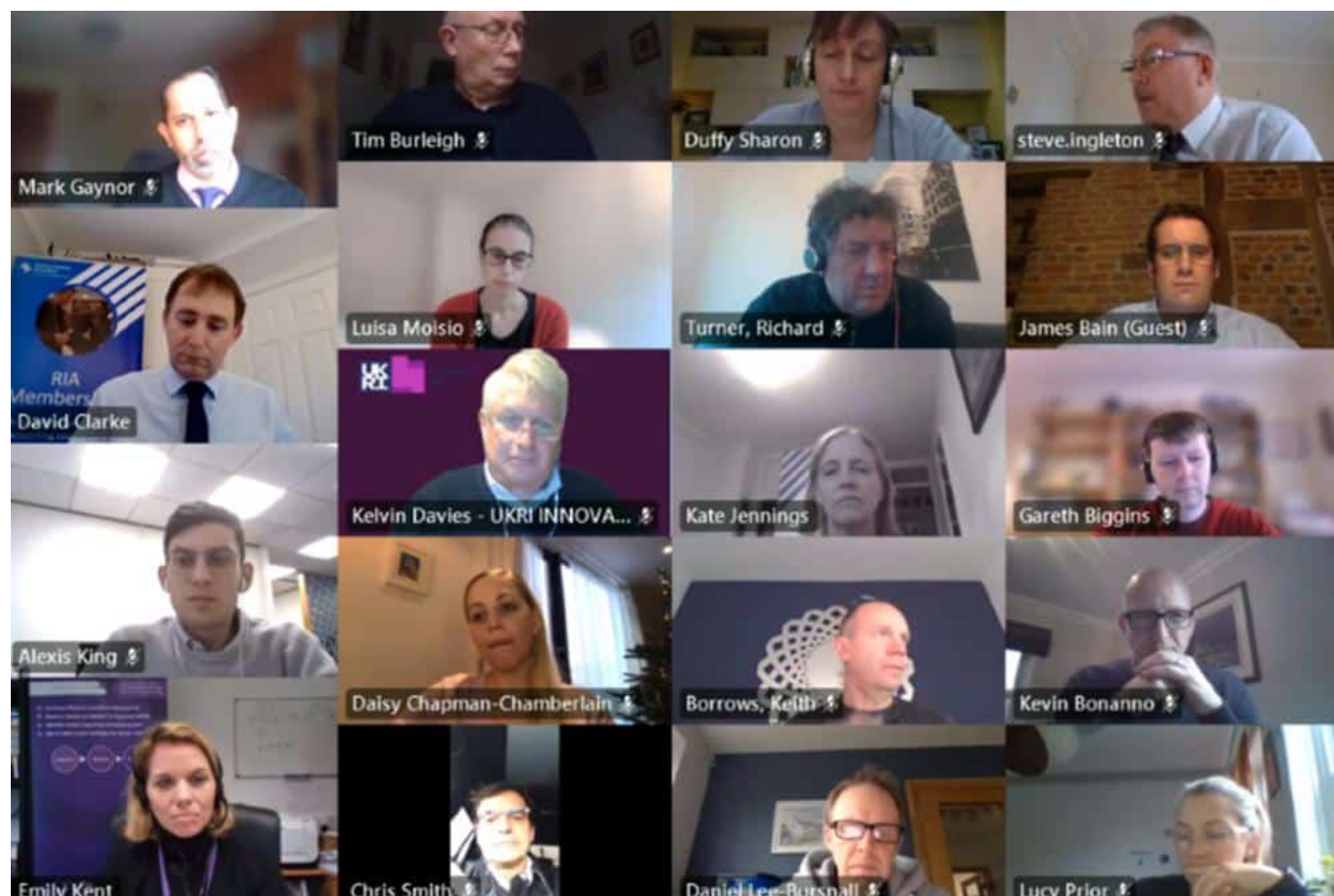


# Rail Minister meets with rail companies driving innovation across the sector

December 4, 2020



Rail Minister Chris Heaton-Harris has joined an *Unlocking Innovation* roundtable, led by the Railway Industry Association (RIA), to hear from organisations developing leading innovations in the rail sector.

Held earlier today, the roundtable saw the Minister hear from organisations across the supply chain, including RIA Members, Network Rail, TfL and HS2, RSSB and InnovateUK. The discussion, organised as part of RIA's Unlocking Innovation programme – which seeks to drive technical developments across the rail supply chain – provided an opportunity to discuss how the rail industry can deliver new products and services in the areas of decarbonisation, reliability and accessibility, and customer experience, amongst others.

During the discussion, attendees highlighted:

- The importance of representatives from across the entire industry working together;
- The significant opportunities to collaborate on innovation in the areas of decarbonisation, reliability and particularly customer experience; and
- That more could be done to maximise the impact of innovation funding, creating the environment for successful implementation, thus attracting further match funding from the private sector, and to procure for innovation including through “Innovation Partnerships”.

It was also agreed that the Industry Innovation Leadership Group would consider these questions further, and report back to the Minister in the new year.

Rail Minister Chris Heaton-Harris MP, said: “It is great to see such the scale of innovation taking place across the rail sector. The Government is always keen to work more effectively with suppliers and to support UK rail businesses to maximise their potential.

“I look forward to further positive work with RIA and the rail supply chain to help new innovations come onto the market and unlock the benefits of emerging technologies, as we build the railway of tomorrow.”

David Clarke, Technical Director at the Railway Industry Association, chaired the event and said: “We welcome Rail Minister Chris Heaton-Harris participating in this roundtable and his support on accelerating innovation in the rail industry more widely. It is clear that there is now real opportunity for the industry to work collaboratively to improve the UK’s rail services and to build new capability and export value, as well as address some of the challenges posed by Coronavirus.

“We look forward to working with the Minister, officials and with partners from across the sector, as we innovate to build a greener, safer and more reliable network for our customers.”

Martin Frobisher, Network Rail Group Safety & Engineering Director, said: “There has been a massive increase in the amount of Research and Development which is being delivered by the rail industry. The Network Rail R&D programme is at £350m including the match-funding from our partner organisations.

“The discussion today was a great opportunity to consider how we can get the best value from these investments and involve all the creativity from across our supply chain.”

RSSB R&D Programme Manager Luisa Moiso, said: “To help drive innovation in the rail sector it is vital that industry and Government work closely together to enable new innovations to reach the market.

“The new Rail Technical Strategy (RTS) recently launched aims to bring the entire industry together, in order to align, drive and promote the UK’s world-class rail expertise and its vibrant innovation community. So we were delighted with today’s discussion which helped drive that conversation forward.”

Professor Clive Roberts, Academic Lead for the UK Rail Research and Innovation Network (UKRRIN), and Head of School of Engineering at the University of Birmingham said: “We were delighted to hear the enthusiasm that Minister Chris Heaton-Harris has for innovation in the rail industry, and the acknowledgement of the roles that government, large industry, SMEs and academia need to play to accelerate the development of innovative solutions.

“The rail sector is currently perfectly placed to deliver the digital transformation that is required in Britain and also developing solutions that can be used internationally to ensure railway networks deliver cost effective, dependable, low carbon services to customers into the future.”

*Photo credit: Railway Industry Association*

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