

UK Embraces Hydrogen-Fuelled Future



The University of Birmingham and Porterbrook have secured £400,000 for their flagship HydroFLEX project. (University of Birmingham.)

Following the trials of the first-ever hydrogen-powered train on the UK mainline in October, Transport Secretary Grant Shapps announced, "This marks a big step forward towards the UK's net-zero targets", as he visited the start of trials in Warwickshire.

The trials of the train, known as HydroFLEX, which have been supported with a £750,000 grant from the Department for Transport (DfT), follow almost 2 years' development work and more than £1 million of investment by both Porterbrook and the University of Birmingham. The next stages of HydroFLEX are already well underway, with the University of Birmingham developing a hydrogen and battery-powered module that can be fitted underneath the train, which will allow more space for passengers in the train's carriage.

The Transport Secretary also announced the ambition for Tees Valley to become a trailblazing Hydrogen Transport Hub. Bringing together representatives from academia, industry and government to drive forward the UK's plans to embrace the use of hydrogen as an alternative fuel could create hundreds of jobs while seeing the region become a global leader in the green hydrogen sector.

Transport Secretary Grant Shapps said: "As we continue on our road to a green recovery, we know that to really harness the power of transport to improve our country – and to set a global gold standard – we must truly embed change. That's why I'm delighted that, through our plans to build back better, we're embracing the power of hydrogen and the more sustainable, greener forms of transport it will bring."

To kick-start this exciting development in Tees Valley, the DfT have commissioned a masterplan to understand the feasibility of the hub and how it can accelerate the UK's ambitions in hydrogen. The masterplan, expected to be published in January, will pave the way for exploring how green hydrogen could power buses, heavy goods vehicles (HGVs), rail, maritime and aviation transport across the UK.

The aim would then be for the region to become a global leader in industrial research on the subject of hydrogen as a fuel, as well as research and development (R&D) hub for hydrogen transport more generally, attracting hundreds of jobs and boosting the local economy in the process.

He added, "Through our £23 million Hydrogen for Transport Programme, the plans also include £6.3 million of funding for a green hydrogen refuelling station and 19 hydrogen-powered refuse vehicles in Glasgow, a world-first for the size of the fleet. This will give a post-COVID boost to local economies through the creation of green jobs while also decarbonising the transport network.