

Latest news from the SW Peninsula Manufacturers' Network

The SW Peninsula Manufacturers' Network met on Friday 3rd June 2016 at the Exeter Science Park Centre and received a couple of particularly interesting presentations.



The first two presenters at the meeting representing the **Peninsula Rail Task Force (PRTF)** were: **Liz Waugh, Managing Director of Coast Communications** and **John Hillman, Director of Program Management for PRTF and Rail Development Officer at Plymouth City Council**. Liz and John's presentation was entitled '*The 20 Year Plan for the SW Peninsula Rail Network*'. A copy of their presentation is available – [here](#). Some of the conclusions we drew from the talk were as follows:

- *The importance was stressed of being selective in focusing attention on the absolute top priorities for the region. What would emerge from the exercise was described as a sequential 30-year roadmap.*
- *North Devon felt strongly that the Tiverton Parkway connection was of particular importance to meeting their needs and should not be lost or threatened.*
- *It was suggested that the SW Manufacturers' Network should be invited to engage in the next and final iteration of the PRTF Report. Our views would be sought and hopefully our endorsement of the final document given. We would also be invited to act as advocates for the proposal by following a suggested action sheet.*
- *Members were also keen to make the point that both mobile telephone services and Wi-Fi speed and reliability needs improving to help make the lengthy journeys more productive.*



Simon Edmonds, Director - Manufacturing & Materials, Innovate UK was our second guest speaker. A copy of Simon's slides is available – [here](#). Simon's presentation comprised: an update on Innovate UK; Strategy - 5 Point Plan; The Government's White Paper on the integration of Research Councils and Innovate UK; funding within the South West and specifically the Peninsula counties and finally current funding opportunities.

Innovate UK

The Government's intention for Innovate UK to move away from awarding grants to instead making repayable loans to companies, in particular, provoked an interesting discussion as to whether this would stifle innovation. Repayment would need to be linked to profitability of the product but how could that be specified? It was felt likely that some form of new financial instruments may be the way forward based on a so-called '*patient capital*' model. Simon's presentation revealed that the Peninsula counties did particularly poorly in funding allocations from Innovate UK with manufacturing in Cornwall receiving less than 3% of the SW total and Devon 10%. (Somerset fared better with 29%). It was agreed to look at this further to see whether this was due to a lack of applications and the need to stimulate awareness and interest.

Other points raised during the meeting:

Several members of the Network said that they were pleased with the success they were currently having in engaging with schools to promote manufacturing and engineering careers. This was primarily being achieved through the 'Futureworks' initiative. Funded through the Plymouth and South West Peninsula City Deal.

Members heard about the planned Venturefest South West event - a showcase of regional innovation and entrepreneurship taking place over one day on the 18th October 2016 at Sandy Park Stadium, Exeter. The aim is to celebrate both exciting innovators and growing businesses and facilitate new interactions, collaboration, knowledge transfer and investment across the region. More details are available:

<http://tinyurl.com/z4qwslc>



Background to the SW Peninsula Manufacturers' Network - formed in 2014, the Network pulls together all the main representative bodies for the sector across the three SW counties of Cornwall, Devon & Somerset. The sector contributes over £4.1bn to the local economy – that's more than 11% of the total – and it employs over eighty thousand people. To put that in perspective, tourism, for which the region is famed, generates less than £2bn within the economy. Conclusion - the SW represents a serious location for manufacturing!

