

Government makes £7.6m available for rail innovation

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The UK Government has pledged £7.6 million to trial and launch innovative technology that will help improve rail travel.

Rail Minister, Wendy Morton, has officially announced this year's First of a Kind competition. In association with Innovate UK, the contest invites bids from companies specialising in forward-thinking that seeks to modernise the railways — both in terms of improving the passenger experience and decarbonisation.

The competition officially opens to applicants on 20 April and closes on 8 June, with bids welcome from organisations of all sizes for projects creating a greener, more cost-effective and passenger focused railway. The year's competition is focussing on technologies which improve the industry's cost efficiency and network performance to support a more reliable railway for passengers and improving rail freight.

The Rail Minister, Wendy Morton said: "I am incredibly excited to launch the sixth round of our First of a Kind competition. In partnership with Innovate UK, we have already invested £35.4 million into over 100 ground-breaking projects.

"We've seen cutting edge technologies such as HydroFLEX developed, the first ever trial of a hydrogen-powered train on the UK mainline, and software improving accessibility such as the Hearing Enhanced Audio Relay app.

"As part of our Plan for Rail it's key we continue breathing life into new ideas and supporting innovation and design to deliver greener rail journeys and transform rail travel for all passengers."

Last year saw 33 innovators receive grants of up to £400,000.

The First of a Kind fund has helped trial and launch over 100 projects which are promoting greener railways, improving passengers' rail experience and accessibility on the transport network, and helping the railway to be more cost-effective. Some of these projects include:

- **HydroFLEX** – The first mainline trial of a hydrogen train in the UK with Birmingham University's HydroFLEX project
- **Window seater** – An innovative app, connecting rail travellers to the world outside their window with geolocated audio stories along the railway
- **Hearing Enhanced Audio Relay (HEAR)** – HEAR is an affordable software supporting hearing impaired passengers which automatically broadcasts audio announcements to passengers' own devices.