July 2025

Station Innovation Zone

Year Four

Application Guidance and FAQs

cataPULT
Connected Places

Table of Contents

What is the Station Innovation Zone?

The Station Innovation Zone is a unique opportunity to test and trial new solutions and technologies in a real-world environment at Bristol Temple Meads Station.

The Station Innovation Zone Competition aims to select and trial cutting-edge innovations which serve as a showcase for rail technology buyers and investors.

Our shared vision is to shape the station of the future - a proud, efficient gateway that reflects local identity, fosters inclusivity, and enables effective transit through its spaces.

Our vision for the station of the future is:

- A proud, efficient gateway to the place it serves, reflects local identity and is open and inclusive to all.
- A place that convenes people, businesses and culture without compromising on purpose: effective transit through its spaces.
- A safe, sociable, seamless and sustainable station that enables both social and financial prosperity.

Competition Overview

Connected Places Catapult, in collaboration with Network Rail, is seeking SMEs with novel ideas to be trialed at Bristol Temple Meads to improve various aspects of the passenger experience.

The Station Innovation Zone competition consists of two phases:.

Phase One (Nov 2025 – Jan 2026): In Phase One, up to 8 SMEs will each receive £4,000 to develop a proposed trial and installation plan during the first two months of work. Upon completion, up to four SMEs will be chosen to proceed to Phase Two.

Phase Two (Feb 2026 – Sept 2026): Up to three chosen SMEs will move forward to live trials over a 6-8 -month period at Bristol Temple Meads Station, with each SME receiving up to £45,000 to support deployment at the station.

We encourage all innovators with the relevant solutions to apply, regardless of whether they have experience in rail or not.

All successful applicants will also receive business development and technical trial support, as well as the opportunity to showcase their technology at relevant industry events.

Please visit our Opportunity Page to apply.

Eligibility

The Station Innovation Zone Competition is open to micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises.

In order to apply:

- You must be a UK-registered business, preferably based in the West of England.
- Your innovation solution must be at least TRL (Technology Readiness Level) 5 – 7.
- Your solution must address one of the identified challenge areas.
- You must be willing to travel for face-to-face meetings in Bristol.

We are particularly interested to hear from innovators with applicable solutions developed in other sectors which have the potential to apply to rail.

If you have any questions, please get in touch with the team via innovation_funding@cp.catapult.org.uk

Key Application Information

Applications will close at 17:00 on **Wednesday 24ᵗʰ September 2025.**

Late submissions will not be considered.

1. Carefully read this guidance document before preparing your application.
2. We will be hosting an **Application Support Webinar at 11:00 on Wednesday 30ᵗʰ July**, please sign up [here](#).
3. [Complete your application form on our online application page.](#)
4. Only information in your application form will be assessed. No other documentation should be attached to your submission unless this is requested.
5. Keep within the maximum word counts noted in each section of the application form.
6. Please note that by submitting an application, you accept that any resulting offer shall be subject to the provisions of this guidance document.

If you require any reasonable adjustments, please contact us as soon as possible at innovation_funding@cp.catapult.org.uk at least 10 days before applications close so we can provide the necessary support.

Bristol Temple Meads Station - Testbed Site

A testbed is an approach that removes barriers to innovation by giving innovators access to user groups and real-world contexts so they can develop, test, and showcase new or existing products and services without the usual risks.

Bristol Temple Meads station will remain the testbed site for this year's Station Innovation Zone, enabling participants to develop and potentially trial their innovation in a real-station environment.

The original Engine Shed and Passenger Shed at Bristol Temple Meads are still there today. Both were built by the railway innovator Isambard Kingdom Brunel and were opened in 1840. The main station that is in operational use today was built slightly later around 1870.

Please note that the entire station has Grade 1 listed status. As such, any change to the station fabric (permanent or temporary) will require Listed Building Consent. Network Rail and Connected Places Catapult can advise and support you to develop your trial in a way

that minimises this impact. Whilst not excluding any trials that require consent, we would strongly recommend that your proposals are developed in a way that does not require this.

[The Station Map](#) shows gate lines, along with entrances and exits, platforms and retail offerings. Access to Platforms 5-15 is provided through a passenger subway. Waiting rooms and cafés are available on some platforms.

There are many improvement schemes currently taking place in the station. These include significant refurbishment of roofs, rooms and platform canopies; a full electrical rewire of the station; and the building of new entrances and retail facilities. As such, some parts of the station may be more difficult to enter than others, and some additional resource may be needed to interface your trial with these schemes. Network Rail and Connected Places Catapult will advise you fully throughout your proposal.

Also, some of the systems and screens within the station may require additional agreement with the owner where these are not owned or operated by Network Rail. We will support you with this.

We would suggest a visit to the station to ensure you are familiar with the layout and that your proposal/solution will work. If you wish to do this, please get in touch.

Important Notes from Network Rail

We are seeking solutions to our challenges that can be delivered in Bristol Temple Meads. Some of your proposals might reflect particular characteristics and opportunities within the station and wider area - however, your idea should also show the potential to be applicable to the wider network and industry.

Please note that this is a live station environment, therefore Network Rail may require successful applicants to undertake a series of assessments on, but not necessarily limited to, data protection, digital connectivity, accessibility, security, inclusivity, reputational impact. Further details of these assessments will be provided to successful Phase One applicants.

Kindly note that if you are successful in running your trial at Bristol Temple Meads, you will be required to manage the trial throughout, with specifically agreed levels of support from Connected Places Catapult and Network Rail SIZ team.

Please ensure you note in your application if you think you will need any additional specific support from members of the Network Rail or GWR teams at the station and what type of support this would be i.e. access to data, staff interviews, staff participation etc.

Areas Network Rail Cannot Support:

Bristol Temple Meads station is one of the most iconic stations in the Wales & Western region. It is also one of its busiest and most strategically important. Due to the vital role the station plays in the day-to-day running of the railway, there are certain parts of the station and railway systems we cannot support through the Station Innovation Zone:

- Any signaling systems or dispatching of trains
- Access to the live railway – no trials to extend beyond the yellow line on platforms
- Any trial that would affect our ability to operate the station in a safe and effective way
- Trials that require significant management/participation from station staff to administer
- Projects on-board trains – the Station Innovation Zone is targeted at the station environment
- Access to CCTV, Security Protocols or Evacuation Procedures
- Trials that have been held in rail elsewhere – unless there is a demonstrable benefit or there is a unique case study offered by Temple Meads.
- Access to Bristol Temple Meads Station Wi-Fi **–** If your solution requires any form of signal/connectivity, this must be drawn from the local 4G/5G network. We cannot connect external devices/servers to the station Wi-Fi.

Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI)

Promoting equality of access to the competitions and supporting a diverse portfolio of companies is integral to Connected Places Catapult. We seek to ensure that the organisations we work with are also committed to demonstrating EDI practices in both current and future projects and operations.

We recommend all applicants demonstrate their commitment to EDI as best as possible in their application.

Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion defined:

- **Equality**: Involves allocating resources based on the requirements of diverse populations, thereby facilitating the realization of their optimal abilities.
- **Diversity**: Encompasses the inclusion, engagement, and acknowledgment of the distinct needs of individuals from varied social, economic, cultural, and ethnic

backgrounds, as well as different genders, abilities, sexual orientations, religions, and more.

- **Inclusion**: Entails the creation of an environment where individuals or members of groups feel embraced, heard, esteemed, supported, and empowered to achieve their utmost potential, irrespective of their background, identity, or disabilities

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion is fundamental to how Network Rail serves its passengers and customers.

If you are successful, you will need to complete a Diversity Impact Assessment for your proposal. This will make sure sufficient consideration has been given to making rail inclusive to all. More details of Network Rail's strategy for this can be found here

Challenges

This year, we have two challenge categories (**Station Weather Resilience** and **Interchange Anxiety Reduction).**

Please note that within the **Station Weather Resilience** challenge, there are two sub-challenges.

Further details on the challenges can be found on the [Opportunity Page](#) as a separate document titled **'Station Innovation Zone – Year 4 Challenges.'**

We highly encourage all applicants to read this document carefully before applying.

How your application is assessed

After the deadline (17:00 Wednesday 24th September 2025), only applications that meet the eligibility criteria and scope of the competition will be formally assessed.

Connected Places Catapult and Network Rail reserve the right to declare applications as unsuccessful and out of scope based on your innovation not aligning with the programme challenges.

Applications will be assessed against the scoring criteria, the details of which you can find in this document.

- **Due Diligence Review**: This will take place last week of September 2025.
- **Technical Assessment**: This will take place during the first part of October 2025.
- **Interviews:** Interviews will be 24th – 28th October 2025.

With regret, we will be unable to accommodate individual requests for interview slots. You will be provided with interview guidance.

The final decisions will be made upon completion of all interviews, with projects starting in November 2026.

Notification of assessment outcome & feedback

If you **are** offered an interview but are unsuccessful, you will be informed and you can request feedback.

If you **are not** offered an interview, Connected Places Catapult are unlikely to be able to provide feedback due to the high volume of proposals expected.

Successful Applications

If you are successful at interview, and consequently accept a place on the programme, you will be sent a conditional contract that you must sign and return, along with any additional documentation that is requested within stated timelines.

There will then be a kick-off meeting to discuss the details of the project and how Connected Places Catapult and Network Rail will support you during the project delivery period.

Scoring Criteria

This section details the assessment scoring criteria that accessors will use for the technical review.

The applications will be marked on their responses against the following four criteria:

Criteria	Weight
Challenge	30%
Solution & Trial Proposal	30%
Impact	30%
Project Delivery & Team	10%

Challenge:

This section establishes your innovation's core purpose and its direct relevance to the chosen Station Innovation Zone challenge. Your application should clearly define the problem, your solution, its TRL, and precisely how it aligns with and addresses the selected challenge.

Solution & Trial Proposal:

This section details the practical aspects of your innovation and its proposed trial at Bristol Temple Meads. Your application should outline a clear trial plan, specify installation requirements and risks, articulate technical needs, and explain how your solution differentiates from existing alternatives, along with its IP status.

Impact:

This section focuses on the broader benefits and value your innovation will deliver. Your application should articulate the economic and sustainability impacts on the rail industry, and explicitly demonstrate your commitment to inclusivity and accessibility in your design.

Project Delivery & Team:

This section assesses your team's capability and your financial planning for the project. Your application must provide a detailed Phase Two funding breakdown (£45,000 for the trial) using the provided template, highlight your team's relevant skills and experience, and proactively identify and mitigate foreseen risks.

Guidance – Writing an Effective Application

Your application will be assessed against four key criteria:

- Challenge (30%)
- Solution & Trial Proposal (30%)
- Impact (30%)
- Project Delivery & Team (10%)

Project Overview & Challenge Section

This section assesses your understanding of the chosen challenge and how your innovation directly addresses it. Clarity, conciseness, and a strong alignment with the challenge are key.

Project Title: *This title will be used in our external communications, so please ensure it is clear, concise, and engaging. (10-word limit)*

- **Guidance:** Think of it as a headline that grabs attention and clearly communicates your project's essence.
- **To score highly:** Use strong, active verbs and specific keywords related to your solution and the rail environment. Ensure it's not generic.

Project Summary: *Summarise your project in a maximum of 3 sentences. This summary will be used for our catalogue after being reviewed by our content team, please ensure it is clear, concise, and engaging. (40-word limit)*

- **Guidance:** This is your elevator pitch- it needs to convey the problem, your solution, and its main benefit - focus on what your innovation *does* and the problem it *solves*.
- **To score highly:** Clearly state the problem your innovation addresses, how it works, and the main positive outcome for the rail environment or passengers.
- ***Example****: "Our innovative sensor network provides real-time data on micro-climates within stations, enabling proactive mitigation of weather-related disruptions. By predicting potential flooding events hours in advance, we aim to significantly reduce service delays and enhance passenger safety. This solution offers a scalable and cost-effective approach to improve station resilience against extreme weather."*

Technology Readiness Level (TRL) Justification: *Describe why you have selected this Technology Readiness Level. (50-word limit)*

- **Guidance:** Briefly explain the current state of your innovation's development, highlighting key milestones achieved that justify your selected TRL.
- **To score highly:** Provide concrete evidence or examples. For instance, if TRL 6, mention successful prototype testing in a relevant environment.
- *Example (TRL 6): "Our prototype has been successfully tested in a lab environment and in a simulated station setting, demonstrating core functionalities and data accuracy under controlled conditions."*

Challenge: How does your innovation address the challenge of this competition? Outline how your innovation directly aligns with and addresses your chosen challenge. (150-word limit)

- **Guidance:** Clearly articulate the specific pain points of the chosen challenge that your innovation targets and how your solution addresses this challenge.
- **To score highly:**
  - **Demonstrate direct alignment:** Use language that explicitly links your solution's features to the challenge's objectives.
  - **Be specific:** Don't just say "it helps with weather resilience." Explain *how* (e.g., "Our AI-driven system predicts X with 90% accuracy, providing critical lead time for station operators to reroute passengers, thereby directly reducing weather-induced disruptions and associated delays.")
  - **Quantify where possible:** Even if estimates, numbers add weight (e.g., "reduce delays by X%", "improve passenger satisfaction by Y%").

Solution & Trial Proposal Section

This section evaluates the feasibility, practicality, and innovation of your proposed solution and the trial plan. A well-structured and detailed proposal will score highly.

Overview of Trial: *Provide an overview of the proposed trial you wish to run at Bristol Temple Meads. Ensure you include key objectives, milestones and expected outcomes. (300-word limit) (Required)*

- **Guidance:** Clearly describe what you intend to achieve during the trial, how you will measure success, and the key steps involved.
- **To score highly:**
  - **SMART Objectives:** Ensure your objectives are Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-bound.
  - **Clear Milestones:** Outline tangible deliverables or phases of your trial (e.g., "Month 1: System installation and calibration; Month 2-3: Data collection and initial analysis; Month 4: Pilot evaluation and report generation").
  - **Quantifiable Outcomes:** Describe what success looks like in measurable terms (e.g., "demonstrate 80% accuracy in [specific function]", "reduce X by Y%").

Installation: *Where and how do you expect to install your solution, and do you foresee any immediate risks associated with this? (200 Words)*

- **Guidance:** Provide a step-by-step description of your installation process at Bristol Temple Meads – consider the practicalities and identify any potential challenges and how you plan to mitigate them.
- **To score highly:**
  - **Detail the process:** Break down the installation into logical, actionable steps. Consider timelines for each step.
  - **Site-specific considerations:** Show you've thought about the specific environment of Bristol Temple Meads (e.g., power access, network connectivity, public access).
  - **Proactive Risk Management:** Don't just list risks; propose specific, credible mitigation strategies.

Standards: *Technical, safety and infrastructure requirements (for your installation phase and/or trial):*

- **Guidance:** Be precise about what you need from Network Rail or the station.

- **To score highly:**
  - **Specifics, not generalities:** Instead of "power," specify "XV AC power supply at X location."
  - **Identify dependencies:** Clearly state what is required from external parties.
  - **Safety first:** Demonstrate an understanding of safety regulations and any certifications your solution requires.
  - **Data needs:** If you require data, specify the type, format, and access method.

Differentiation & Competition: *How does your innovation differentiate from existing solutions? (150 Words)*

- **Guidance:** Identify existing solutions (including current practices within the rail industry, even if low-tech) and articulate your unique selling proposition.
- **To score highly:**
  - **Direct Comparison, Value & Market Awareness:** Explicitly state what makes your solution better, faster, cheaper, more efficient, more accurate, or more user-friendly than alternatives/competitors.

Intellectual Property: *Describe the intellectual property status of your innovation. (e.g., patents, trademarks, copyrights) If you are collaborating with another organisation, please explain how intellectual property (IP) ownership will be allocated.*

- **Guidance:** Be clear about the IP status of your innovation. If IP is pending or jointly owned, explain the arrangements.

Impact Section

This section assesses the potential benefits and wider implications of your solution, extending beyond the immediate trial. Think broadly about the value your innovation can create.

Impact of Solution: *Please describe the expected impact(s) of your solution. You should consider impact from the following perspectives:(200-word limit)*

- **Economic Impact on Rail (**cost-benefit, return on investment, scalability of the solution– both for your business and rail industry as a whole)
  Sustainability Impact (e.g from emissions reduction, safety, health & wellbeing)
- **Guidance:** Address both economic and sustainability impacts. Be specific and quantify where possible. Consider both the short-term and long-term impacts.

- **To score highly:**
    - **Quantify where possible:** *Economic:* "Projected to save Network Rail £X annually through reduced operational costs and avoided delay minutes." *Sustainability:* "Could reduce carbon emissions by Y% through optimized energy use."
    - **Scalability:** Explain how the benefits can extend beyond Bristol Temple Meads to the wider rail network.

Accessibility: What design decisions have you made (or will you make) to ensure that your innovation is inclusive? Please consider how your innovation is inclusive to all individuals regardless of backgrounds, abilities, and identities. (150-word limit) (Required)

- **Guidance:** Demonstrate a commitment to inclusivity and accessibility in your design. Consider a wide range of users, including those with disabilities, different language speakers, and diverse backgrounds.
- **To score highly:**
    - **Specific Design Choices:** Don't just say "it will be accessible." Describe *how* (e.g., "Our user interface will adhere to WCAG 2.1 AA standards, incorporating screen reader compatibility, adjustable font sizes, and high contrast options. We also plan to offer multilingual support for key information, ensuring accessibility for non-English speaking passengers.")
    - **User-Centric Approach:** Emphasise how your design process considers diverse user needs, think about cognitive, sensory, and language accessibility too.

Project Delivery and Team

This section assesses your ability to successfully execute the project and the strength of your team. Clear financial planning and a capable team are crucial.

Project Cost Breakdown: Use the provided finance template. Failure to do so will result in your application not being considered. Be highly detailed and transparent in your breakdown.

- **To score highly:**
    - **Accuracy and Detail:** Provide a precise breakdown of all anticipated costs.
    - **Justification:** Each line item should be clearly linked to a specific activity or resource required for the trial.

- o **Value for Money:** Demonstrate that you have considered cost-efficiency and that the requested funds will be used effectively to deliver the trial's objectives.
- o **Professionalism:** Ensure rates are realistic and titles are clear.

Trial Delivery Team: *Please describe the skills and experience of the project team, highlighting their skills and expertise for this project. Show your team can meet the timeline, naming the project manager, the team and existing commitments. (200-word limit) (Required)*

- **Guidance:** Highlight the relevant expertise of each team member that directly contributes to the success of this project. Emphasise their track record and how their skills align with the technical and project management demands of the trial.
  - o **To score highly:**
    - ▪ **Specific Experience:** Don't just list roles. Describe *what* each person brings (e.g., "Our Project Manager, [Name], has 10 years of experience leading complex tech deployments in operational environments, specifically within the transport sector, ensuring adherence to strict safety protocols and timelines.").

Foreseen Risks & Challenges: *Please list any foreseen risks or challenges and identified mitigations. (Required) (150-word limit)*

- **Guidance:** Demonstrate a proactive and realistic approach to risk management. Think about technical, operational, logistical, and external risks.
- **To score highly:**
  - o **Comprehensive Identification:** List a range of credible risks, not just obvious ones.
  - o **Specific Mitigations:** For each risk, propose a clear, actionable mitigation strategy.
  - o **Feasibility of Mitigations:** Ensure your mitigation plans are realistic and effective.
  - o ***Example****: Risk: "Unforeseen infrastructure limitations at Bristol Temple Meads." Mitigation: "Conduct a detailed site survey during Phase 1 to identify and plan for any necessary infrastructure adaptations, engaging directly with Network Rail's engineering teams."*

Project Reporting

Trial Proposal

At the end of the Phase One, you will be expected to produce a trial proposal that details your plan for developing and/or testing your technology or solution at Bristol Temple Mead station.

The proposal should be written and presented to a professional standard and suitable for non-specialists, with all acronyms and unavoidable technical language clearly explained. Further guidance will be provided.

Progress Reporting

Throughout the programme you will be required to provide regular monthly reports highlighting progress, opportunities, issues, and risks.

Final Report

At the end of Phase Two, you will be expected to provide a final report detailing your outcomes, impact, and future exploitation plans

Payment Schedule

Phase One

For Phase One, there will be up to £4,000 available for you to develop and write your trial proposal for your innovation at Bristol Temple Meads Station.

You will receive 50% upfront and 50% upon completion of your trial proposal.

This funding will be given as grant funding, therefore will be subject to Minimum Financial Assistance. Minimum Financial Assistance requires you not to have received more than £315,000 in public funding within the last 2-3 financial years, including the current one.

Only fees incurred between project start and end dates will be paid.

Phase Two

For Phase Two, up to £45,000 of funding is available to conduct a full trial at Bristol Temple Meads Station.

Phase Two will be conducted as pre-commercial procurement, meaning you will be required to raise invoices with us in stages.

An up-front payment of 80% of the total trial cost will be made within 30 days of you raising your first invoice.

At the end of the project, the remaining 20% of your funding will be paid once your final project report has been approved and you have raised your second and final invoice with us.

The purchase of the following would be eligible:

- Staff and/or consultancy resource
- Equipment & Materials – installation costs
- Laboratory/Testing Costs.
- Travel & Subsistence

Rates for staff time should be inclusive of overhead costs of up to 20% of overall staff costs.

Salary rates must be justified and appropriate, reflecting market values.

You can also add costs under the category of 'Other'. These will be agreed if they are shown to be fully justifiable and represent value for money.

We kindly advise you to keep all receipts and invoices relating to your project.

Only fees incurred between project start and end dates are acceptable to charge to the project.

Dates and Deadlines

Please note the dates and deadlines for the competition below. These are indicative timings; we will adhere to this schedule as best as possible. The closing date for applications is fixed and will be **17:00 on Wednesday 24th September 2025.**

Key Dates

- **Competition Open** – Wednesday 16th July
- **Application Support Webinar** – Wednesday 30th July 11:00 – 12:30
    - Sign up [here](#)
- **Drop in Session with Network Rail –** Wednesday 13th August
    - Details will be posted on our [Opportunity Page.](#)
- **Drop in Session with Network Rail & Challenge Designers** – Wednesday 10th September
    - Details will be posted on our [Opportunity Page.](#)
- **Competition Close –** Wednesday 24th September 2025 – 17:00
- **Notification to Shortlisted Applicants** – Mid-October 2025
- **Interviews** - Late October 2025
- **Contracts Issued** – Early November 2025
- **Phase One Project Start** – November 2025
- **Phase One Project End Date** – January 2026
- **Phase Two Project Start Date** – February 2026
- **Phase Two Project End Date** – July 2026
- **Showcase at Bristol Temple Meads** – Late Summer / Early Autumn 2026
    - Please note this is to be confirmed.

Contact Details

If you have any questions about the programme, please contact innovation_funding@cp.catapult.org.uk

We wish you all the best with your application.