

News release

Researchers get £3.1million to help improve railway track

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A team of world-leading scientists has been awarded a £3.1million research grant that could bring about a step-change improvement in the performance of the UK's railway track system.

Led by Professor William Powrie, of the University of Southampton, Track21 will receive the funding from the Engineering and Physical Science Research Council (EPSRC) over five years.

The research programme brings together academics from the Universities of Southampton, Birmingham and Nottingham and key industry players. It aims to develop a comprehensive understanding of the engineering, economic and environmental performance of railway track that will provide the science needed to underpin a radical overhaul in techniques for track design, construction and maintenance.

Professor Powrie says: "This is a unique and exciting opportunity to make a real difference to the railway system.

"The railway industry is constantly making gradual improvements, but what we're doing is something different. We're interested in high-quality science. Working with our industry partners, we want to create the new knowledge that will inform not just incremental advances but a fundamental shift in the way the existing network is maintained and new lines are designed and built.

"The implications will be far-reaching; reduced costs, increased capacity and improved reliability would make an appreciable difference to all rail users."

Track21 comprises interlinked research projects forming a single coherent programme. Areas of focus include the ground beneath the track; ballast, sleepers and alternative methods of rail support; noise and vibration, and economic and energy costs. The programme has been developed in consultation with industry partners.

Professor Powrie adds: "We have excellent relationships with a range of industry stakeholders. This will ensure that the fundamental scientific research we carry out is both relevant to and readily available for implementation by the industry, and in the medium to long term will make a real difference to rail users."

Notes for editors

1. Track21 is a partnership project involving the Universities of Southampton, Birmingham and Nottingham; Network Rail, HS2, RSSB, the Railway Industry Association, Balfour Beatty Rail, Scott Wilson, Pandrol and Corus Rail. For more information visit www.track21.org.uk
2. The Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council (EPSRC) is the UK's main agency for funding research in engineering and the physical sciences. The EPSRC invests more than £850 million a year in research and postgraduate training to help the nation handle the next generation of technological change.