

# Pioneering solar rail company Riding Sunbeams long listed for prestigious Ashden Award

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Riding Sunbeams, the world-leading solar rail pioneer, has been long listed for a prestigious Ashden Award for climate innovation in the UK.

**Ashden**, a UK charity, has been supporting transformative climate solutions for 20 years. More than 800 organisations applied for the 2021 Ashden Awards, and Riding Sunbeams is one of just 38 to have made it to the longlisting stage.

Award winners will be announced this Autumn – after a rigorous assessment and judging process involving on-the-ground visits and input from sector experts.

Riding Sunbeams' vision is to power railways with unsubsidised, direct-wire renewable generation whilst delivering significant social impact for line-side communities. Direct supply of solar power to rail traction systems had never been done. But it has huge potential for metros, trams and railways in the UK and around the world. After extensive feasibility work and research, Riding Sunbeams connected the first pilot

solar traction array to the railway at Aldershot station in 2019 through its First Light project.

First Light proves that plugging solar directly into the UK railways can be done safely and without disrupting trains. It has paved the way for connecting the world's first ever MW-scale solar farm to the railways in 2021, the Selmeston Connection Project. Riding Sunbeams will offer shares in its solar farms to communities and commuters, so local people will own and benefit from the clean energy powering their trains.

Riding Sunbeams CEO Ivan Stone said: "The Riding Sunbeams team is really excited to be on the Ashden longlist and it's a great testament to their hard work and determination to find innovative solutions to overcome seemingly insurmountable obstacles!

"Riding Sunbeams was founded with a mission to find an unsubsidised route to market for community energy, and to rapidly decarbonise railways – Britain's largest electricity consumer – in a way that maximises social benefit. Railways and solar PV are therefore a match made in heaven, and our First Light demonstration project has successfully proved this at the technical level."

Riding Sunbeams' work has informed Network Rail's Traction Decarbonisation Network Strategy as well as the Department for Transport's Transport Decarbonisation Strategy, and could ultimately see one in every ten UK trains running on energy direct from the sun.

It has also helped to inform both Transport for London and HS1's new tender processes to procure renewable traction energy direct from lineside generators. Last year Riding Sunbeams completed a new feasibility study with Transport for Wales for direct supply to 25kV AC overhead electrified routes, looking at the potential for community solar to power the South Wales Metro. Internationally, the company is on a Mission to India discussing Riding Sunbeams with Indian Railways.

Ashden's CEO Harriet Lamb said: "In the year that governments, climate innovators and activists gather at the COP26 global climate summit in Glasgow, these inspiring climate champions demonstrate the many solutions that can be replicated at scale and speed.

"The Ashden Awards focus on cutting-edge initiatives that are both green and fair – that deliver climate justice, create good jobs, train people in green skills, and cut carbon.

"This year we have an amazing array of initiatives to choose from and judging is going to be tough! We cannot wait to showcase their outstanding innovations to the world when we announce the winners this autumn."

Through its awards and ongoing networking and support, Ashden spotlights and supports climate and energy innovators around the world – including businesses, non-profits and public sector organisations delivering proven, ready-to-scale climate solutions.

*Photo credit: Andy Aitchison*