

# BCIMO event bridges gap between Network Rail and UKRRIN

December 12, 2023



The first ever large-scale event to take place at the Black Country Innovative Manufacturing Organisation (BCIMO)'s brand new state-of-the-art facility in the West Midlands has strengthened the bonds between major rail organisations and academic institutions, according to senior leaders attending the event.

The *Building Partnerships in Rail in Research and Innovation* event, hosted by the [Railway Industry Association \(RIA\)](#) on behalf of [Network Rail](#) at BCIMO's Very Light Rail National Innovation Centre (VLRNIC), saw delegates from across the industry meet to develop ways in which collaborative working could deliver further cost efficiencies.,

Network Rail was granted exclusive access to the meeting and event spaces at the centre, which comprise a 130-seater Auditorium, large Exhibition Hall and four meeting rooms. Used together, these spaces allowed Network Rail to deliver a successful multi-purpose conference which included presentations,

networking, exhibitions, and breakout sessions, with team members praising the facilities on offer.

A timelapse video of the Exhibition Hall being set up and used throughout the day can be [viewed here](#).

During the event, Network Rail highlighted the upcoming capital delivery challenges that it faces in the coming years, which it believes that academic organisations, such as the UK Rail Research and Innovation Network (UKRRIN), a collaboration between universities such as the Universities of Birmingham, Southampton and Huddersfield, to name a few, can support. In response, UKRRIN demonstrated the capabilities of its Centres of Excellence to feed the discussions for workshops held in the afternoon.



Robert Ampomah, Chief Technology Officer, Network Rail, said:

“There is a wealth of opportunities to challenge the way we do things in the railway, but to unlock those opportunities we have to connect, share, learn and listen to others. We felt that we achieved that with this event and we will follow this up to develop tangible opportunities to help us grow our knowledge and realise real efficiencies.”

“There is already a lot of research and innovation within maintenance and product development, but we wanted to focus on research and innovate within Capital Delivery in order to create cost-effective and faster ways to improve railway construction activities.”

“Events such as this are powerful because they provide a great opportunity to support engineering decision making – by bringing together delivery teams with academics we start to create new ways of thinking in the realms of capital delivery that previously may not have been considered. Through this, we can further reduce costs and improve productivity.

“Working with organisations like UKRRIN and making the most of the innovative facilities that organisations such as BCIMO has, helps us to access these solutions much faster. BCIMO’s testing facilities provide easier access to test solutions outside of the live operational railway environment, so that we can put them through their paces and validate them before implementing them on the railway.

“The impressive meeting and event facilities at the VLRNIC really supported the flow of discussions throughout the day. Having access to a location where both rail and conference facilities can be accessed together is invaluable. I am sure we will use the centre’s facilities for other events in the future.”

Innovation is one of the major focusses for Network Rail as the industry heads towards CP7 and is also important in significant projects like the TransPennine Route Upgrade.

David Lawrance, Technical Director & Chief Engineer of the TransPennine Route Upgrade, was part of the team that initiated discussions to develop this event. He said building partnerships with academic institutions will be vital pushing delivery efficiency and better outcomes for the customer over the next few years.





David Lawrance, said:

“As a delivery team, we realised the importance of working with academics to establish best practice for capital delivery. There is a huge capability within UKRRIN and a wide range of challenges within rail project delivery. We aren’t always very good at bringing those things together, so that was the focus of this event. There are already some great examples which demonstrate the potential opportunity.”

“In one instance, the University of Huddersfield supported us on the Transpennine Route Upgrade with the development of a simulation to help design the electrification system at Colton Junction on the East Coast mainline. This model allowed us to minimise pantograph to overhead line system contact forces, which would otherwise have led to a reduced linespeed or remodelling of the whole junction; both highly undesirable in terms of passenger outcomes and cost

“We were really impressed by the BCIMO facilities – the combination of lecture theatre, networking area and breakout rooms (all in close proximity) was perfect for our objective, and created a very positive energy. We feel we achieved what we set out to at this event.”



This event is just one example of BCIMO and Network Rail’s developing relationship, with a number of other initiatives having already taken place or in the pipeline. A 60-delegate demonstration event took place at the VLRNIC on 11th October, where Network Rail utilised the Centre’s track and tunnel to showcase a range of technologies including Tunnel Sub-surface Inspection Radar (TSIR), GIS Tunnel

Evaluations & Automatic Tunnel Examination (ATE). This was closely followed by a week-long FELIX pilot training course and demonstration day on 20th October.

Visit BCIMO's [Rail Development & Test Site](#) and [Meeting & Event Spaces](#) to find out more.