

Coventry Very Light Rail tours its future home

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Coventry City Council's prototype Very Light Rail vehicle, which has the potential to transform how people move about the city, is set to be moved ready for real on track testing.

Over the last two years researchers from WMG, University of Warwick together with TDi Ltd, have been designing and building the new Coventry Very Light Rail vehicle for Coventry City Council, which will see an electric powered, zero-emissions, lightweight, rail-based public transport system arrive in Coventry.

The vehicle is being moved from NP Aerospace in the city for some static software testing before moving to a dedicated track at BCIMO in Dudley.

The prototype vehicle has done a tour of Coventry so it could see its future operational home. After leaving the vehicle production site in Coventry it stopped outside the Co-op building and the Transport Museum so that the public could get a better view.

Councillor Jim O'Boyle cabinet member for jobs and regeneration and Coventry and Warwickshire LEP board director said, "I am really pleased to see the first prototype vehicle out of the factory and on to our city's streets. Even on a low loader it looks impressive – modern, sleek and of course the fact its battery powered means it's good for the environment and air quality too.

“Very Light Rail has reached this really important point thanks to all of the researchers, innovators, engineers and manufacturing skills we have right here in the city. And I believe that we can create jobs and opportunities for local people as we lead the Green Industrial Revolution.

“Coventry was the beating heart of the carbon revolution and now with projects like this, UKBIC, our electric bus fleet and our plans for a Gigafactory we will lead the zero-carbon revolution too.

“On track testing will take some time – but it should prove the concept – and at that stage I expect there to be lots of interest in VLR from other areas of the UK and abroad. This is a very exciting moment.”

Dr Darren Hughes, from WMG, University of Warwick comments: “It is very exciting for us to see the development of the Coventry Light Rail vehicle move onto the next phase of testing in Dudley, and to see the vehicle in the City which it will one day call home.

“The vehicle has been constructed within Coventry with a reliance on a regional supply chain where possible, showing the strength in depth of local manufacturing. It is a unique vehicle with state-of-the-art technologies including an advanced battery power-train and resilient glazing making it even safer for public use.”

Helen Martin, director of regeneration & enterprise at Dudley Council said: “The Very Light Rail Test Track and National Innovation Centre (NIC) is a key project for our borough. It will offer an innovative and exciting opportunity to provide lower cost local rail connectivity, encouraging shift from private vehicles towards public transport and creating economic benefits in terms of skills and supply chain opportunities.

“With the test track now completed, we’re looking forward to testing getting underway later this year.”

Darren Smith Head of TDI adds: “The TDI team are extremely pleased with the projects’ progress to date and the local benefits it has enabled. The work our supply chain, including our colleagues at NP Aerospace have engaged in, has produced an outstanding first off demonstrator for this hugely important and innovative project. The future economic benefits, both nationally and locally, this project will bring cannot be underestimated and TDI are very proud to be entrusted to deliver it for our client, WMG.”

James Kempston, CEO, NP Aerospace, comments: “Collaboration on the VLR project with WMG and TDI has been a great success, resulting in an exceptional prototype, which is ready to begin testing. The project has expanded our capability in the prototype vehicle industry and has enabled us to support a significant environmental transport initiative for the people of Coventry. It’s a very positive story for UK manufacturing with the challenges of the pandemic and Brexit and it’s particularly impressive what the team have delivered in just 8 months. We look forward to any future collaborations this may bring to the business.”

The BCIMO centre in Dudley is home to the test track developed as part of the wider research programme, on which they will now test the vehicle on to ensure that it performs as planned. Important trials will include the rapid battery charging system which will allow vehicle power to be replenished in minutes.

The project has been made possible thanks to funding from the Government’s Local Growth Fund through

the Coventry and Warwickshire Local Enterprise Partnership (CWLEP) and the West Midlands Combined Authority Devolution Deal.

Photo credit: Mark Radford Photography