April 2026

The Ideas Elevator Programme

Maritime Decarbonisation

Competition Guidance

CATAPULT
Connected Places

Contents

1. Competition Overview

The Department for Transport (DfT), working in partnership with Connected Places Catapult (CPC), is launching 'The Ideas Elevator for Decarbonising Maritime' competition to surface early-stage concepts for the sector. The Ideas Elevator programme is designed to uncover, support, and develop transformative early-stage ideas that can support clean maritime.

Programme objectives include:

- **Acceleration of early-stage innovation in clean maritime:** Supporting the creation of solutions that advance maritime decarbonisation.
- **Supporting government priorities**: Ensuring innovations align with national goals for sustainability, accessibility, and efficiency
- **Strengthening long-term innovation pipeline**
- **Diversifying supply of innovative solutions** addressing transport challenges.

While existing programmes such as TRIG (Transport Research & Innovation Grants) and UK Shipping Office for Reducing Emissions (UK SHORE) provide strong support for mid to late-stage technologies (TRL 3–7), there remains a significant gap at the earliest research stages where high risk, high reward ideas are formed.

The Ideas Elevator aims to close this gap by:

- Identifying 'disruptive' ideas and enabling breakthroughs that can transform transport.
- Supporting the creation of early technology concepts applied in the sector.
- De-risking initial hypotheses ahead of entry into larger funding competitions.
- Fostering collaboration: Bringing together academia, startups, and industry.
- Building a strong pipeline of evidence based, innovative solutions.

2. Programme Structure

The ‘Ideas Elevator’ programme is seeking innovative ideas that demonstrate potential, practical feasibility and measurable outcomes aimed towards creating a decarbonised maritime sector.

Although there is no direct funding for the first phase of this programme, successful applicants will receive an opportunity to be interviewed and be considered for funding via the next TRIG competition.

The programme has two phases as follows:

Phase 1

- Up to 15 projects shortlisted to Phase 1
- Focus: develop an idea in a concept note. A template will be provided.
- Pitch support.
- Focus: prepare a pitch (template to be provided) and attend an in-person Pitch Day event which will take place Tuesday 14th July 2026 at Connected Places Catapult London office; the panel will consist of topic-matter experts and senior leaders.
- Time commitment: 3 weeks mid-June to mid-July 2026

Phase 2

- Following the Pitch Day, up to 5 projects will be invited to be interviewed in October / November 2026 as an opportunity to receive grant funding via the next TRIG competition to further develop ideas.
- If interviews are successful, each project will receive up to £45,000 to deliver a 5-month project to further develop on their solutions in 2027.

Eligibility

Eligibility criteria are as follows:

- You must be a UK-registered SME, defined as an organisation with fewer than 250 employees or a researcher employed by a UK based university
- Your solution must be between Technology Readiness Level (TRL) 1-2.

For reference:

TRL 1 – Basic Principles Observed and Reported

Technology is at the earliest stage of maturity. Fundamental scientific principles have been observed and documented, but no specific application has yet been defined. Activity is exploratory and research-led, focused on understanding underlying phenomena, but not solving a concrete operational problem. Evidence is theoretical or experimental research, with no validation of performance in a practical or/and operational context. In summary:

- Early theoretical frameworks, hypotheses, or discovery-based research.
- Scientific research begins to be translated into applied research.

TRL 2 – Technology Concept Formulated

Potential applications and use cases for the technology are identified, and a clear concept being defined. The technology is speculative, but the transition from research to applied research is emerging. Initial assumptions, hypotheses and conceptual designs or system designs articulated. There is no experimental proof at this stage, but analytical studies provide early justification for further development and moving to higher TRL levels. In summary:

- Invention begins.
- Applications are speculative but grounded in scientific rationale.
- Conceptual models, preliminary simulations, or proof-of-principle reasoning may be included.

3. Challenge

Background

The UK maritime sector requires significant decarbonisation to meet national Net Zero targets and contribute to the government's clean energy ambitions as set out in the Maritime Decarbonisation Strategy. That is why the UK SHORE programme is funding R&D to support the acceleration of key technologies necessary to achieve this decarbonisation. As well as funding research, UK SHORE supports growth and development of UK businesses.

Through the Ideas Elevator Programme, the UK SHORE programme aims to support low TRL clean maritime solutions, to feed the pipeline of innovation towards commercialisation. This is particularly important during the new £448m

funding period between 2026-2030 to ensure there is a complete spectrum of projects funded. This will directly support the Government's missions to kickstart economic growth by fostering a leading clean maritime industry and solidify the UK's position as a clean energy superpower. Furthermore, it will directly advance the Department for Transport's priority to support the transition to green transport, ensuring a sustainable and environmentally responsible maritime sector.

Challenges

CHALLENGE STATEMENT 1

Enabling Safe and Scalable Adoption of Future Maritime Fuels

"How might we develop early-stage methods, tools or concepts that enable the safe handling, storage, distribution and use of zero and near zero GHG emission fuels and support the skills, materials and logistics needed for the transition to multiple zero and near zero fuels?"

Why this challenge matters

The maritime industry sits at the heart of global trade responsible for transporting over 80% of the world's goods. Yet, it is also a significant contributor to greenhouse gas emissions, making its decarbonisation both urgent and unavoidable. Transitioning to zero and near zero GHG emission fuels such as hydrogen, ammonia and methanol is widely seen as one of the most promising pathways to reduce the sector's environmental impact.

CHALLENGE STATEMENT 2

Reducing Emissions Through Smarter, More Efficient Vessel Operations

"How might early-stage concepts, data-led approaches or enabling technologies improve vessel energy efficiency through smarter and more efficient operations for zero and near zero GHG emission and automation to reduce maritime greenhouse gas emissions?"

Why this challenge matters

Improving the efficiency of vessel operations is one of the most immediate and impactful ways the maritime industry can reduce its environmental footprint. Shipping is a highly energy-dependent sector, and even small inefficiencies in routing, speed, coordination and vessel performance scale into significant global emissions when multiplied across the worldwide fleet.

CHALLENGE STATEMENT 3

Preparing Ports and Infrastructure for a Low Carbon, Multi-Modal Future

"How might early-stage tools, models or system concepts help ports and maritime infrastructure manage automation, multifuel energy demand and coordination to support maritime decarbonisation?"

Why this challenge matters

Ports and associated infrastructure are the critical enablers of trade and maritime decarbonisation. As the industry transitions toward zero and near zero GHG emission and more efficient logistics systems, ports will need to evolve from traditional fuel and cargo handling hubs into complex energy, logistics, and data ecosystems.

CHALLENGE STATEMENT 4

Whole Port Baselines including Vessels and Zero Emission Infrastructure

"How might we create a simple, secure and repeatable approach to mapping whole port energy demand and emissions including shore power infrastructure, vessel charging facilities and land-based machinery with a direct link to reducing maritime emissions?"

Why this challenge matters

Ports need a combined picture of port energy demand and emissions across vessels and land-based machinery. Without this, sequencing charging, shore power, future fuels and safety improvements is off best estimates.

CHALLENGE STATEMENT 5

Trusted, Secure and Reusable Maritime Evidence to Enable Early Decarbonisation Decisions and Investment

"How might we create trusted, secure and reusable maritime evidence that enables faster, more confident early-stage decarbonisation decisions unlocking investment across the shipping value chain?"

Why This Challenge Matters

Across the maritime sector, real-world evidence on vessel operations, energy use and emissions can have limitations. Existing data can be fragmented, inconsistent and difficult to share due to commercial sensitivity and security concerns. This lack of robust, trusted evidence creates uncertainty when

modelling future fuel demand, evaluating retrofit options, designing vessels, and planning clean energy infrastructure such as shore power and alternative fuels.

Out of Scope

We are not funding projects that are:

- Focusing on non-methanol biofuels, except for projects that utilise biofuels as a pilot fuel or secondary fuel on vessels predominantly powered by methanol, ammonia or hydrogen
- Focusing only on increasing the efficiency of current conventional fossil fuels and fossil fuel powertrains of maritime vessels
- Focusing on marine conservation and ecology
- Focusing on removing non-GHG and indirect GHGs from the combustion products of conventional fossil fuels and synthetic fossil fuels
- Focusing on Personal Watercraft (PWC)
- Focusing on the use and production of synthetic fuels, note: this exclusion does not apply to low, zero or near zero greenhouse gas emission methanol, ammonia and hydrogen fuels
- Focusing on submarines and submersible vessels
- Focusing on military applications
- Covered by existing commercial agreements to deliver the proposed solutions
- A duplicate of existing innovation
- Focusing on non-methanol biofuels, except for projects that utilise biofuels as a pilot fuel or secondary fuel on vessels predominantly powered by methanol, ammonia or hydrogen
- Dependent on export performance, for example, giving a subsidy to a baker on the condition that it exports a certain quantity of bread to another country
- Dependent on domestic inputs usage, for example, giving a subsidy to a baker on the condition that it uses 50% UK flour in their product

4. How to Apply

1. Complete your application form **here.**
2. Applications will close at 12:00 noon on 8th May 2026. Late submissions will not be considered under any circumstances.
3. If you need any assistance, please contact us as early as possible, so we can support you.
4. Only the information available 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 of the sections of the application form. Any content that exceeds the word count limit will be disregarded.

When answering the application questions please refer to the following:

1. Be specific: The responses should be concise and to the point. Stick to the word limit while effectively conveying your proposal's core aspects.
2. Be clear: Use clear and straightforward language to convey your ideas. Avoid jargon or overly technical terms.
3. Align with competition goals: Illustrate how your innovation aligns with the government's key challenges.
4. Proofread and refine: Review your response for clarity, accuracy, and coherence. Ensure that you effectively communicate how your innovation embraces inclusivity for all individuals.

Guidance on Answering Application Questions

You will need to answer 3 questions.

Firstly, you will be asked to pick the one challenge that is most aligned with your solution from the list below.

1. Enable Safe and Scalable Adoption of Future Maritime Fuels
2. Reducing Emissions Through Smarter, More Efficient Vessel Operations
3. Preparing Ports and Infrastructure for a Low Carbon, Multi-modal Future
4. Whole Port Baselines including Vessels and Zero Emission Infrastructure

5. Trusted, Secure and Reusable Maritime Evidence to Enable Early Decarbonisation Decisions and Investments

Question 1 Problem statement

Please elaborate how your concept aligns to the competition challenge you have selected above. (200 Words) - *'Problem statement ' scoring criteria*

- **Clarify the Connection:** Explain which specific elements of the competition challenge your concept addresses.
- **Demonstrate Relevance:** Show how the objectives and features of your concept have potential to address the challenge. Demonstrate your understanding of the current market practice and why your idea is needed, including supporting evidence (e.g. research findings, user needs analysis).
- **Feasibility potential**: Indicate how your concept could be developed towards practical application (TRL 3 and above) and eventual adoption, while acknowledging its early stage.

Question 2: Concept description

What is your concept (250 Words) - '*Concept ' scoring criteria*

- **Describe the core idea:** Clearly describe your concept and how it addresses the identified challenge.
- **Scientific basis:** explain the underlying science, logic and evidence that supports the concept. Reference experiments, literature, or analogous technologies where possible.
- **Cross-sector insights:** If applying methods from other industries, explain relevance and potential adaptation to maritime transport
- **Showcase Innovation**: Highlight what is novel, e.g. technology, process or user-centred approach. Demonstrate how your idea stands out from existing solutions
- **Competitive Landscape**: Explain how the concept differentiates itself from existing ones in the field, if any.

Question 3: Impact potential

How will your concept contribute to decarbonisation of maritime transport (200 words) ***'Impact' scoring criteria***

- **Outline Potential Benefits:** Who will benefit? How much will they benefit? Can you quantify the benefits?
- **Broaden the Perspective:** Explain how your concept can contribute to long-term goals for sustainable and inclusive transport
- **Provide Evidence:** Use examples, data, or case studies (where applicable) to support your claims of positive impact, if available.

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's EDI values. We seek to ensure that the organisations we work with are also committed to demonstrating EDI practices in both current and future projects and in the way they operate. We recommend all applicants demonstrate their commitment to EDI as best as possible in their application.

Following your application, you will need to demonstrate your commitment to upholding equality and diversity practices within your organisation.

Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion defined:

- **Equality:** ensuring that everyone has the same opportunities, and no-one is treated differently or discriminated against because of their personal characteristics. These are nine protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010.
- **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

5. Application Assessment

After the deadline, only applications that meet the eligibility criteria and scope of the competition will be formally assessed. Connected Places Catapult reserves the right to declare applications as unsuccessful and out of scope.

Applications will be assessed against the scoring criteria, detailed below.

Notification of Assessment Outcome

You will find out in May / June 2026 whether you've been successful for Phase One. Kindly note that we will be unable to provide feedback if you are not successful for Phase One due to the expected large volume of applications.

Successful Applications

If you are successful to join the programme, you will be asked to sign and return documentation promptly. Failure to do so will result in a possible withdrawal of the participation offer.

Scoring Criteria

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

Criteria	Weight
Problem statement	30%
Concept description	40%
Impact potential	30%

1. Problem statement (Weight: 30%)
    - Problem statement clearly explains which elements of transport challenge the concept addresses
    - Applicant demonstrates how the idea fits in the context of current market practice, what gap it fills and why it is needed. Sufficient, reliable evidence to support the claims has been included
    - Features of the concept and the way it is likely to address the challenge have been clearly explained

- Provided outline for development of the concept beyond TRL3 towards adoption is clear, well thought-through, practical and realistic.

2. Concept description (Weight: 40%)

- Application includes a clear description of a novel and unique concept that directly addresses the challenge
- Underlying science and logic are clearly explained and supported by appropriate evidence. Projects applying solutions from other sectors provide detail of sectors, explaining relevance to the maritime challenge
- Originality and clarity in approach, including an outline of underpinning science and logic, have been demonstrated
- Differentiation of your concept from existing practices in the field has been clearly articulated, demonstrating potential for scalability.
- Application demonstrates practicality and feasibility, supported by evidence.

3. Impact potential (Weight: 30%)

- Potential beneficiaries of your concept have been identified, it is clear who will benefit and how.
- Potential contributions your concept can have to decarbonising maritime transport have been outlined.
- Projected metrics relevant to the detailed challenge you focus on have been included.

Intellectual Property

For intellectual property questions, please refer to the Grant Terms and Conditions linked to the application page.

6. Dates and Timelines

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 **8th May 2026, 12:00 noon.**

Applications submitted after the deadline will not be considered. Extensions will not be granted under any circumstances.

Competition Opens	16th April 2026
Competition Closes	8th May 2026, 12:00 noon
Application Assessment	May 2026
Phase One	June - July 2026
Phase Two	July – Sept 2026
Interviews	October / November 2026
Project (if successful at interview stage)	February 2027 – June 2027

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