

GCRE welcomes first round of railway construction innovation funding

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Chief Executive of the Global Centre of Rail Excellence Simon Jones has welcomed the first round of projects to benefit from a new fund supporting innovation in railway construction.

In October last year, UK organisations were invited to apply to Innovate UK for a share of up to £575,000 for feasibility studies as part of the 'Innovation in Railway Construction' competition funded by the UK Government.

The funding is being provided by the Department for Business and Trade, with the first 24 projects having been announced, involving 36 organisations.

The first phase funding will allow a feasibility study to be developed in partnership with the construction teams at GCRE to potentially deliver the innovations at the new £400m facility being constructed in south Wales.

The projects vary in scope from development of innovative concrete sleeper technology to new low carbon-acoustic barriers.

Simon Jones said: "It's very exciting to see the first round of projects supported from the Innovation in Railway Construction competition.

"From the outset we've wanted the Global Centre of Rail Excellence to pioneer new ideas and be a place where outstanding and creative research and development is undertaken. This list of twenty four feasibility projects is very much in keeping with that vision and it will be very interesting to see them develop over the coming months.

"As we construct and then operate our new facility here in south Wales, I'm keen that we continue to work at the cutting edge of innovation and to try new ideas and test new technologies that can ultimately make our railways stronger, greener and more affordable. It's great to think that the projects in this list are focused on helping to do that.

"These projects will now be taken forward as feasibility studies, with the promise of further funding to develop the best ideas onto the next level. This is an extremely rare and creative opportunity and we're all looking forward to working with the projects as they mature."

The funding represents phase 1 of a potential 2-phase competition, with a number of successful projects progressing in 2024 to fully develop their ideas and to deliver a demonstration on the GCRE site

When it opens in 2025, GCRE will be a facility providing world class research, testing and certification of rolling stock, infrastructure and innovative new technologies that will fill a strategic gap not just in UK rail, but across Europe.

Head of Rail at the Department for Business and Trade, Mike Noakes, said: "It's great to see this first round of feasibility studies funded from the Innovation in Railway Construction competition. It is encouraging to have such a diverse range of ideas and innovations coming forward and it really reinforces GCRE's role in shaping the future of the railway.

"Many of these projects have the potential to address problems that global warming will bring to rail, very probably and quite graphically illustrated by the Hook landslide in Hampshire in January.

"These projects are a great platform and it will be fantastic to see the best grow into new products and technologies that can be deployed on and around the UK rail network and then globally, with benefit for passengers, operators, the wider industry and UK plc.

"The UK Government is committed to accelerating the pace of innovation across our rail network to address current and future challenges and this competition, in collaboration with GCRE, is a great example of how that can be done."

GCRE was established in 2021 with an initial commitment of £50 million from the Welsh Government. The UK Government is supporting the project with funding for research and development along with capital funding of £20 million. GCRE recently launched a major public procurement to attract private funding for the project.

A link to the competition details are

here: <https://apply-for-innovation-funding.service.gov.uk/competition/1351/overview/bdd3a659-97a5-4fd2-8450-0244297defdb>

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