Trialling new rail technologies: apply for contracts

The UK rail industry transports 1.7 billion passengers and 110 million tonnes of freight each year and faces challenges from rapid growth and changing customer expectations.

The number of trains has increased by 28% since 1997 and demand for rail transport is expected to increase by 58% over the next 10 years.

Light rail and local transport systems are expanding and creating opportunities for UK businesses.

Current engineering and technologies are struggling to keep pace with the demand. New technologies could help the rail industry to meet expectations, improve services for customers and open new markets for business.

Innovate UK has up to £9.4 million from the Department for Transport to invest in demonstrations of new technologies that could improve rail services.

Funding for this 'first of a kind' competition is under the Small Business Research Initiative (SBRI) and managed by Innovate UK, part of UK Research and Innovation.

Projects must use new technology in rail environment

The competition aims to fund projects that demonstrate for the first time how proven technologies, such as automation or innovative uses of data, could be used on the railways.

Projects must seek to demonstrate the technology as a compelling business idea in areas such as a railway station, rolling stock, rail infrastructure or an environment close to a railway.

They are expected to focus on 1 of 4 themes:

- environmental sustainability including low-carbon freight, energy generation and storage, low-emission self-powered vehicles, improved air quality, noise reduction and recyclable materials

- customer experience including improving access and accessibility, optimising journey times, improved information systems, on-board and station connectivity, passenger comfort, analysis of customer feedback

- railway operations including improved dwell time at stations, optimised freight planning, better recovery from disruption, better information for frontline staff, real-time decision-making assistance, use of robotics to improve safety and security

- optimised and cost-effective maintenance including use of automation and robotics, automated cleaning, on-site maintenance of rolling stock, improved reporting of failures

Project teams should include the owner of stations, rolling stock or infrastructure, an experienced railway organisation and an organisation that could become a customer.

Competition information