



# Innovation Policy & Practice Event

*Innovating to Recovery – market-facing innovation centres  
supported with WM recovery funds*

**Dr Nick Mallinson**

CEO, BCIMO

3<sup>rd</sup> September 2020

# Introduction

- Established in 2020 to:
  - Oversee the construction and operation of the Very Light Rail National Innovation Centre (VLRNIC) at Castle Hill, Dudley
  - Provide support to SME businesses across Dudley and the wider Black Country – to improve competitiveness in a global economy and encourage growth post Covid-19
  - Promote and develop 21st century ‘connected public transport solutions’ to accelerate modal shift from cars and reduce traffic emissions
- The launch team commenced on September 1st 2020 and is located at the Castle Hill site



# Launch Team

- Dr Nick Mallinson – CEO
  - 25 years in the electronics industry followed by 15 years at Warwick Manufacturing Group (WVG), most recently as Programme Manager in the High Value Manufacturing Catapult (HVMC)
- Richard Jones – Business Development & Partnerships Manager
  - Formerly Senior Technical & Innovation Manager at the Rail Industry Association (RIA)
- Naomi Arblaster – SME Business Advisor
  - Formerly SME Support Manager at University of Staffordshire
- Olivia Brown – Operations & Marketing Manager
  - Formerly Business Development Executive at the HVMC, WVG
- Vickie Davey – Finance & Admin Executive
  - Formerly Finance Manager at NDB Engineering Ltd



# The VLRNIC

- First proposed in 2014, the initiative was conceived to:
  - Help the development of lower-cost rail based transport relevant to the needs of 21st century Britain
  - Facilitate the growth of a VLR manufacturing sector and jobs in the UK, and in particular in the West Midlands
- Funding in excess of £24m has been raised from the Black Country LEP and ERDF thanks to tremendous work by Dudley MBC
- Construction of a test track is already underway and construction of the Innovation Centre will commence in October 2020, with completion in late 2021
- The centre will also provide training to apprentices in partnership with Dudley College IoTT



# SME Support

- Previous initiatives have found that many Black Country SMEs are rather 'set in their ways' and fail to innovate as much as companies elsewhere across the West Midlands
- The ERDF grant received by the project is contributing to some of the building costs but also towards a targeted initiative to boost innovation in Black Country SMEs
- Our SME Business Advisor will build a team with two aims:
  - 1) In the short-term identify those SMEs that are interested in innovation and support them to accelerate new ways of working and the development of new products and services
  - 2) Over a longer period carry out an extensive campaign to set out the need for all SMEs to adapt to the changing world and ensure that their products are relevant and competitive in global markets
- *For more information on the types of SME support available please contact Naomi Arblaster at [naomi.arblaster@bcimo.co.uk](mailto:naomi.arblaster@bcimo.co.uk)*

# Future Public Transport

- There is a major push from the UK Government to encourage the decarbonisation of transport, increased use of public transport and better connected public transport modes to enable 'Hub-to-Home' journeys
- While the business case for the VLRNIC was made on the basis of the opportunities that very light rail offers, the Department for Transport is keen that other modes of transport, that will encourage modal shift from cars, are fully evaluated and brought to market at the earliest opportunity
- The VLRNIC will play an important role in this, looking at how VLR solutions on branch lines or tram systems can link seamlessly with autonomous pods, electric scooters, cycles and pedestrians to create end-to-end connected public transport journeys
- The centre may change name in due course to something along the lines of the 'Hub to Home Transport Innovation Centre'

**Thank you for listening!**

*If you have any questions please contact Olivia Brown  
at [olivia.brown@bcimo.co.uk](mailto:olivia.brown@bcimo.co.uk)*