

[News story: Reimagining railways: innovation funding announced](#)

Up to £9 million innovation funding competition to improve the railway for customers.

In a message to the [Railway Industry Association's](#) Innovation Conference, Rail Minister [Paul Maynard](#) announced up to £9 million to support UK businesses as part of a new innovation competition to develop solutions for national and international railways.

The funding is being made available by the [Department for Transport](#) (DFT) through Innovate UK.

Creating better railways

The competition aims to help deliver the industry's [Rail Technical Strategy](#) and its [Rail Capability Delivery Plan for 2017](#), which outlines the joint industry vision for using technology to create better railways.

It will invite applications on 2 priority areas that:

- create high-value, low-cost railway innovations, which increase the value of rail services to passengers while driving down operational expense
- improve customer experience through station design and performance

For the travelling public this should mean a more sustainable rail industry that offers better services, better journeys and better value.

Accelerating innovation in rail

Mr Maynard said:

We are delivering the biggest modernisation programme in rail since the Victorian era. But industries like automotive and aerospace spend many times what rail spends on research and development. This has to change. We have got to accelerate innovation in rail. It's what passengers deserve and expect.

This is why we are working with Innovate UK to launch a rail innovation competition offering investment of up to £9m, which will help to deliver the industry's Rail Technical Strategy.

We want participation both from within the rail sector and from organisations with little experience of working in rail. Winning back customer confidence is a big challenge for the industry and

successful innovation will play a big role in delivering that.

UK businesses of any size can apply for funding. Each project should include at least one small or medium-sized enterprise (SME).

Competition information

- the competition opens on 20 March 2017, and the deadline for registration is midday on 10 May 2017
 - we expect projects to last up to 12 months and to range in size from £150,000 to £1 million
 - projects must involve at least one SME, be collaborative and be business-led
 - businesses could attract up to 70% of their project costs
 - a briefing event will be held on 21 March 2017
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[Beijing police detain man for causing air pollution for first time](#)

[unable to retrieve full-text content]Beijing police have detained a man on Mar. 13 for discharging untreated emissions into the air. It is the first time that Beijing police have put someone behind bars since an air pollution crackdown was launched in February.

[Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei region to build world-class airport cluster](#)

[unable to retrieve full-text content]Beijing, Tianjin and Shijiazhuang will join hands to build a world-class airport cluster. There will be about 260 airports across China in 2020 when the new airports in Beijing and Chengdu and other major projects are constructed and put into operation.

Guizhou reports new H7N9 case

[unable to retrieve full-text content]One human infection of H7N9 bird flu has been reported in southwest China's Guizhou Province, local health authorities said on Thursday.

Movement in EU thinking on Brexit and "populism"

There are signs that more governments on the continent are beginning to realise that the UK is not seeking continued membership of the single market or customs union, and accepts it will have a relationship based on friendship, collaboration, joint working and trade in a wide range of areas and activities.

Germany now grasps that they need continuing access to the large London financial markets which do so much to help finance continental business as well as to our lucrative car market. French, Dutch, Danish and other farming businesses on the continent do not want to see the quite high tariffs allowed under the otherwise low tariff WTO regime placed against their voluminous exports to us. The more realistic continental politicians see they cannot undertake the type of negotiation they expected. They thought the UK would be begging to stay in the single market, so they could impose requirements over financial contributions and freedom of movement. It is not going to be like that.

A good negotiation for the UK needs to be friendly, straight forward, and with limited requests of the others. Indeed, it is difficult to see that the UK wants anything from the negotiation that the rest of the EU does not want and need more. They need tariff free more than us. They need good access to financial services and banking. They want their many citizens resident in the UK to be able to stay here. They want the UK to continue to make the largest contribution to the European part of the NATO defence activity and budget. The great news is they can have all that if they simply reassure our UK citizens resident on the continent about their status – which they will – and opt for tariff free trade which they would be wise to do in their own interests.

Many are breathing a sigh of relief in the Chancellories of Europe that the Dutch did not give a larger vote to Mr Wilders, and made Mr Rutte the leader of the largest party. However, they would be wise not to be complacent. Mr Rutte lost 8 seats and Mr Wilders gained 5 seats. Mr Rutte had to disrupt the EU's relationship with Turkey to sound more like Mr Wilders in a bid which did swing some voters back according to the polls. In line with the

progressive collapse of the Conservative and Labour look alike parties in Euroland owing to their inability to influence main economic policies, the Dutch Labour party had a disastrous election.

The EU without the UK does have to find more tax revenue from the remaining members or cut back its spending. It is curious to see how all those pro EU forces who told us our net contribution was tiny before the referendum are now saying it will leave a nasty hole in EU finances when we are gone. Fortunately they need to agree a new longer term budget around the time we leave, so they can decide as a more homogenous group of countries, mainly in the Euro, how much collective spending and taxing they need for the new circumstances. As they build their more integrated Europe they would probably be wise to ensure it is properly funded, with sufficient cash to send to the poorer regions and countries. Other single currency areas send much more money around their unions as grants than the Euro area does. That, however, is a matter for them, not for us. They will benefit from not having the UK in the room trying to stop any budget increase when they turn to these important matters for their future.