

£36.8 million investment gives green light to Very Light Rail revolution in West Midlands

January 24, 2023



Funding for the innovative Coventry Very Light Rail (CVLR) transport system has been approved by transport bosses, enabling plans for a real-world demonstration programme in Coventry city centre to progress.

The West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA) Board recently approved the first £36.8 million instalment of an expected £72 million investment in the emerging VLR technology, which was developed by Coventry City Council and its partners, and will be cheaper and faster to build than traditional rail and tram systems. It now just needs final approval by the Department for Transport (DfT).

While much of the City Region Sustainable Transport Settlement funding has been earmarked for the construction of a real-world demonstration track in Coventry city centre, there will also be further investment in Dudley's newly opened Very Light Rail National Innovation Centre (VLRNIC).

New equipment will be purchased for the £32 million facility, which was designed to help shape and accelerate the development of lower-cost, more environmentally friendly transport solutions – including the ground-breaking Coventry VLR system.

Overseen by the Black Country Innovative Manufacturing Organisation (BCIMO), the centre already features a 2.2km test track, a 15-metre radius loop, an 870m curved tunnel and a bespoke overhead electric charging system. Its main building houses a three-storey engineering hall, in addition to research offices, laboratories and an events suite.

While the VLRNIC was declared open in December 2022 and is currently in use, the funding will support it to become fully operational.

It will also be used to develop the business cases, both for a fully operational CVLR system, and further VLR lines and links with the current West Midlands Metro network.

Andy Street, Mayor of the West Midlands and WMCA Chair, said: “This funding will allow us to take Very Light Rail to the next level – from the workshop to real-world demonstration – and shows the WMCA Board’s unequivocal backing for innovation in Coventry.”



Photo credit: BCIMO