

Lab by Transport for Wales begins recruitment for third cohort of tech innovators

February 5, 2021



Recruitment is now underway for the third instalment of Wales' leading rail-dedicated innovation programme, Lab by Transport for Wales.

The pioneering 12-week accelerator scheme looks to stimulate growth in Wales, offering an exciting opportunity for business innovators to develop ideas which look to enhance the railway experience for customers.

After the completion of two successful cohorts already, recruitment has now started for a third batch of ambitious and creative tech talent start-ups from across Wales and the UK.

Once recruitment is complete, the start-ups will work closely with Transport for Wales to receive dedicated mentoring from business experts to develop their products and innovations over the course of the 12-week programme, gearing up towards a final 'demo day' where they will pitch their ideas to leading TfW decision-makers.

Winners will then be awarded funds to develop their products further and help towards delivering the

railway of the future.

Due to COVID-19, the programme will be delivered remotely in the same format as the second cohort, allowing start-ups to work safely and participate from home.

As preparations continue towards the third cohort, Transport for Wales has already successfully helped 19 budding start-ups develop their ideas through the first two cohorts of the programme, with 13 of these reaching business case review.

Whilst Tfw are unable to pursue every start-up company's innovations, the advice, guidance, and support of working with the Alt Labs team and business experts has been invaluable to the development of those companies' products, on occasion still leading to opportunities to work together despite not being chosen on demo day.

Although not declared winners of the second cohort, *Wordnerds* – a deep tech start-up in the world of data and Artificial Intelligence, were still successful in obtaining a contract based on their product and continue to work closely with Tfw.

Speaking about the experience of the programme and what it has meant for them since, Helen Precious, Big Data Consultant at *Wordnerds* said: "Our experience throughout the Lab was excellent. The 12-week process really encouraged us to review and re-evaluate our approach, helping us to dig deeper into the problems faced by customers and identify the core business needs.

"This ultimately led us to delivering a high value solution for the insights team. The support from the Transport for Wales team from the first week was amazing. They were supportive, attentive, and incredibly generous with their time and feedback.

"The result is a fantastic minimum viable product and a really strong relationship, which we're hugely excited to see progressing beyond the innovation lab programme."

Samantha Bott, Transport for Wales' Customer Relations Insight Specialist, added: "We've been fortunate enough to sign a contract with *Wordnerds* since the cohort and have been working closely the team to implement a reporting system that has enabled key performance indicators for the business.

"These reports have been crucial to identifying trends and addressing issues that arise in real-time and have really aided us to work in collaboration with our industry partners."

The end of the second cohort saw *Spatial Cortex*, creators of a revolutionary wearable technology to help reduce manual handling injuries, chosen as the winners and awarded £25,000 to develop their product even further to enhance the railway experience for customers.

Speaking since being declared winners, Kailash Manoharaselvan, Co-founder and Director of *Spatial Cortex* said: "Given that we are still at an early stage as a start-up currently, the experience of the programme and winning the prize has been an absolute game-changer and certainly made a real difference to us. Importantly, it has given us much-needed momentum on our start-up journey.

“Transport for Wales are extremely forward looking and open to embracing innovations that will help to improve the experience of both their customers and to safeguard the health and wellbeing of their staff.

“The innovations lab programme is a great initiative that facilitates this by providing promising start-ups with the opportunity to pitch their solutions to a panel of key stakeholders, and we would highly recommend any start-ups already in the Rail industry or anyone considering pivoting to the rail industry to apply to this programme.”

Looking ahead to the third cohort, Michael Davies, TfW’s Insight and Innovation Manager, said: “It’s great to have been able to continue working with several of the talented companies from the two cohorts we’ve held so far.

“For our third cohort, we’re looking to work with more innovative companies and widen the scope to meet some of the other challenge areas we feel exist.

“Some of these areas will include infrastructure, safety, and security, as well as looking at fresh ways of tackling one of the biggest challenges public transport has faced in recent times; how we encourage people to choose public transport in the future. We’re looking forward to getting started.”

If you would like to apply to be part of the third cohort of the innovation programme, you can do so here: <https://www.f6s.com/labbytransportforwalescohort3>.

Photo credit: Transport for Wales