

News Release

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New Government funded project takes Connected and Autonomous Logistics in the North East to the next level

A new project announcement, led by the North East Automotive Alliance (NEAA) and a high level consortia, seeks to scale and expand the deployment of Connected and Autonomous Logistics (CAL) to future-proof commercial opportunities and drive significant UK growth in this emerging sector.

The V-CAL project, based in Sunderland, has been awarded £4 million from the government's £42 million Commercialising Connected and Automated Mobility (CAM) competition through the Centre for Connected and Autonomous Vehicles (CCAV).

Announced today, V-CAL will build upon the Department for Digital Culture Media & Sport (DCMS) funded 5G CAL project, which delivered a working proof-of-concept (PoC) demonstration of the autonomous and teleoperation of a 40-tonne truck, with live loads delivered from Vantec to Nissan Motor Manufacturing UK (NMUK) fully autonomously without intervention by a safety driver.

V-CAL will scale the deployment on the initial PoC into actual operational conditions and also expand into alternative, more complex routes, which build scale, reliability, and consistency of operation. It will run up to four zero-emission autonomous HGVs around the Nissan Sunderland site, on a private roads, where the vehicles will navigate traffic lights, roundabouts, and other road users.

Paul Butler, CEO at the NEAA, said: "The North East region is uniquely placed to develop, test and commercialise CAL technologies. It is home to a critical mass of local manufacturing industry, with ambitious growth plans.

"We are delighted to be awarded V-CAL project funding to be able to scale and expand the initial 5G CAL proof of concept, which ended in 2022, and provide two real industrial use

cases for the scale and deployment of connected and autonomous logistics. The logistics sector is strategically important to the North East and UK economy, and this provides an opportunity to build resilience in the sector and for the UK to take a leading role in the development and commercialisation of CAL technologies.”

The project, led by the NEAA, in partnership with Vantec, NMUK, StreetDrone, Nokia, Newcastle University, Angoka and Womble Bond Dickinson (UK) LLP, has the opportunity to unlock the enormous potential for scalable CAL commercial offerings, ready for the UK market.

Business Secretary Grant Shapps, said: “In just a few years’ time, the business of self-driving vehicles could add tens of billions to our economy and create tens of thousands of jobs across the UK. This is a massive opportunity to drive forward our priority to grow the economy, which we are determined to seize.

“The support we are providing today will help our transport and technology pioneers steal a march on the global competition, by turning their bright ideas into market-ready products sooner than anyone else.”

Martin Kendall, Managing Director, Vantec Europe Limited, said: “Having spent the last two years proving the 5GCAL concept works we are very pleased to have been awarded V-CAL funding that will allow us to scale up our autonomous delivery ambitions. Our challenge for V-CAL is to have our HGV driver removed from the vehicle and operating the Tele Operations rig, controlling up to three autonomous vehicles at one time.

“This is a significant step towards an autonomous supply chain on a much larger scale. Always taking safety into account and working with our current HGV drivers, we are looking at ways to complement our driving operations, offering the opportunity to reskill drivers and to offer a very credible complimentary logistics solution to our partners.”

Michael Simpson, Vice President, Supply Chain Management Nissan AMIEO region, said: “We are delighted that the CAL project has been expanded. The second phase brings the opportunity to further develop automated parts delivery into the factory, as well as automated delivery of cars out of the plant at the end of the manufacturing process.

“It’s a fantastic project covering “real world” situations such as roundabouts and traffic lights, to help answer some of the critical questions on automated delivery. We’re looking forward to being involved and seeing the results.”

Mike Potts, Co-Founder and CEO of StreetDrone, said: “In the first phase of the CAL project, we demonstrated that teleoperated and fully automated HGV deliveries could be deployed in a complex industrial context. With this new phase of work to scale driver-out deliveries into a viable service, we are keen to show that the benefits of autonomy can be achieved in the near-term for logistics operators working in environments such as manufacturing, ports and distribution centres.”

The award is one of seven grants being announced by the government as part of the £42m Commercialising Connected and Automated Mobility (CAM) competition, which will see industry consortia will match the public grant to around £84 million and will be expected to demonstrate a sustainable commercial service by 2025.

Phil Siveter, CEO UK&I at Nokia said: “Nokia is delighted to be a partner in this project. The initial 5G CAL proof of concept has been a great success in demonstrating the value of 5G private wireless technology to overcome challenges with last-mile logistics.”

〈Pictures at the event〉



Image: L to r: Lee Hargadon, Head of Enterprise & Public Sector UK & Ireland, Nokia; Mike Potts, Co-Founder and CEO, StreetDrone; Steve Sutcliffe, General Manager Inbound Logistics & ILN, Nissan Motor Manufacturing UK; Michael Talbot, Deputy Head, Centre for Connected and Autonomous Vehicles (CCAV); Martin Kendall, Managing Director, Vantec Europe Limited; Paul Butler, CEO, North East Automotive Alliance; Chris Appleby, Innovation Manager, North East Automotive Alliance

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