

# First instalment of an expected £72 million investment in the emerging VLR technology

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The ground-breaking Coventry Very Light Rail (CVLR) transport system is to be showcased on the streets of Coventry as part of a real world testing programme following the approval of funding by regional transport bosses.

The West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA) Board has agreed the first instalment of an expected £72 million investment in the emerging VLR technology – designed to be both faster and cheaper to build than traditional tram and rail systems.

The Board's green light will also enable specialist on site testing for other VLR systems to move forward.

With development already underway in Coventry and Dudley, the West Midlands is at the forefront of VLR and well placed to become a global leader in both design and manufacture.

Using light weight, battery-powered electric vehicles the Coventry VLR system operates without overhead cables and its innovative track is designed to require less extensive foundation works, making installation quicker and less expensive while delivering similar environmental benefits.

Much of the new investment will be used to build a real world demonstration track in Coventry city centre and to develop the business case for a fully operational system.

There will also be further investment in the newly opened Very Light Rail National Innovation Centre (VLRNIC) in Dudley, enabling the purchase of equipment so that the centre can become fully operational. The funding will also be used to explore the business cases for further VLR lines and links with the existing West Midlands Metro network.

A total of £72 million has been earmarked for the project from [the City Region Sustainable Transport Settlement](#). The first £36.8 million agreed by the Board today, which is enough to get the projects well underway, will now go to the Department for Transport for final sign off.

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.

"This technology has the potential to deliver tram systems at pace and at much lower cost – giving more people access to a modern rapid transit system as well as cleaner air and less congestion along with it.

"Coventry has helped pioneer VLR and will therefore – alongside our wider region – be well placed to take advantage of this growing industry and the new job opportunities it will bring in the months and years ahead. That's why the WMCA is so pleased to support our partners on this exciting project."

Cllr Jim O'Boyle, cabinet member for jobs, regeneration and climate change, said: "This is a milestone investment in Coventry Very Light Rail, a project set to transform the way people in our city – and others throughout the UK and even the world – get around. By creating a new, clean and green form of transport, this investment is securing jobs in Coventry and, as in other cities which have installed light rail, will support regeneration in local areas.

"Of course, Coventry Very Light Rail is just one way that the council is working to improve air quality and combat climate change. We've installed more electric vehicle charge points than anywhere outside London, we're set to become the UK's first all-electric bus city by 2025, we have ambitions for a gigafactory and have committed to planting a tree for every person living in Coventry by 2032."

Neil Fulton, chief executive officer of the Black Country Innovative Manufacturing Organisation (BCIMO), the legal entity responsible for operating the VLRNIC, said "BCIMO is delighted to be a part of the regional Very Light Rail programme and looks forward to providing continued R&D support to the CVLR project.

"The centre provides a unique opportunity for new rail technologies, such as VLR, to be developed and tested in a purpose-built facility and away from the mainline operating environment."

Councillor David Stanley, Dudley Council's cabinet member for regeneration and enterprise, said: "The very light rail project will eventually revolutionise how people travel by rail. I am delighted this funding has been approved and is a significant step forward in showcasing Dudley and the wider region as a trailblazer for innovative transport."

*Photo credit: Transport for West Midlands*