

BCIMO hosts industry speakers to address West Midlands rail challenges at Clean Futures Accelerator Workshops

August 30, 2023



Applicants for the Clean Futures Accelerator, a West Midlands-based transport transformation programme, have attended two days of Challenge Support Workshops at the Very Light Rail National Innovation Centre (VLRNIC) in Dudley to gain insights and understanding of the challenges they will be addressing during the innovation programme.

The workshops, held on Tuesday 22 and Wednesday 23 August, were facilitated by BCIMO's Clean Futures Accelerator team for applicants focused on developing Clean Tech solutions for Rail who will be supported by BCIMO for the duration of the programme.

High-profile guest speakers presented on the supply chain challenges and opportunities within the rail industry.





Discussions at the workshops centred around the opportunity for new product development to address the challenges of Greener EV Components, the Circular Economy of Transport, Road Freight Alternatives, Greener Transport Infrastructure and Future Fuels, as well as insight and discussions around intermodal transportation.

Attendees received comprehensive guidance on the challenge topics and applications, types of the solutions the market is looking for, the testing and demonstration facilities on offer at the VLRNIC and how to complete the testing and demonstration section within the application form.

Speakers on the Tuesday 22 August workshops included Angus Brummit-Brown, Senior Project Manager for Coventry Very light Rail, Coventry City Council, and Mark Thompson, Managing Director, AceOn, who both addressed the Greener EV Components & Circular Economy of Transport challenges.

Phil Read, Managing Director, Varamis Rail, also spoke on the challenge of Road Freight Alternatives during the afternoon session.

On Wednesday 23 August, Angus Brummit-Brown, Senior Project Manager for Coventry Very light Rail, Coventry City Council, Niall Fagan, Head of Engineering, Capital Delivery Eastern, Network Rail and Spencer Williams, Head of Consulting, Rhomberg Sersa Rail Group addressed the challenges associated with Greener Transport Infrastructure.

During the afternoon, Beverley Nielson, Chair, Ultra-Light Rail partners, Chris Elliott, UKRRIN Hub Manager, Unipart Rail and Spencer Williams, Head of Consulting, Rhomberg Sersa Rail Group discussed the Future Fuels challenge area.

BCIMO also announced its winners support package which, in addition to the £50k, comprises:

Commercialisation Support Package (up to 10 days of support)

- Up to 10 days of specialist rail support focused on commercialising the winner's product into the rail sector
- Facilitated client & partner introductions on site
- A profile-raising advert / feature in Rail Business Daily
- A video demonstrating the winner's technology and journey at the centre

Engineering Support Package (10 days of trial & demonstration support)

- Access to BCIMO's Rail Development and Test Site facilities for testing and demonstration purposes
- Bespoke support to develop a testing and demonstration plan
- Engineering support to test and demonstrate the winner's technology solution on site

Additional Services & Support (over the project lifetime)

- Free access to BCIMO's Commercial and Investor Hub
- Free access to hotdesking facilities in the Clean Futures SME collaboration space
- Access to support with an allocated SME Development Manager
- Discounted access to BCIMO's Meeting, Conference and Event spaces

Each workshop concluded with a tour of BCIMO's facilities.





In total more than 50 organisations were in attendance, including Adelan, Alucast, CN Squared Consultancy, Penn Engineered Solutions Ltd, Rock Power Connections, Quantum Seating and many more.

Presentations for each of the workshops can be downloaded [here](#).

Discussing the workshops at VLRNIC, Naomi Arblaster, Head of SME Development at BCIMO said:

“We’ve had a fantastic two days of workshops with some very engaging speakers who addressed the challenges our region is facing for future-proofing its transport sector. The Clean Futures Accelerator programme is set to play a pivotal role in addressing the future transport needs of industry and society and therefore these workshops were so important in bringing together applicants with the challenge setters and helping them understand the solutions required and the support and facilities available to them here in the West Midlands.

Naomi added: “We are at a pivotal moment in our transport sector where low carbon solutions are being sought to provide a better, cleaner future for all. These workshops were all about bringing industry together and showing SMEs how their innovations can be the driving force behind transport solutions of the future. We’re here to support applicants and at the VLRNIC we have world-class facilities for all their testing and demonstration needs.”

Speaker Beverley Nielson, Chair of Ultra Light Rail Partners said:

“Ultra Light Rail Partners was really pleased to take part in this stimulating event with a broad range of companies in attendance looking at innovations to make transport more sustainable, easier to install and develop, net zero emissions, or even better resulting in no climate change. It was a real pleasure speaking during the last session of the event. Thanks to the BCIMO team for their part in pulling this together and making it all look so effortless!”

Speaker Chris Elliot, Experience in Rail, said:

“There is some great innovation out there that will help BCIMO for both this and future accelerator programmes to shape the way people in the West Midlands can develop and prosper.”

Attendee, Andre Wang, Co-founder & CEO, Moonbility said:

“The insights shared during the workshop about the current market demands have proven to be exceptionally valuable. The Very Light Rail ecosystem is a relatively recent development in the UK, and the innovative atmosphere fostered by BCIMO undoubtedly illuminates the potential within the industry. We eagerly anticipate witnessing how our digital-twin-powered asset monitoring platform can harness the testing site to engage a broader range of stakeholders.”

Attendee Ian Glasscock, Rock Power Connections, said:

“It was particularly inspiring meeting and connecting with other innovative companies in this sector and hope the initiative brings us all closer together for synergies.”

The Clean Futures Accelerator is being led by [Connected Places Catapult](#) in collaboration with the Black Country Innovative Manufacturing Organisation (BCIMO), Coventry University and CU Services Ltd. The programme forms part of the wider [West Midlands Innovation Accelerator](#) delivered in partnership with the West Midlands Combined Authority, Innovate UK, UK Research and Innovation, and the Department for Science, Innovation and Technology.

To find out more visit, visit BCIMO's [Clean Futures Accelerator](#) page. Applications close at midnight 10 September.