

Detroit Calls for Global Innovators to Promote Clean Freight in Historic Eastern Market as Part of Global \$9M Sustainable Cities Challenge

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DETROIT (May 29, 2024) – The Toyota Mobility Foundation’s Sustainable Cities Challenge has selected the City of Detroit, Michigan, Varanasi, India, and Venice, Italy to host innovation challenges initiatives. The goal of the \$9 million global initiative is to help cities accelerate toward sustainable mobility, fostering healthier and safer urban environments while enhancing people’s ability to commute, work, study, and access services.

Detroit has launched a global call for innovators to transform freight in the city’s historic Eastern Market district as part of the Toyota Mobility Foundation’s \$9 million Sustainable Cities Challenge. Detroit’s initiative invites innovators from across the globe to access a share of \$3 million in funding per city to create solutions that will reduce emissions, noise and air pollution and operational costs.

Over 150 cities from 46 countries entered the Challenge after the call to cities was first launched in June 2023 and over the last months, the list was narrowed to 10 and now 3 cities. The cities, located in the United States, India and Italy, were chosen from a shortlist of 10 cities announced in November 2023.

Detroit’s Eastern Market is the largest open-air market and amongst the oldest historic markets in the U.S. and is at the heart of Detroit’s Challenge. It is the city’s hub for food distribution, selling over \$360 million of wholesale food annually, and double that in exports. The district is poised to expand and is considering strategies to address environmental concerns, carbon emissions, and pollution while adding residential units to this bustling community.

City planning efforts have called for exploring alternatives to fossil fuels and optimizing routing software to alleviate traffic congestion. Now, in a bid to reduce fossil fuel dependence and freight costs, Detroit invites innovators to apply for a share in \$3 million of developmental funds. Innovators are tasked with crafting mobility solutions that seek not only to lower emissions and mitigate pollution but also to explore sustainable financial strategies that challenge the current economics of freight that make alternative fuel options too costly.

Detroit calls upon local and international innovators to propose bold solutions that remove barriers to adopting clean freight technologies, reduce fossil fuel use within the freight network and improve market vendor operations, where even slight cost reductions can have a profound impact.

Participants will gain exclusive insights into the complex workings of a large regional freight network as part of the City’s mobility systems, working with the City of Detroit to engage with city and business leaders in the Eastern Market.

Tim Slusser, Chief of the City of Detroit’s Office of Mobility Innovation, said:

“We’re excited and honored to be one of just three cities in the world selected for the Sustainable Cities Challenge. As the only city chosen in the western hemisphere, Detroit represents over one hundred years of world-renowned innovations in transportation. The Eastern Market district is a critical part of our region’s food distribution network. This Challenge is a great opportunity for the City to work closely with Eastern Market Partnership and the State of Michigan’s Office of Future Mobility and Electrification to pioneer new sustainable solutions in clean freight.”

The initiative, spearheaded by the Toyota Mobility Foundation and designed in collaboration with Challenge Works and the World Resources Institute, aims to bring cities and innovators together to develop sustainable, inclusive, data-driven mobility solutions fit for the future.

Ryan Klem, Director of Programs at the Toyota Mobility Foundation, said:

“This Challenge is an opportunity for innovators to work together with the City of Detroit to transform a critical part of the city’s infrastructure. Eastern Market is part of Detroit’s history, but it also plays a crucial role today

and will do so for many years to come. The solutions to this Challenge will help businesses throughout Detroit, but the lessons learned could also be applied to cities across the world.”

Kathy Nothstine, Head of Future Cities at Challenge Works, said:

“Detroit has already made efforts to make the city’s transportation network more efficient, but this Challenge will open the doors for innovators from across the world to provide fresh thinking and new approaches. We look forward to seeing the solutions proposed to Detroit’s City Challenge.”

Ben Welle, Director of Integrated Transport and Innovation at WRI Ross Center for Sustainable Cities, said:

“The city of Detroit has seen great changes since Eastern Market was first established over 150 years ago. Innovation is essential for cities to adapt to these changes and continue to thrive. This Challenge will bring the city and innovators together. This is an exciting opportunity not just for Detroit but for cities everywhere.”

The other selected cities for the Sustainable Cities Challenge are Varanasi, India and Venice, Italy.

Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh, India

Launching in late June 2024 – Varanasi is located on the banks of the Ganges River in northern India and is the “spiritual capital” of India. A revered pilgrimage destination, the city sees visitors from across India as well as abroad. This influx of visitors, while vital to strengthening the city’s tapestry of faith and culture, is leading to increased concerns about safety and crowding.

The Varanasi City Challenge aims to generate innovative, data-driven solutions incorporating elements of technology and design that make crowded areas of Varanasi’s old city (Kashi) safer and more accessible for religious tourists and local residents alike including vulnerable members of the population.

Venice, Veneto, Italy

Launching June 11, 2024 – Venice is often pictured solely as a historic city famous for its intricate network of canals. Nevertheless, the majority of the population lives and works in the mainland suburbs such as Mestre, Maghera and other motorized islands, which serve as a crucial transportation hub connecting Venice to the mainland and beyond.

With a mobility landscape that is truly multi-modal, including land and water transport, the city has invested significantly in sustainable mobility infrastructure and services. In the Venice City Challenge, the city seeks innovative solutions that shift behavior, encouraging an increased use and adoption of existing sustainable transport modes.

The deadline for Sustainable Cities Challenge Detroit entries is Monday 5 September 2024. To find out more, visit the [Sustainable Cities Challenge website](#).