

DETROIT ANNOUNCES FINALISTS FOR \$3 MILLION GLOBAL CHALLENGE TO INNOVATE EASTERN MARKET

- **Selected finalists include innovators in electric semi-trikes, hydrogen power, micro-logistics, fleet electrification, and fast-charging battery systems**
- **These finalists aim to advance clean freight solutions and reduce fossil fuel reliance in Detroit's historic food distribution hub**
- **Finalists will receive 130k implementation funding to pilot their solutions in Eastern Market, with the potential for scalable, citywide impact**

DETROIT (June 20, 2025)—The Toyota Mobility Foundation (TMF), alongside Detroit's Mayor Mike Duggan, today announced four finalists for the \$3 million Sustainable Cities Challenge, focused on transforming urban freight movement in Detroit's Eastern Market.

Developed in collaboration with the City of Detroit, Challenge Works and the World Resources Institute, the Challenge supports innovative solutions to reduce fossil fuel use and improve the efficiency of freight operations in one of the city's most vital commercial hubs.

The Sustainable Cities Challenge attracted entries from innovators worldwide, seeking to reduce fossil fuel use and drive down the cost of electrifying freight in Detroit's Eastern Market. After an initial review, ten semi-finalists were invited to further develop their ideas over a six-month period. From that group, four have now been selected as finalists following a rigorous evaluation from a panel of expert judges.

Finalists were chosen based on criteria including innovation in freight, reduction of fossil fuel use, scalability, technological maturity, potential to scale, and team capacity. Judges looked for solutions that could reduce fossil fuel use and freight costs while demonstrating a strong understanding of local needs and implementation of feasibility. Each team was required to present a clear demonstration plan with measurable KPIs to support long-term impact and scalability.

A panel of five judges, bringing together expertise in freight, mobility, and sustainability alongside deep knowledge of local business and community needs, selected the following finalists:

- **Civilized Cycles** – Civilized Cycles is a Detroit-based design and engineering company that manufactures light electric vehicles (semi-trikes) for urban freight and cargo

delivery. The team's solutions seek to use semi-trikes to replace gas-powered options in city environments, offering sustainable and efficient mobility solutions.

- **ElectricFish Energy Inc** – ElectricFish is a climate-tech company developing distributed energy infrastructure that combines battery storage with DC fast-charging capabilities for electric vehicles. The team's solution aims to leverage this infrastructure to build systems designed to reduce strain on the grid, lower energy costs, and provide backup power during outages.
- **Neology** – Neology is a Swiss clean technology startup aiming to develop systems that produce hydrogen and electricity on demand. These energy solutions are adaptable for use in construction, urban environments, remote sites, and other areas where clean, off-grid power is needed.
- **Orange Sparkle Ball Inc** – Orange Sparkle Ball is an innovation accelerator that collaborates with organizations to scale impact-driven solutions. The team is developing a data-powered micrologistics platform which aims to streamline first- and last-mile freight delivery and enhance local logistics efficiency.

Each finalist will receive implementation funding to conduct real-world demonstrations of their proposed solutions in Eastern Market and, in select cases, in other parts of the City of Detroit. Their efforts will contribute to a broader vision of cleaner, smarter urban transport systems that can be replicated globally.

Speaking at the Sustainable Cities Challenge: Detroit finalist announcement, **Mayor of Detroit, Mike Duggan**, said:

"We are tremendously grateful to the Toyota Mobility Foundation for selecting Detroit and its culture of innovation as the only recipient in the United States to be a part of its Sustainable Cities Challenge. Eastern Market moves the food Detroiters need every day. Thanks to the Foundation, Detroit can help to pioneer solutions to lessen the environmental impact of this important commerce."

"These four finalists bring an exciting mix of complementary innovations and practicality, with solutions that aim to show demonstrable impact in Detroit's Eastern Market," said **Ryan Klem, Program Director at the Toyota Mobility Foundation**. "Their work provides an opportunity to show incremental steps towards sustainable, people-centered freight systems globally."

"The Sustainable Cities Challenge has already had a positive ripple effect. Local innovators inspired by this global challenge have joined the finalists in working to reduce diesel runtime," said **Vince Keenan, Head of Innovation Engagement for the Mayor's Office of Mobility Innovation (OMI)**. "Eastern Market has become another real-world tech innovation laboratory in Detroit."

Katy Trudeau, President and CEO of Eastern Market, said, “Over the last 100 years, businesses in Eastern Market have innovated around food logistics, distribution, and production. Working with growers, businesses, and other stakeholders across southeast Michigan and beyond, we are shaping the next 100 years right here in Detroit.”

“The diversity and ingenuity of these finalists highlight what is possible when cities open their doors to new thinking,” **said Kathy Nothstine, Director of Cities and Societies, Challenge Works.**

“Detroit’s commitment to fostering sustainable freight solutions is setting a precedent. These projects are not just forward-thinking; they’re achievable and grounded in the real needs of the community.”

The Sustainable Cities Challenge is funded by the Toyota Mobility Foundation and has been designed in partnership with Challenge Works and the World Resources Institute. It aims to create cleaner, more efficient urban mobility systems worldwide. The innovative approaches emerging from Detroit’s Sustainable City Challenge demonstrate how locally grounded ideas can drive meaningful progress toward global sustainability goals.

For more information, visit sustainablecitieschallenge.org.

About the Sustainable Cities Challenge

The Sustainable City Challenge is a two-stage, three-year \$9 million global opportunity for cities and innovators. The Sustainable Cities Challenge will be delivered over two stages:

- **Stage 1: Call to cities**

The Challenge sought cities who wish to host City Challenges in 2024 – 2025. In November 2023, ten shortlisted cities received a range of capacity building support to help them understand the issue they want to solve and attract innovators to provide solutions. This included participation in a capacity building academy in Dallas, Texas from November 13–15, 2023. By May 2024, three cities were selected to host City Challenges to find solutions for local mobility challenges: Detroit (USA), Varanasi (India), and Venice (Italy).

- **Stage 2: Call to Innovators via 3 City Challenges**

Working with the host cities, the Sustainable Cities Challenge team supported by designing local City Challenges which launched between May and June 2024. Each City Challenge offers up to \$3 million in implementation funding to innovators. Host Cities held open calls for entries from innovators via their City Challenge with the support of the Sustainable Cities Challenge team. Together, they selected their finalists to test their solutions in 2024–2025. In 2026, final implementation funding will be given to winners in each host city to continue to implement and grow their solutions.

Timeline of the TMF Sustainable Cities Challenge

- [Detroit Challenge: Transforming Freight](#)
- [Varanasi Challenge: Innovating Crowd Flow](#)
- [Venice Challenge: Embracing Sustainable Mobility](#)

Additional Quotes

Justine Johnson, the State's Chief of Mobility, said, "Detroit is honored to serve as a test bed for the accessible, sustainable, and equitable future of clean freight. It's another example of the way Michigan takes emerging mobility and electrification technologies from concept to deployment, from mind to market. As a pillar of the community that transcends generations, Eastern Market is building the future of mobility right here."

"Detroit is growing. By the end of 2025, Detroit's new bridge to Canada will increase freight traffic through our city," said **Tim Slusser, the City's Chief of Mobility**. "Now is the time to discover how to move more goods around more people with less pollution."

About Toyota Mobility Foundation

The [Toyota Mobility Foundation](#) (TMF) was established in August 2014 by the Toyota Motor Corporation (Toyota) to support the development of a more mobile society in which everyone can move freely. The Foundation underscores Toyota's ongoing commitment to continuous improvement and respect for people. It utilizes Toyota's expertise and technologies to support strong mobility systems while eliminating disparities in mobility. TMF works in partnership with universities, governments, non-profits, research institutions and other organizations, creating programs that are aligned with the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to address mobility issues around the world.

In the past, TMF has led a range of Challenges, including the global [Mobility Unlimited Challenge](#), [CATCH](#) in Malaysia, [InoveMob Challenge](#) in Brazil and STAMP Challenge in India. You can find out more about TMF and how it is governed at toyotamobilityfoundation.org

About Challenge Works

For a decade, Challenge Works has established itself as a global leader in designing and delivering high-impact challenges to incentivize cutting-edge innovation for social good. Challenge Works is a social enterprise founded by the UK's innovation agency Nesta. Over the past decade, Challenge Works has worked on 101 challenge prizes, engaging more than 16,000 innovators and unlocking over £310 million in funding to tackle some of the world's biggest challenges. Challenge Works

believes no challenge is unsolvable, partnering with non-profits, governments, and other organizations around the globe to unearth entrepreneurs and their innovations that can solve the greatest challenges of our time. Find out more at <https://challengeworks.org/>

About World Resources Institute

World Resources Institute (WRI) is a global research organization with offices in Brazil, China, Colombia, India, Indonesia, Mexico and the United States, and regional offices for Africa and Europe. WRI's 1,700 staff work with partners to develop practical solutions that improve people's lives and ensure nature can thrive. Learn more: WRI.org and on Twitter [@WorldResources](https://twitter.com/WorldResources).

About the City of Detroit's Office of Mobility Innovation (OMI)

The Office of Mobility Innovation (OMI) exists to help the City of Detroit navigate the rapidly changing transportation and mobility industries. Transportation and mobility are essential for both people and businesses, and Detroit's automotive heritage provides an unparalleled opportunity to work with industry to innovate and define their future.

OMI leads mobility advancement efforts on behalf of the City of Detroit and collaborates with industry, academia, philanthropy, and local, state and federal government. By centering residents in every step of the process, OMI is focused on leveraging mobility as a pathway to opportunity in Detroit.

For additional information about OMI, please visit detroitmi.gov/government/mayors-office/office-mobility-innovation or follow us on LinkedIn, Facebook, YouTube and Instagram.