

Station Social & Commercial Development Plan

31 March 2026



Background Summary – 10-year Plan

In September 2022, GTR submitted its Station Social and Commercial Development Plan (SSCDP) to the Department for Transport. This plan set out GTR's vision to transform redundant or under-used station spaces into social-impact or commercial opportunities, taking a 10-year view and providing a strategic framework that aligns these spaces with current and future business and industry needs.

Key Strategic Objectives

The SSCDP is focused on establishing and delivering the following key strategic objectives, which are reviewed annually:

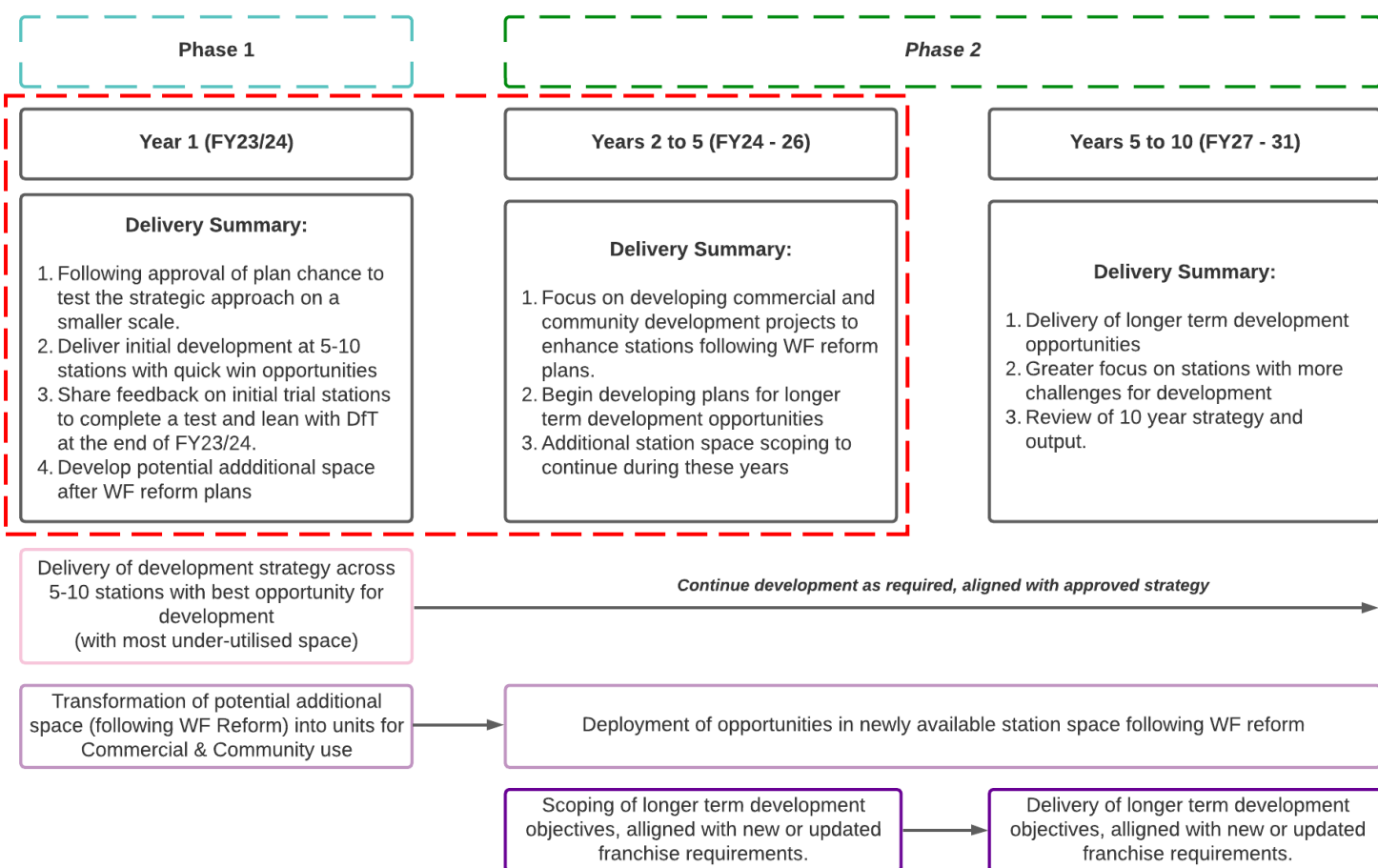
- Ensuring as many potential spaces are utilised as possible for commercial, community/social or internal efficiencies (including staff accommodation and offices)
- Reducing costs paid out through empty rates liability by offering up currently vacant commercial spaces for short term community use
- Being agile and adapting to industry, customer, and social changes as they develop, to be reviewed and updated annually
- Developing multi-use spaces from under-utilised station space that support both commercial and social objectives
- Supporting the longer-term Sustainable Rail Strategy to put rail at the heart of communities
- Pursuing an outcome-led approach that focuses on the social and environmental, as well as economic impact
- Embedding social value into all decision-making and evaluation
- Driving long term rail recovery through continuous improvements to the station environment, optimising any under-utilised space

Ahead of outlining the progress made in the implementation of GTR's 10-year SSCDP, it is important to reference the impact of the rail industry's Workforce Reform (WFR) consultation on the original plan's deliverables. The plan was designed to align with the anticipated activities surrounding WFR, which would potentially have involved changes to station staffing models and increased spaces available. It was acknowledged from the outset that the plan's full progression would be contingent upon a clear understanding of WFR outcomes and would be constrained should progress be limited. With that in mind, several activities have been delayed, such as conducting a wide-ranging station space audit with staff to provide a comprehensive overview of available building and land space that could be leveraged for both commercial and community purposes.

These actions were strategically positioned as key steps in the 10-year SSCDP and were contingent upon a change in on-station ticket retailing, which would have resulted in a significant amount of additional space becoming available across GTR's network. In the absence of these changes, it is acknowledged that only limited progress has been possible due to the potential ramifications on station operations and staffing. However, GTR remains committed to delivering these initiatives to ensure a multi-faceted and community-focused approach to station development and they will remain a high priority to action when it is considered prudent and practical to do so.

10-Year Plan Overview

Below is a summary of the original SSCDP phasing:



We have now moved into the continued delivery of Phase 2, which is dedicated to the strategic planning of station space usage; working in collaboration with our Customer Services Directorate, infrastructure, CSR and facilities areas to scope funding opportunities in line with the proactive identification and utilisation of free or underutilised space across our network. Several results of these engagements are documented below in deliverables to date.

Deliverables To Date for FY25/26

In line with our annual business plan, 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 tenant opportunities for its commercial property estate, contributing to a robust and diversified revenue portfolio. Partnership with Rail Estate Search has led to the signing of Heads of Terms for 51 new retail units across GTR stations, whilst GTR aims to continue developing its property portfolio year on year. The following items have been in play since the start of the contract year, and will continue in their evolution and implementation for the foreseeable future:

1. Commitment to develop small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and local, independent retail at stations alongside higher-paying national chains

In line with ORR guidance, GTR's priority is to maintain open, transparent and competitive routes to market that allow a diverse range of operators to participate in retail on our stations. While national brands often bring established customer trust, strong design standards and reliable rent levels, SMEs and independents can offer local differentiation, innovation and community alignment. The right balance will vary depending on the station type and location. GTR adopts a flexible approach, welcoming all operator types through a fair process, and allowing the strength of the offer, both financially and qualitatively, to determine the selection. This ensures that customers benefit from a retail mix that is both commercially sustainable and locally relevant, as well as operationally resilient. The tenant-type split is currently 80% SME to 20% National. Although we grant leases to SMEs at a lower base rent, where possible we include turnover top up provisions, which means that as tenant turnover increases, GTR's revenue from the rent also increases. This is a proven method of enabling small businesses to establish themselves.

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

GTR continually reviews its individual station offerings to diversify choice for passengers. Prior to letting, vacant units are assessed against a retail hierarchy of needs which is shaped by dwell time, journey purpose, customer type and demographic, to ensure that in-coming retailers are offering an appropriate service matched to customer requirements, value for money and the alternatives available outside of the station environment.

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

GTR continues to offer appropriate incentives and inducements (such as rent-free periods and turnover top up rental agreements) to maximise the marketability of units and improve the tenant mix between well-known national brands and independents/SMEs.

4. Removal of the barrier on protected leases

GTR terminates leases protected by the Landlord and Tenant Act 1954 when the opportunity arises and it is commercially viable to do so. This allows GTR the flexibility to offer new modern leases and promote an improved tenant mix in the station environment, potentially encouraging new businesses to enter the market. Since April 2025 GTR has been successful in terminating one more protected lease.

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

TAWs allow 30 days' notice by either party to terminate. They enable new smaller tenants a low-risk opportunity to trial their commercial propositions, and they enable GTR to proactively manage new tenants to ensure that they align with GTR's customer experience goals and swiftly exit those that do not.

6. Space & People

Ancillary revenue is earned from the charity work that Space & People facilitate at our stations, while charities benefit from exposure in high-footfall transport hubs. In addition, station teams make arrangements locally for groups to make collections.

7. GTR continues to install vending machines and photo booths

Besides being a lucrative revenue opportunity, unattended vending gives travellers and other stakeholders quick and convenient 24/7 access to snacks, beverages and other services. There are now 156 units across the GTR network.

8. Evolution of the strategic approach of the SSCDP, aligning social and commercial benefits in car parks

The Urban Hubs programme of installations on the periphery of car parks has resulted in a revenue driving opportunity for GTR alongside clear community and social benefits for the stations where these parcel lockers (InPost, Amazon, BuyBox, Yeep and Quadient), Salvation Army bins, and "We Buy Any Car" services have been completed. In addition, plans are underway for a programme of new Royal Mail locker installations.

9. Attracting shoppers to the station environs 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 operates at Dorking station.

CSR, Community & Stakeholder Activity

Strong, connected communities are the foundation not just of a thriving railway, but of a thriving UK. That's why we invest in projects and partnerships that support the people and places connected to our network. Our community team coordinates this work, creating social value through community-based projects and partnerships. This encompasses everything from supporting local businesses to transforming stations into vibrant community hubs.

Our most recent Social Value Report was published in October 2025, as is available on our website.

Community Rail Partnerships (CRPs)

We support four CRPs across our network: Southeast CRP (SCRCP), Beds and Herts CRP, Darent Valley CRP and Cam Valley CRP. The core funding we provide enables CRPs to deliver against the four pillars of the DfT community rail strategy; to providing a voice for the community, promoting sustainable and healthy travel, bringing communities together, and support social and economic development.

Each CRP runs its own website and conducts annual reviews which feature their work.

We provide office space within our stations to two of our CRPs to help them deliver social impact within their local communities; an office at Lewes for the Southeast Community Rail Partnership and one at Bedford for the Beds and Herts CRP. Both offices are not required for railway use and are too small to be used for commercial purposes.

We are continuing to look at ways in which we can utilise unused spaces at stations and support community partners who currently use spaces at stations.

Station Partners

We work with 110 Station Partners across our network who help make our stations brighter, more welcoming places for passengers. These include small volunteer groups and other local organisations who see our stations as important community hubs – places to work together, promote the area and build local pride.

Friends of Bishopstone turned an empty room at the station into a thriving community hub for local elderly residents and won the Kings Award for volunteering which was presented to the group in February 2026.

The Friends of Ore, in partnership with GTR and Network Rail have turned a piece of derelict land next to the station into a thriving community garden for local residents and schools to learn more about growing plants and vegetables. We continue to support the group with grants for plants and equipment and volunteering days

How our colleagues support important causes

Our people make a real difference in their local communities, through volunteering and supporting charity projects. These activities create positive social impact across our network and give staff the chance to develop new skills while giving back. For example, 33 of our infrastructure colleagues volunteered time individually last year to improve our green spaces, clearing litter, removing overgrown plants, and preparing areas for planting. This has the effect of improving our spaces for customers and local communities, making their use and further development more attractive.

Your Station, Your Community Fund

Finally, we highlight our *Your Station, Your Community* improvement funding programme, a cross-cutting programme that delivers social value across various focus areas. This programme helps local groups, charities, customers and communities deliver projects that matter across our network, both within and outside of our stations, with themes encompassing mental health, education, employability, diversity and inclusion, and environmental sustainability. This fund has supported 80 projects with grants totalling £786,000, reaching more than 35,000 people across our network.

Spaces unsuitable for rental as commercial units

Small and non-standard units in low footfall areas frequently do not support a commercial proposition for a paying tenant. However, these units may present an opportunity for a community project as a hub or social space, such as described above. Nevertheless GTR can still be restricted in the options for usage since even if the space is made available free of charge, business rates would likely be payable, making it a viable option only for a charity (although even a charity's liability for business rates varies from council to council - 'charitable rate relief' offers up to 80% off a business rates bill, and some local councils will top up the discount to 100% with 'discretionary relief'). Community groups not registered as a charity who occupy GTR premises would be liable for business rates, making this a very unattractive proposition for them. Despite these barriers, local councils do from time to time exempt a group from payments, which is something we explore with partners on a case-by-case basis.

We have provided a lease to a local social enterprise Arty Time CIC to convert an old station building into a community hub and base for the local foodbank. We also provided seed funding to the group, via our Community Investment Fund grant programme, to get designs created for the space and to raise funds for the project.

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.

GTR has engaged with third party development organisations including SOLUM and Platform4 to develop proposals within GTR station lease areas (primarily car parks) including mix-use residential and commercial developments which in-turn would generate development receipts to invest into improving stations. A number of schemes are currently under consideration and are in the midst of planning reviews and approvals with local planning authorities. These schemes include Redhill, Brighton, Harpenden, Sutton, Purley, Lewes and Eastbourne.

GTR has successfully sought third party contributions from Railway Heritage Trust, Local Authorities (Central Bedfordshire and London Borough of Lambeth) and the Lottery Fund to enhance scheme deliveries on our network which include a new cycle hub, bringing into use redundant waiting facilities, and step-free access proposals.

During the last financial year, GTR has also repurposed a former retail tenancy at Blackfriars to create a staff training suite of meeting facilities, reducing our reliance on securing third party venues. A total of £500,000 was invested into this facility which successfully opened in January 2026.

Next Steps

GTR has developed a tailored and focused approach to ensuring investment into assets and services has the best return and the best impact from a customer and stakeholder perspective. This is being facilitated via the newly launched Route Strategy Programme which evaluates each route to establish future demand through population and housing growth, large developments in the area that affect public transport, and more forensic analysis of geodemographics and the latent demand for our rail public transport system. This will help to drive more direct and relevant investment into car parking capacity, station retailing and facilities development, and integrated transport planning.

In addition, GTR has developed a closer working relationship with both airports on its network - Gatwick and Luton. These airports have plans to significantly increase passenger numbers as a result of their expansion plans and have provided public transport surface access funds to improve public transport connectivity to their airports. GTR has accessed these funds to invest over £900,000 into early morning service extensions, wayfinding across over 60 stations serving the airports, improved retailing incentives to use rail for inbound passengers, and more streamlined fares and ticketing for all passengers including airport products like Security Fast Track passes to help make rail more attractive, to help grow the airport and the local economies.

Finally, GTR has launched a new Corporate Travel and Schools & Colleges Travel Service, working with organisations, local authorities, and education authorities to help subsidise and communicate GTR services. We are offering online bulk booking of season tickets and term time passes to encourage public transport usage.