disruption can affect customers, colleagues and the services communities rely on. For CrossCountry, adaptation is about preparing for these risks in a way that protects people, strengthens resilience and keeps the railway moving in a changing climate.

Our 12-month update

Over the last 12 months, CrossCountry has continued to recognise climate risk as a growing operational and customer challenge. Weather-related disruption can affect journey reliability, station and onboard conditions, colleague experience, customer comfort and the ability to travel with confidence.

In 2026, we produced a Weather Resilience and Climate Change Adaptation plan, strengthening our approach to climate risk and helping ensure our response better reflects the needs of our customers and colleagues. The plan will be reviewed and updated annually so that it remains current, evidence-led and responsive to changing risks across the CrossCountry network.

This has highlighted the need for a refreshed and more customer- and colleague-focused approach to climate adaptation, ensuring that risks are understood not only in terms of operational disruption, but also in terms of the people affected by that disruption.

Our short-term plan

We will assess climate-related risks to customers and staff in more detail, including how extreme weather affects passenger experience, frontline colleagues, onboard teams, disruption management, accessibility and welfare.

In 2027, we will develop an updated Weather Resilience and Climate Change Adaptation plan to address these risks. The updated plan will identify priority actions, governance arrangements and areas where CrossCountry will need to work with partners, including Network Rail, station operators, suppliers and industry bodies.

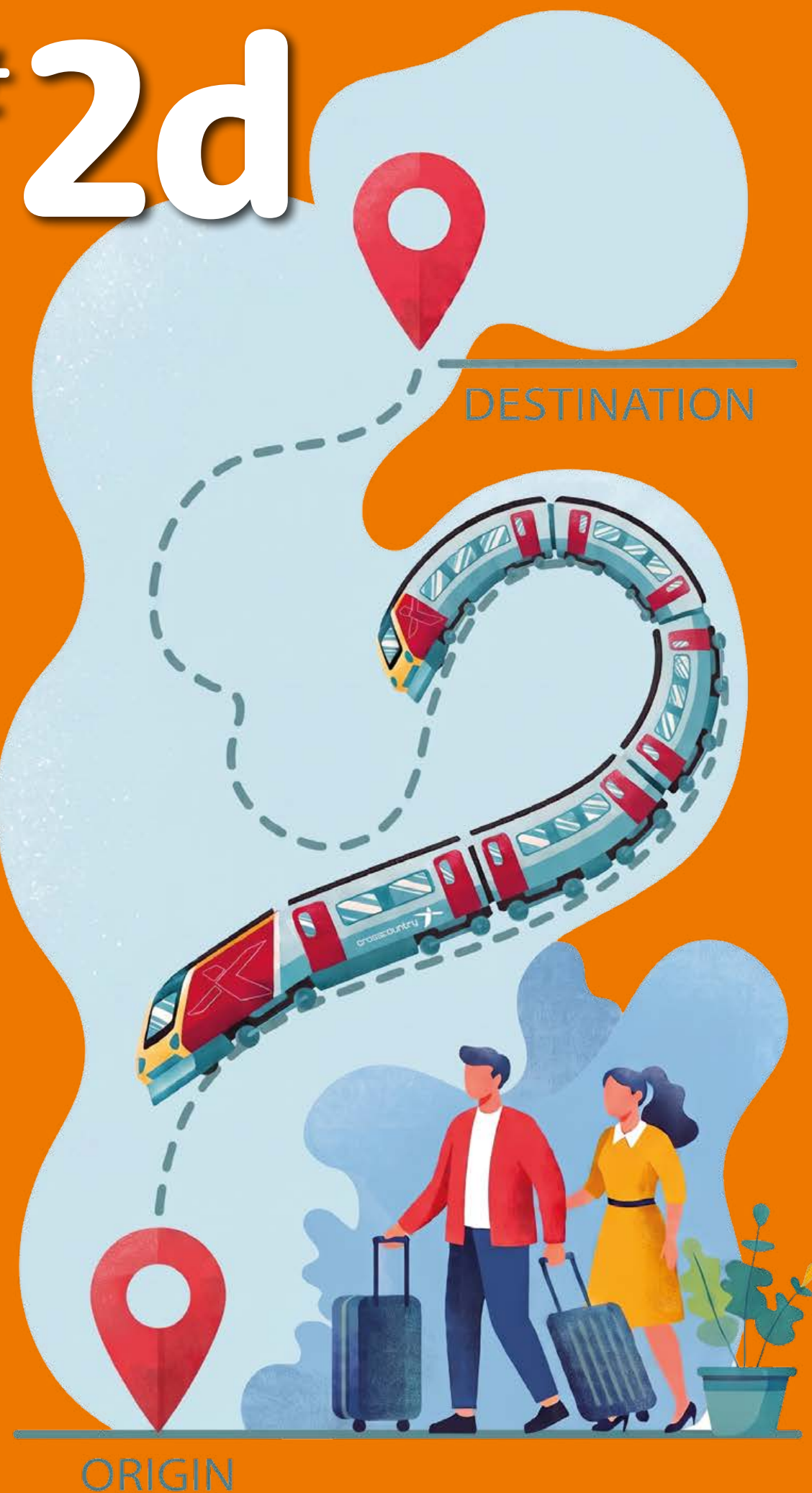
Across the next three years, we will embed the updated plan into business planning, operational decision-making and sustainability governance. We will strengthen our understanding of climate risks across the CrossCountry network and identify practical mitigations that support customers and colleagues during severe weather.

Our long-term vision: 2035

By 2035, climate adaptation will be embedded into business-as-usual activity across CrossCountry. We will have a detailed understanding of the climate vulnerabilities across our network, supported by robust risk assessment and clear plans developed with Network Rail and other industry partners to manage priority risks.

As extreme weather becomes more frequent because of climate change, our focus will be on reducing the impact on people as well as operations. Customers and colleagues should be able to travel and work with confidence, knowing that CrossCountry has practical, tested and people-focused arrangements in place to minimise disruption, protect safety and support reliable journeys during severe weather.

#2d



CONNECTED JOURNEYS

Rail works best as part of a wider, simpler and more inclusive journey. Customers experience the whole route from door to destination, so CrossCountry's role extends beyond the train to better links with walking, cycling, buses, other operators, community transport, onward travel information and digital tools. By making rail easier to access and combine with other sustainable modes, we can help more journeys shift away from higher-emission travel and support reductions in UK transport emissions.

Our 12-month update

Over the last 12 months, CrossCountry has supported Connected Journeys through both digital improvement and community-led activity. The launch of our new website has strengthened the customer journey planning experience, making it easier for people to access travel information, plan journeys and connect rail with wider travel choices.

Alongside this, community activity has supported projects linking rail with active travel, visitor information and travel confidence. The Wellbeing Rail Trail Walks project, delivered by Worcestershire Community Rail Partnership with the University of Worcester and part-funded by CrossCountry, is a strong example. It trains students as Wellbeing Walk Leaders and uses rail trails that start and finish at stations, encouraging low-carbon travel, reducing isolation and improving confidence, physical activity and wellbeing.

Connected Journeys also means improving links with other transport and information sources, including onward bus connections, interchange with other operators, station-to-destination routes and digital support for customers planning and completing journeys confidently.



The Wellbeing Rail Trail Walks project was delivered by Worcestershire Community Rail Partnership in partnership with the University of Worcester, with part-funding from CrossCountry.

Our short-term plan

We will strengthen Connected Journeys by using Community Rail Partnerships to shape more targeted, place-based activity. This will prioritise projects that improve access to rail, support active travel, build travel confidence and connect stations with local services, green spaces, education, employment and visitor destinations.

We will also explore opportunities to improve onward travel information and strengthen partnership working with bus providers, local authorities, other rail operators and community organisations. Targeted activity will include digital inclusion support, such as helping elderly and vulnerable people build confidence using journey planning, ticketing and travel information.

Across the next three years, Connected Journeys will develop into a clearer place-based delivery model, supported by stronger local partnerships and focused on walking, cycling, rail confidence, digital inclusion and integrated travel.

Our long-term vision: 2035

By 2035, travelling with CrossCountry should feel part of a seamless, well-connected transport system. Customers should be able to plan journeys easily, move between rail and other modes with confidence, and access work, learning, leisure, health and community life without unnecessary barriers.

CrossCountry's role will be to use its national reach, Community Rail relationships, supply chain influence and Social Value approach to make sustainable travel the easy choice, including better physical connections through buses, active travel and other operators, and better digital access for customers of all ages and abilities.



CrossCountry was pleased to support Hereward Community Rail Partnership and Peterborough Civic Society in putting active travel visits to historic Peterborough on the map. Four new walking and trail maps for Peterborough were created with a grant from our Community Engagement Fund

#2e



SENSE OF PLACE

The railway does more than connect destinations; it shapes how people experience, understand and value the places they travel through. CrossCountry's network reaches communities with distinctive histories, cultures and identities. By celebrating those stories, improving station environments and supporting local creativity, we can help stations become welcoming gateways into the communities they serve.

Our 12-month update

Over the last 12 months, Community Rail activity has shown how railway spaces can celebrate local identity and improve the station environment for customers and communities. Across the network, place-based projects have included murals, artwork, heritage interpretation and community-led storytelling that make stations feel more distinctive, welcoming and rooted in their local area.

A strong example is Tyne Valley Community Rail Partnership's **A Song for Edmondson**, funded through our Community Engagement Fund. The project used music to connect pupils with Brampton Station and Thomas Edmondson, its 1836 stationmaster and pioneer of railway ticketing. The children learned local railway history, took part in sound engineering and experienced how rail heritage can be brought to life through creative community engagement. This project received recognition through the Community Rail Awards.



CrossCountry was delighted that Tyne Valley Community Rail Partnership won first place in the Railway 200 Legacy category for its imaginative A Song for Edmondson project, funded through our Community Engagement Fund.



Our short-term plan

We will use the Sense of Place module to align Community Rail Partnership activity more deliberately with the Sustainability Strategy.

We will prioritise community investment where projects are co-created with local partners, visibly celebrate heritage or identity, improve station environments and leave a legacy that communities can continue to use, display or develop.

We will also strengthen the strategic targeting of the Customer and Communities Improvement Fund and Community Engagement Fund by using Sense of Place criteria at project design and selection stage. This will ensure that funded projects continue to reflect local stories, strengthen pride and demonstrate their contribution to the wider People, Places and Planet framework.

Across the next three years, Sense of Place will mature from a group of individual murals, trails and heritage projects into a more structured place-based programme. We will build a pipeline of Community Rail Partnership-led schemes that celebrate local stories, railway heritage, culture, biodiversity, community heroes and station identity. By doing this, we will create stronger evidence of how place-based activity strengthens community identity and creates Social Value.

Our long-term vision: 2035

By 2035, Sense of Place will show how rail can strengthen local identity and Social Value. Stations on the CrossCountry network should feel like more than stops: they should be welcoming gateways into the heritage, culture and future of the communities they serve.

Through sustained partnership with Community Rail Partnerships, local authorities, schools, community groups and suppliers, CrossCountry will help protect what makes places distinctive while opening up new opportunities for creativity, inclusion, tourism and local pride.

In June, the Bridgewater Line Community Comic Mural was unveiled at Atherton railway station in Greater Manchester. The project was delivered by South East Lancashire Community Rail Partnership using funding from train operators CrossCountry and Northern.

#3



PLANET PILLAR

The Planet pillar is about the choices we make today to protect the environment tomorrow. Rail is already one of the lowest-carbon ways to travel long distances and has a clear role in helping reduce UK transport emissions where it provides an attractive alternative to road or air. But at CrossCountry, we are going further. We still have a responsibility to reduce the emissions, waste and resource use associated with our own operation, and to work with suppliers and partners to influence the impacts beyond our direct control.

For CrossCountry, protecting the planet means focusing on the areas where we can make the greatest difference: cutting carbon from the current fleet while planning for future transition, treating waste as a valuable resource, and managing water carefully in the places where we operate. Together, these modules help us move towards a cleaner, leaner and more circular railway.



In summer, CrossCountry avoided creating electrical waste and generated Social Value by donating old but fully functional TV screens to local partners, including the Newcastle Deaf Centre.

#3a



CARBON

CrossCountry helps customers choose a lower-carbon alternative to road and air, but diesel traction remains our largest direct environmental footprint. As a long-distance operator, we must reduce avoidable fuel use now while building the evidence, partnerships and investment case for long-term fleet transition.

Our 12-month update

Over the last 12 months, CrossCountry increased services, journey options and seats across the network while keeping overall emissions broadly stable. This reinforces rail's role in the wider UK transport system as a lower-carbon alternative for long-distance journeys across England, Scotland and Wales.

Our latest emissions reporting shows that CrossCountry rail travel is 2.47 times more carbon efficient than average road transport, with carbon intensity per passenger kilometre reducing year on year.

We have also continued practical carbon reduction from the existing fleet and our sites. Intelligent Engine Stop Start has been installed across the Voyager fleet, helping reduce unnecessary engine running, while site energy meters are improving emissions data and helping target future investment.

Overall progress across purchased goods and services, electricity, waste and business travel was partly offset by higher fuel use linked to increased service mileage. This highlights both the carbon benefit of growing rail's role and the continued need to reduce emissions from the current fleet and wider operation.



CrossCountry helped support more lower-carbon journeys by sponsoring a mile of the Lias Line cycle network near Leamington Spa on our network

Our short-term plan

We will continue to embed IESS and monitor the carbon benefits it delivers. We will also explore how the system can be developed further to create additional carbon savings, including through the potential development of future technology where this is technically and operationally feasible.

Alongside this, smart meter data and site energy assessments will be used to roll out targeted initiatives that reduce electricity consumption, improve operational control and support lower-carbon site management.

Across the next three years, CrossCountry will develop a clearer carbon reduction pathway for the current fleet and wider operation. This will include maximising the impact of IESS, assessing opportunities for further system improvements, reducing site energy consumption and using evidence from fleet, site and operational work to inform future planning. We will also continue to engage with the Department for Transport on longer-term fleet strategy, recognising that meaningful long-term carbon reduction will require investment in new fleet technology and a transition away from the current diesel fleet over time.

Our long-term vision: 2035

By 2035, CrossCountry aims to be on a clear pathway towards a lower-carbon fleet and a lower-carbon operation. Short-term improvements such as IESS and site energy reduction are important, but a new fleet will be required to deliver the scale of carbon reduction needed in the long term.

CrossCountry will work with the Department for Transport and wider industry partners to support a future fleet strategy that reduces emissions, improves efficiency and enables us to play our part in the transition to a lower-carbon railway.



#3b



WASTE

Every item CrossCountry buys, serves, uses or disposes of has an environmental impact and potential value. We want to move away from viewing waste as something simply to manage or discard, and instead treat materials as resources that can be avoided, reused, repurposed or recycled. From onboard catering and packaging to workplace waste and supplier materials, the way we manage resources says something about the kind of railway we want to be. Our ambition is to move beyond compliance and build a culture where waste is prevented wherever possible, and where materials are kept in use for as long as possible.

Our 12-month update

Over the last 12 months, CrossCountry has maintained compliance with Simpler Recycling requirements and continued to communicate changes across the business. This has included an ongoing communications plan to help colleagues understand what is changing, why it matters and how they can support better waste segregation and recycling.

We have also rolled out a new First Class offer that includes ambient meals and reduces sandwich waste. Alongside this, we are reviewing the current offer across all classes to identify further opportunities to reduce waste at source, improve stock management and make lower-waste choices easier.



Throughout 2026, CrossCountry has been working with a local university to develop a partnership focused on creative circularity, exploring how waste materials can be reused, repurposed and given a second life.

Our short-term plan

We will continue to work with suppliers to meet applicable Extended Producer Responsibility requirements and prepare for future Self-Managed Organisational Waste data collection and reporting obligations, taking account of the latest regulatory guidance. Communications activity will continue so colleagues and suppliers understand their responsibilities and changes are embedded consistently across the business.

We will also assess how the Deposit Return Scheme can be implemented across our operation. This will include looking at how bottles can be avoided where possible, and how purchased bottles can be returned, captured and recycled more effectively where they remain part of the customer offer.

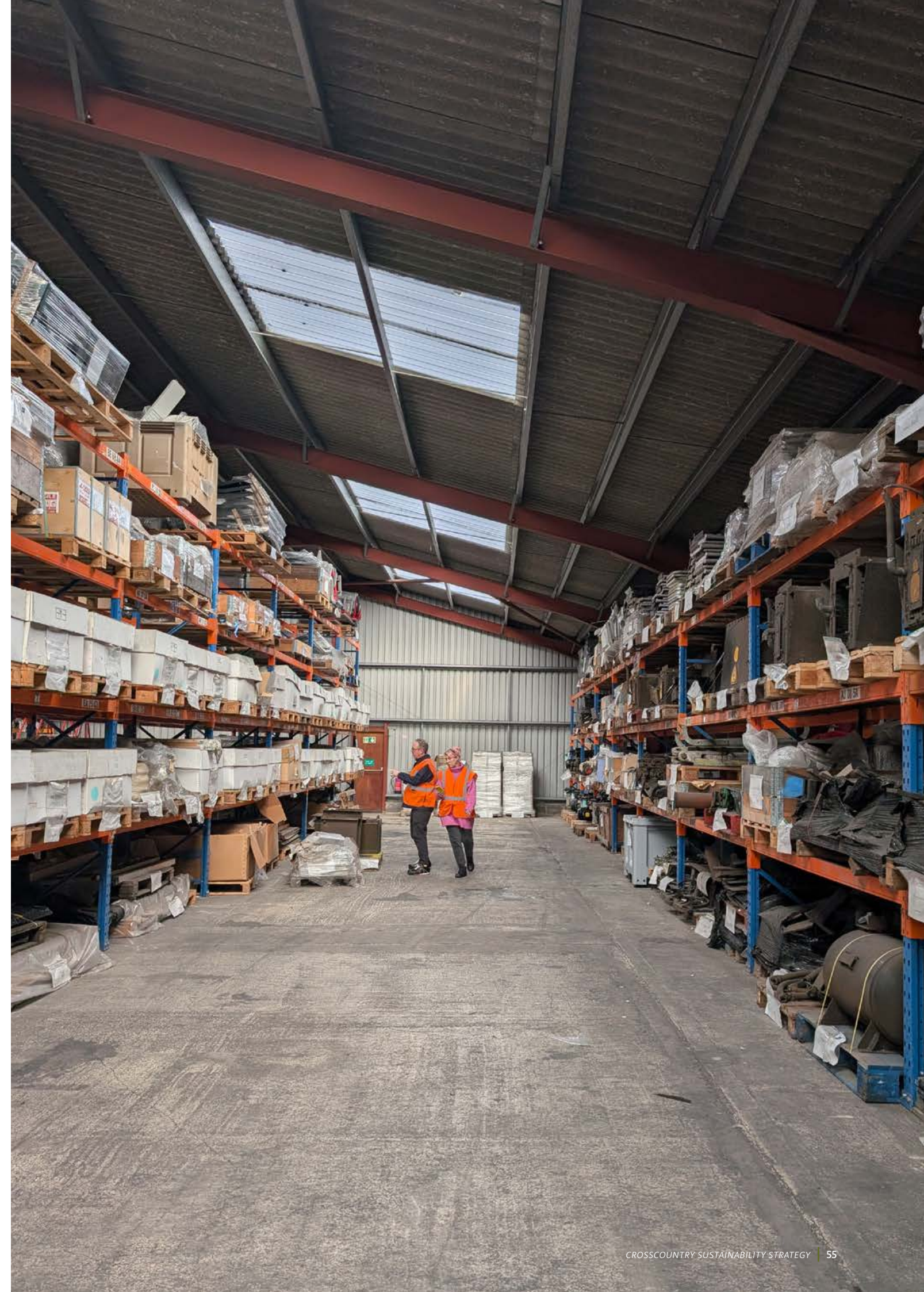
In October, we will formally launch a new partnership with a local university focused on circularity. This will help us explore how materials can be reused, repurposed and given a second life, supporting a more innovative and resource-efficient approach to waste.

Across the next three years, CrossCountry will move from compliance-led waste management towards a stronger circular economy approach. This will include reducing waste at source, improving the design of onboard and station-related customer offers, strengthening supplier accountability and using data to identify where waste can be avoided or better managed. Learning from the university partnership will help inform future procurement, onboard service design, customer communications and community or Social Value opportunities.

Our long-term vision: 2035

By 2035, CrossCountry will treat waste as a resource. This means designing waste out wherever possible, making reuse and recycling easier, and working with suppliers and partners to keep materials in use for longer.

Circular thinking will be embedded into how CrossCountry buys, uses and manages materials. By reducing avoidable waste, improving segregation, supporting return schemes and developing circular partnerships, we will reduce environmental impact while creating wider value for communities and the supply chain.



#3c

WATER

Water is a scarce and shared resource that supports CrossCountry's sites, depots, colleagues and customers. As climate change increases pressure on water systems, responsible water management is becoming more important for resilience, cost control and environmental stewardship. For CrossCountry, this starts with better data, faster action and practical changes that reduce unnecessary consumption.

Our 12-month update

Over the last 12 months, CrossCountry has successfully made alterations to water meters to improve the accuracy of flow data. This has strengthened our ability to understand consumption patterns and respond more quickly when issues arise.

The improved data is now being used to identify leaks and high usage areas more quickly, supporting better operational control and helping to prevent unnecessary water loss.

Our short-term plan

We will review water consumption across all relevant sites and identify practical, smaller-scale changes that can reduce use of this scarce resource. This will include using meter data to target high-consumption areas and working with local teams and suppliers to understand where improvements can be made.

Across the next three years, improved water data will support a more proactive approach to water management. This will include strengthening reporting, identifying recurring high-usage areas and building water efficiency into relevant supplier conversations and site improvement plans.

Our long-term vision: 2035

By 2035, CrossCountry will manage water as a valued and scarce resource. Water consumption will be better understood, avoidable loss will be minimised, and efficient use will be embedded into site management, supplier activity and future investment decisions.

Where viable, we will seek to pilot or progress rainwater harvesting and other water-saving measures, using evidence from site reviews to prioritise locations where intervention is likely to deliver the greatest benefit.



LOOKING AHEAD

The 2026 Sustainability Strategy update represents a practical step forward in CrossCountry's sustainability journey. It keeps our framework stable, strengthens alignment with national transport strategy and uses customer insight to reinforce the priorities first identified through the 2025 materiality assessment. It places greater emphasis on delivery through partnerships, procurement and Social Value forecasting and measurement, while reinforcing the role CrossCountry can play in helping reduce UK transport emissions by making rail a more attractive, accessible and lower-carbon choice.

By continuing to work through People, Places and Planet, and by using the 11 modules strengthened through the 2026 customer survey, we can maintain focus while increasing maturity. The survey reinforces the importance of a balanced strategy that delivers practical benefits for customers, communities, colleagues and the environment, while giving us confidence that our framework remains relevant and well aligned to stakeholder expectations. By using Social Value as a common currency, we can better understand and communicate our impact. By working more deliberately with suppliers and Community Rail Partnerships, we can extend our reach and deliver outcomes that matter locally and nationally.

Our ambition remains clear: to deliver a railway that gives more than it takes away. In 2026, we will continue to go beyond the journey by creating lasting value for people, places and the planet.



Take us on
your Journey

cross
country

