

GCRE team welcome guests to Meet the Buyer event in Cardiff

November 2, 2022



The **Global Centre of Rail Excellence (GCRE)** team welcomed guests to a 'meet the buyer' event today in Cardiff.

GCRE is looking to become a world class site for innovation within the rail sector and is looking for partners to help make the dream a reality.

Hoping to build collaborations that will drive the project forward and help create the global hub for rolling stock infrastructure testing, innovation, storage and maintenance, the event allowed colleagues from across the rail industry to gather and learn a little more about the contracts available for railway, infrastructure, energy and construction on the scheme.

Simon Jones, chief executive of the GCRE welcomed guests with a brief history and couldn't hide his enthusiasm about the exciting next stages of the project. He said: "We're at a really significant juncture of the project. This project has momentum. We have a site, we have planning permission, we're up and running."

The management team, led by Jones, spoke to guests, before they were invited to break into one-to-one sessions.

Procurement lead Tamara Evans led the talk on procurement, explaining that the project is looking for partners with a focus on sustainability. Supply chain sustainability is a core focus for GCRE, and it is vital that suppliers appreciate that a sustainable approach is about more than just environmental impact.

Jones explained more: “We think this (GCRE) is going to draw in other high-quality investments to a part of Wales that has been left behind. This whole area was built on the back of coal extraction and before that the steel industry, and that has now disappeared, so it seems this is a chance for something new to emerge from that industry.

“We want to use our buying ability to support local business to give them real opportunities. The railway alone is about a quarter of a million pounds, that excludes things like the energy system and the hotel, so it’s a big spend to get this thing built.

“We want local business to feel the benefit of that. We will work with our supply chain to help us build those opportunities.”

The team are looking to work with organisations who are actively managing both the social and environmental impacts of their own supply chain, so that GCRE can ensure a green, transparent, and circular supply strategy over the course of the project.

Potential opportunities noted included:

Programme support

- Programme management
- Project management
- Commercial management
- Site supervision
- Design assurance

Fencing

- Stockproof
- Security
- Acoustic

Commercial buildings

- HQ
- Hotel

Bulk purchase of materials

- Various lots (S7C, rail, ballast, sleepers, stop blocks)

Passive railway systems

- Permanent way
- OLE
- Civils
- Troughing/ducting

Railway buildings

- Depot buildings and infrastructure

Demountable buildings

- Data centre
- Welfare facilities

Active highway systems

- Telecoms
- Signalling
- Power
- Control room fitout
- Minor civils
- Digital twin

Onllwyn Road Bridge

- Replacement

Energy system

- Static frequency
- Converter
- Solar farm
- Private wire and grid
- HV distribution

Rob Thomson, director of implementation, took the floor to discuss construction plans with the group. With a 700-hectare site to consider – the same size as Gibraltar – this is no small task. Outline planning applications have been granted for the earthworks and railway, with allowance for 24-hour operations.

Phase one will see the design, earthworks and sidings created. Phase two moves into the railway systems – including electrification, signalling, telecoms and the operations centre. Phase three is the construction of a large commissions shed, hotel and business park.

Following the recent announcement of the acquisition of the former Nant Helen opencast site and Onllwyn Washery in South Wales from opencast mining company Celtic Energy, phase one of the project is progressing, with earthworks set to begin later this year. The second quarter of 2023 will see the construction of warm storage, and sidings will be constructed and operational. 2024 will see tracks being laid on the site, and it is hoped that the full project will be fully operational by 2025.

With so much to do, Rob was keen to encourage the demonstration of any new installation techniques, products or services that may assist with the sizable project.

Simon Jones was keen to stress that although the project is going to be huge, there have been important considerations outside of the planning rules to consider: “We want to work with the local community, and we are building a huge industrial park near to people’s homes, so we want to be a good neighbour.

“We want this project to offer opportunities for employment and training. We want to work with young people, schools and colleges. We want to bring as much R&D, which is really hard to do anywhere else, we want that to be taking place here.”

For more information, contact: supplychain@gcre.wales