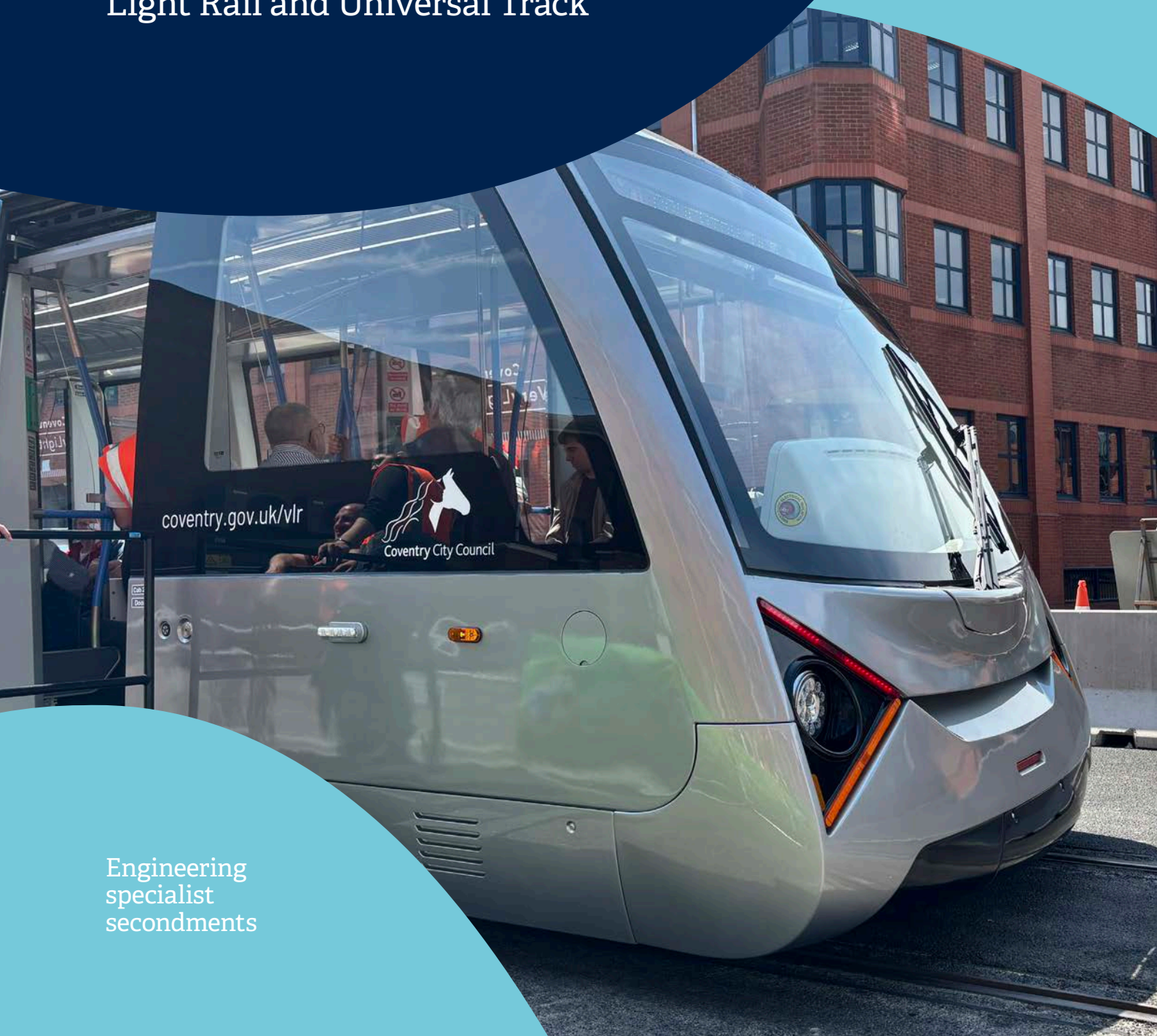
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Delivering Affordable Light Rail for UK Cities

Time for Trams Conference 2026

Roundtable discussion: Coventry Very Light Rail and Universal Track



Engineering specialist secondments



Introduction

Waterman Aspen hosted a roundtable discussion bringing together representatives from Combined Authorities, Local Authorities, Transport Bodies and Industry Leaders to explore the opportunities and challenges associated with Coventry Very Light Rail (CVLR) and the Universal Track system. The discussion focused on how innovative track technology could accelerate the delivery of affordable mass transit systems across the UK.

Thank you to the following participants who took part in the discussion:

- **Nicola Small**, CVLR Programme Director - Coventry City Council
- **Colin Knight**, CLVR SRO - Coventry City Council
- **Stacy White**, Assistant Director for City Transport - Sheffield City Council
- **Christopher Blucke**, Programme Director of Transport and Connectivity - Hull and East Yorkshire Combined Authority
- **Peter Cushing**, Light Rail Commissioner - Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority
- **Adam Williams**, Policy Officer - West Yorkshire Combined Authority
- **Ethan John,** Mass Transit Programme Assistant - West Yorkshire Combined Authority
- **Helen Ursell**, Transport Appraisal Lead - Transport for West Midlands
- **Sandeep Shingadia**, Executive Director - Transport for West Midlands
- **Patrick Gannon**, Head of Light Rail - South Yorkshire Mayoral Combined Authority
- **Miles Ward**, Senior Project Manager - West of England Combined Authority

Thanks to our roundtable hosts



Darryl White



Jonathan Taylor

Executive summary

Participants recognised Coventry's Universal Track as one of the most significant innovations currently emerging within the UK light rail sector. The ability to reduce utility diversions, minimise disruption and lower construction costs was widely viewed as having the potential to transform the economics of tram delivery, particularly within medium-sized cities and towns.

Key topics:

Universal Track has the potential to reduce cost, programme duration and construction disruption.

Current funding and appraisal approaches do not adequately capture regeneration, housing and economic growth benefits.

Utilities regulation remains one of the biggest barriers to transport infrastructure delivery.

Industry collaboration and national advocacy will be essential to support adoption.

Long-term political leadership and evidence-based decision making are critical to successful implementation.

Awareness and perception of Coventry Very Light Rail

Attendees demonstrated a strong awareness of the Coventry Very Light Rail programme and its potential to reduce utility diversion requirements while remaining compatible with conventional tram systems.





Business case challenges

Participants highlighted difficulties in securing investment approval where wider benefits such as regeneration, housing growth, productivity and placemaking are not fully reflected within transport appraisal methodologies.

Utilities and regulatory reform

Delegates identified utility diversion costs, regulatory requirements and industry practices as a major barrier to delivery. Wider policy reform was seen as necessary to unlock the full benefits of innovative track systems.

Leadership, risk and innovation

Successful delivery requires political sponsorship, evidence-based decision making, demonstration projects and independent validation to build confidence amongst stakeholders.

Universal Track as an enabler for future transit networks

Delegates suggested that Universal Track could support phased mass transit delivery and provide a pathway towards affordable rail-based transport solutions in growing city regions.

Key outcomes

- Support development of national standards and advocacy for Universal Track.
- Encourage collaboration between authorities.
- Continue demonstration and testing activities.
- Promote appraisal methodologies that capture regeneration benefits.
- Address utility-related barriers collaboratively.

Looking ahead

The roundtable concluded that Coventry Very Light Rail and Universal Track offer a credible pathway towards more **affordable and deliverable** rail-based transit systems for towns and cities across the UK.



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