



Welcome to our community and stakeholder newsletter

As we move towards the middle of 2026, we have continued to build on our successes from 2025 as well as launching new initiatives to drive further positive change across the business.

Work with Hitachi and Angel Trains to finalise the design of our new fleet is progressing and we're extremely close to confirming both the internal and external design. The new fleet will be among the most modern on the East Coast Main Line and first units are due to enter service in 2028.

We currently have three applications live with the ORR, including plans for additional services between West Yorkshire and London, as well as proposals for new direct services between Cleethorpes and London and Newcastle and Brighton.

Our Class 180 fleet has started the year strongly. We are continuing to invest in the fleet, including new window film to help reduce onboard temperatures. We've also completed the rollout of replacement body-worn cameras to all onboard colleagues.

It has been really great to see the launch of the 2026 Community Fund, with funding awarded to some very well-deserving causes. I look forward to seeing the positive impact of these.

A reminder that our people are central to what makes Grand Central special and this is consistently reflected in the positive feedback we receive from customers. We thank you for this and your continued support.



Chris Brandon
Director, Grand Central



NEW
BRADFORD
AMBASSADORS

GUIDE DOG
AMBASSADORS

HARTLEPOOL
SCOUTS

LONGBOAT
WAKEFIELD

COMMUNITY
FUND
WINNERS

MANCHESTER
MARATHON

RAIL SAFE
FRIENDLY

OUR
ACCESSIBILITY
OFFERING

NEW AD
CAMPAIGN

NEW CAREERS
PAGE

Youth volunteers bringing new energy to Bradford Interchange

We've launched a new youth-focused programme at Bradford Interchange, aimed at boosting community engagement and developing employability skills.

The new volunteer ambassador team, made up of young people aged 18 to 25, began a three-month trial back in April. Up to four volunteers will be on duty each Sunday, offering passengers a friendly and reassuring presence while gaining valuable real-world experience.

The 15 new recruits have completed a comprehensive training programme to prepare them for their roles. This includes rail safety and confidence training, customer service roleplay, station inductions and hands-on rail familiarisation. Many participants have also undertaken Samaritans training, with further sessions planned in partnership with Guide Dogs.

This latest initiative, delivered in partnership with the Community Rail Network, forms part of Grand Central's Social Value programme for 2026. It supports the wider Arriva Rail Services Sustainability Strategy, with a focus on opportunity, inclusion and community impact.

Early feedback from volunteers has been positive. Kimia Modaressi, one of the new ambassadors, described how the experience has already helped build confidence and skills. "At the beginning of the day, I felt nervous stepping into a busy environment and speaking with members of the public," Modaressi says, "However, as the day went on, my confidence grew significantly. As a young person volunteering, this experience has encouraged me to step outside of my comfort zone and build confidence in a professional environment. It has given me a better understanding of responsibility, public interaction and the importance of helping others. I look forward to continuing to develop these skills and volunteering on a regular basis."

Alongside the young ambassadors, the programme also includes five supporting roles, ensuring a strong team presence at the station.

For more information about the programme or to get involved, visit www.grandcentralrail.com/community/ambassadors



Sighted guide training sessions

We were really pleased to have our first first training session with Guide Dogs to support our volunteers' work with Grand Central customers and help make the railway more accessible.

The training includes ways to guide adults safely, with confidence, skill and understanding. Skills include basic guiding techniques to help people navigating obstacles and getting in and out of vehicles.

Kelle McParland, Guide Dogs' sighted guide training officer, says, "Our training provided volunteers skills and confidence to offer the right support, while also raising awareness of the barriers people with sight loss can face in everyday environments." She adds, "It's all about supporting people with sight loss to feel confident and supported in everyday settings, including travel."



Scouts bring some community spirit to Hartlepool Station revamp

Friends of Hartlepool Station and Grand Central Ambassadors have teamed up with their local Scout groups to transform the town's railway station.

As part of the Scouts' Platform for Change badge, young people worked alongside volunteers to install 14 new planters on the recently opened Platform 3 at Hartlepool Railway Station.

The project forms part of a wider vision to enhance the station and its interchange, creating a warmer and more welcoming environment for passengers. Supported by Grand Central, Northern Rail and the PFC Trust, the improvements aim to showcase Hartlepool's attractions and make a good impression for visitors arriving in the town.

The newly installed planters, now filled with colourful spring flowers, are already brightening the platform. To mark the occasion, coordinators Margaret and Alan Elliot presented a commemorative plaque to Colin Griffiths, Chairman of the Friends of Hartlepool Station and a Grand Central Ambassador.

The group is planning further enhancements, including a new Welcome to Hartlepool sign on a grassed area within the interchange.



Wakefield Kirkgate is bursting with Pride

Last year we worked with LGBTQ+ charity and Kirkgate Station adopters LonGBoaT Wakefield CIO and The Art Exchange CIC to help create a community mural at Wakefield Station.

The stunning mural, funded by Grand Central, has finally been installed and it's a really striking community art display which celebrates the diversity of the communities we serve.

Formed in 2018, LonGBoaT creates inclusive spaces where everyone feels welcome and supported. Next month, LonGBoaT will also host a panel of the UK AIDS Memorial quilt in its gallery space at the station. The huge quilt will be available for viewing at WX in Wakefield City Centre, the first time it's been displayed outside of London.

"We're so glad to be part of making Wakefield a place where LGBT+ people feel seen, heard and respected," said Hannah Bromage, Grand Central Community and Volunteer Manager, *"not only does the mural celebrate the diverse communities that we're proud to serve, it also continues to showcase Wakefield as a hub for creative arts."*



Grand Central Community Fund

Grand Central Community Fund shortlist

We've shortlisted five initiatives for our Community Fund for projects in York, Sunderland, Peterborough, Bradford, Hartlepool and Northallerton. We've chosen ones that reflect a focus on social impact, sustainable travel and environmental improvement in communities we serve. Overall we've provided £14,650 to the following projects.

Baby Week

A programme helping first-time parents gain confidence travelling with babies by train through guided rail trips, practical demonstrations and baby-friendly events in locations including York, Sunderland and Peterborough. It aims to reduce isolation, promote rail as an accessible option for families and encourage more sustainable travel choices in early parenthood.

Café West Healthy Living Centre

Based in Bradford, this project will create a wellbeing-guided walk from Café West to Bradford Interchange and a community garden at the café. Workshops and activities will promote sustainable travel, environmental awareness and mental wellbeing for local residents.

Friends of Hartlepool Station

This inclusivity-focused scheme supports station improvements in Hartlepool, including new murals depicting local history, a picture gallery and wayfinding signage around the station and interchange. It also revives plans for wildflower beds, creating a more welcoming gateway that builds community pride and strengthens the link between the station and the town's heritage and attractions.

The Friends of Hartlepool Team ready to get started on the 'Hartlepool Vision' project.

North Star Learning Hub CIC

A 12-week educational programme near Hartlepool station for young adults aged 16–25 who are not in education, employment or training. Participants work towards Functional Skills qualifications while building rail-travel confidence, employability skills and volunteering experience, using the railway as a practical route to education, training and work.

Romanby Parish Council

In Northallerton, the Parish Council plans to complete a wildflower meadow within Ainderby Road Leisure Park, close to Northallerton station, to boost biodiversity and create a quiet nature sanctuary. The area will include features such as bird and bat boxes, information boards and opportunities for local schools and volunteers to use the space for nature-based learning and wellbeing.



Steve goes the distance

An Grand Central colleague has gone the extra mile, 26.2 of them, to be precise, to raise hundreds for charity.

Steve, Revenue Management, Pricing and Retail Manager, completed the Manchester Marathon back in April, finishing the course in an impressive four hours, 15 minutes and two seconds. Not only did he take on the gruelling distance but he also achieved a personal best, beating his previous marathon time by 23 minutes.

Steve used the challenge as an opportunity to support The Surge Sanctuary in Nottinghamshire, an animal rescue centre where he volunteers. The sanctuary provides lifelong care for abandoned, mistreated, and rescued animals.

Steve committed to months of winter training, turning the experience into something more than just a race. *“Setting myself this challenge gave me a real sense of purpose over the winter months,”* he says, *“It helped me get fitter and had a hugely positive impact on my mental health.”*

Thanks to his efforts and the generosity of supporters, Halstead has raised £865 so far, with donations still coming in.

You can still support the fundraising efforts by donating via the JustGiving page: www.justgiving.com/page/steve-halstead-surge



GC proud to be Rail Safe Friendly

We are delighted to be supporting the Rail Safe Friendly (RSF) programme, reflecting a growing industry-wide commitment to improving rail safety education for young people across the UK.

The initiative, developed through Learn Live in collaboration with Network Rail, focuses on tackling the dangers of railway trespassing by delivering curriculum-aligned safety content directly into schools.

By targeting areas with higher incident rates, the programme, launched in 2023, helps students better understand the risks around railway environments and make safer decisions. It builds on earlier rail safety campaigns by offering tailored digital content for primary, secondary and SEND learners and aims to strengthen links between the rail industry and local communities.

Emily Baxter, Rail Safe Friendly Project Manager, said, *“We are pleased that Arriva Rail Services is a proud supporter of the Rail Safe Friendly programme. It shows the collective commitment of the rail industry to making railway safety education accessible to young people across the country. With the support of organisations like this, we can continue our mission to protect young people from the dangers of railway trespass.”*

The programme has an ambitious goal of enrolling every school in the UK by 2027.



Changes to our accessibility offering

We have overhauled our accessibility offering over the past year, with new staff training, equipment and digital upgrades aimed at making journeys easier for older and disabled passengers.

We've upskilled our onboard customer service assistants so they can deploy ramps, giving wheelchair and mobility scooter users another trained member of staff to help them board and alight. We've also invested in new ramps for all 10 of our Class 180 trains.

As part of a wider accessibility refresh, we are re-recording all passenger information system auto-announcements across our Class 180 fleet to provide clearer, more consistent audio information for customers, including those with visual or hearing impairments. This sits alongside existing onboard information screens and a real-time journey tracker, which provide visual and audio updates on train progress and disruption.

Our website has also been updated in line with Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG), making it easier for customers to find accessibility information, book assistance and buy tickets online or via the Grand Central app. The refreshed digital platform also signposts details of station facilities, rolling stock accessibility and alternative formats such as audio and large-print versions of the Accessible Travel Policy and Making Rail Accessible leaflet.

New GC ad campaign

We've filmed a new advertising campaign. The campaign showcases days out and short breaks along our route. It is being shown at the cinema, on Sky, and across digital and social media channels.

"The ad features some of our Grand Central colleagues, helping to reflect the genuine people behind our services," says Luke Purcell, GC's marketing manager, "It brings together the journey and the destination and will feature iconic London locations alongside moments on board our trains."



New Grand Central careers

We've got a new-look careers page to give an insight into what it's like working at Grand Central, from engineering and fleet to operations and support.

The page has real stories of people who work here as well as an insight into what working life is like here.

www.grandcentralrail.com/careers-grand-central

We want your news and views

Got a great story to share about community work on our routes or even projects you think we should be involved in?

Please drop us a line at community@grandcentralrail.com.

If you have any questions or you wish to stop receiving these emails please contact community@grandcentralrail.com.