

Government launches £7m tech fund to decarbonise freight and boost innovation

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A £7 million government-backed fund has been launched which aims to roll out innovative new ideas and technologies to deliver freight more efficiently and cleaner.

The freight innovation fund (FIF) will go to up to 36 small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). They will then work with industry-leading companies to develop innovations to make freight more efficient, resilient and greener, such as ways to improve how freight moves between rail, road and maritime transport.

By giving innovators the opportunity to test their ideas, the fund aims to help SMEs roll out new technology and ways of working to unlock potentially huge efficiencies and emissions reductions across the sector. This can include how to organise containers better so they can be more easily broken up for the final part of their journey or how to improve links between rail, maritime and road transport.

The innovation fund was announced last year within the government's [future of freight plan](#), the first-ever cross-modal and cross-government plan for the UK freight transport sector. It targets the 5 priorities for the freight sector identified in the plan, including being cost-efficient, reliable, resilient, environmentally sustainable, and valued by society.

Working to bolster the capacity of the freight network – for example, to anticipate, absorb, resist or avoid disruption and quickly recover from disruption when it does occur – can increase the resilience of supply chains across the country for a wide variety of industries.

The fund will look to support ideas and tech addressing, in particular, 3 long-standing issues in the freight sector.

- a lack of large-scale cross-industry data collection and sharing between different modes of freight transport, such as road, rail and maritime, that could improve efficiencies and coordination
- difficulties in inter-modal transport, such as between rail and road, and ways to improve how large consignments are broken up into smaller ones, which could reduce emissions and traffic
- improvements in freight distribution in ports across different transport modes that could create knock-on benefits with timings, efficiencies, and predictability of the rest of the journey

The government's [future of freight plan](#) sets a strategy for the government and industry to work closely together to deliver a world-class, seamless flow of freight across the UK's roads, railways, seas, skies and canals.

The plan also explains how identifying a National Freight Network will help to better understand freight movements and their value to the economy.

The FIF builds on previous government initiatives designed to support increased research and development in the freight industry; previous technologies supported in other funds include:

- Hypermile who developed an artificial intelligence programme that offers real-time feedback to help heavy goods vehicle drivers save fuel
- Fishbone Solutions developed a programme that uses vibrational data from rail freight wagons and Artificial Intelligence analysis to determine whether the wagons are working correctly
- CGA Simulation created a tool that simulates urban environments to predict the best place for infrastructure to enable radical development in logistics

Delivered by Connected Places Catapult, the fund will give SMEs access to technical and business support from the organisation.

Nicola Yates OBE, CEO at Connected Places Catapult, said: "Each year in the UK, we transport 1.6 billion tonnes of freight using many different modes of transport, and it has never been quicker or easier. The freight sector makes a huge contribution to our economy and contributes significantly to domestic carbon emissions.

"Today, we are delighted to be working with Department for Transport to launch this freight innovation fund as part of their future of freight strategy. The fund will help us to work with innovators and industry partners to develop a pipeline of technology and data innovations that will tackle the freight sector's emerging needs, ensuring that resilience, efficiency and carbon reduction are core to the sector's future."

SMEs will benefit from a freight innovation fund accelerator, which will provide bespoke business support

to innovators to help them access private investment, as well as a freight innovation cluster, a community of innovators within the freight industry that hosts regular networking events and activities.

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