

TRANS



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THE HIGHLANDS AND ISLANDS TRANSPORT PARTNERSHIP

Annual Report

2006 – 2007



 getting the highlands & islands back on board

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› Foreword



During the year we have concentrated our efforts on producing the Regional Transport Strategy. This is the first time that a high level strategy has been prepared for transport in the Highlands and Islands.

It has been a major task for our consultants, our permanent advisers, and the members.

I am delighted that this task

was achieved on time, and more importantly that the final Strategy was supported by our five Councils and the main public agencies and business groups in the region. The Strategy represents our agreed aspirations for dealing with the current inadequacies of the region's transport network, and for putting transport in a position to support the economic and social development of the region for the 21st century.

We hope to maintain this progress and to investigate moving to a model 3 Partnership to help deliver with our Local Authorities the action programme accompanying the Strategy.

Also, we have moved from a voluntary partnership to a statutory body following the Transport Act 2005. The final voluntary partnership meeting was in March 2006, after which our colleagues in Shetland went on to form their own statutory partnership, ZETRANS, and our colleagues in Arran joined SPT. I know that the new Partnerships will work closely together in the coming years to mutual benefit.

On behalf of the other Regional Transport Partnerships, and at the Minister's request, HITRANS has set out the new arrangements for ferry user consultation to replace the Shipping Services Advisory Committees. The first meetings of these new groups will be in the summer of 2007. Ferry services are an important part of life in our region and I wish these new groups well.

I am standing down from local government service and from membership of HITRANS in May 2007. It has been a great privilege to chair the Partnership over the past 10 years. I will watch with interest as HITRANS begins to deliver the Regional Transport Strategy. I would like to express my appreciation to all those that have helped and supported me during this time.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Charlie King". The signature is written in a cursive style.

Charlie King
HITRANS Chair

› The HITRANS team

The HITRANS Board comprises a councillor from each local authority area covered by the partnership and 3 non-councillor members appointed in a personal capacity by the Minister for Transport following open advertisement and selection.

The Board has appointed a group of professional advisers who play an important role in developing policy. The executive team report to the Board. Dave Duthie will join the team as Director from June 2007.

Board

Cllr Charlie King, Chair (Highland Council)
Cllr Bob Sclater, Deputy Chair (Orkney Islands Council)
Cllr Roma Hossack (Moray Council)
Cllr Duncan MacIntyre (Argyll and Bute Council)
Cllr Donald Manford (Comhairle Nan Eilean Siar)
Donald MacNeill
Wilson Metcalfe
Louise Smith

Advisers

Naomi Coleman (Orkney Islands Council)
Iain Duff (Scottish Council for Development and Industry)
Dave Duthie (Argyll and Bute Council)
Murdo Gray (Comhairle Nan Eilean Siar)
Sam MacNaughton (Highland Council)
Donald MacNeill (Highlands and Islands Enterprise)
Sandy Ritchie (Moray Council)
David Summers (Highlands and Islands Public Transport Forum)
Frank Roach (Highland Rail Partnership)

Executive Team



Howard Brindley (Partnership Co-ordinator)
Andrew Capes (Travel Plans Officer)
Katy Cunningham (Clerical Assistant)
Ranald Robertson (Transport Development Officer)

› Review of the year

The new HITRANS Statutory Regional Transport Partnership held its first meeting in December 2005 and ran in parallel with the voluntary partnership until March 2006 when the non-councillor members were appointed by the Minister.

These early meetings established the governance arrangements for the Partnership including the standing orders and the various policies relating to equality, transparency, and equity in the conduct of the business of the Partnership. We have benefited greatly from the work of the voluntary partnership which produced an early strategy and action programme in 2003; established a research programme; and delivered a number of transport infrastructure projects. The transition to the Statutory Partnership was achieved smoothly.

The year has been dominated by the preparation of the **Regional Transport Strategy**. Consultation with stakeholders began in the winter of 2006 and culminated in a stakeholder conference in October. The final draft of the Strategy was agreed by member Councils in February 2007 and the Strategy was submitted to the Minister at the end of March. Details are contained in the section of this Annual Report dedicated to the Strategy and a full copy is available on our web site.

We have continued the programme of **studies and research**.

- › An ex-post economic appraisal of the **Skye Bridge** undertaken jointly with HIE revealed the extent of the benefits to island communities of fixed

link crossings. As a result of these findings, we are working with Transport Scotland to ensure that these benefits are adequately represented in future STAG appraisals of fixed link crossings.

- › We have completed part 1 STAG appraisal of the **Aberdeen to Inverness transport corridor** jointly with NESTRANS and Transport Scotland. This has identified some 28 actions to be taken forward into the Strategic Transport Projects Review being undertaken by Transport Scotland. Examples include A96 by-passes and sections of dualing, and improvements to the rail service with timetable recasts and new stations.



- › An economic appraisal of the benefits of improving the **A9 road between Inverness and Perth** is being undertaken jointly with Highlands and Islands Enterprise. This will be completed in

the Autumn of 2007 and again will feed into the Strategic Transport Projects Review.

- › An **origin and destination survey** of passengers and traffic on the CalMac, Western Ferries, Pentland and Northlink ferry routes was completed jointly with ZETRANS and SPT during the year. This has provided much detailed information which will be used in the review of lifeline ferry services proposed in the National Transport Strategy, which we hope will commence in 2008.



- › A study of the **marine freight sector** undertaken jointly with HIE has revealed a decline in coastal shipment of bulk traffic by small vessels and an increase in freight consignments on the Ro Ro services. However, there are opportunities to increase short sea shipping of freight around the region. We intend to set up a liaison group with the main ports to take this forward. We will also work with the Scottish Executive to improve the economics of introducing new small vessels into the trade.

- › We have contributed to studies of **ferry fare discount schemes** led by the Council and the Enterprise Network in the Western Isles. We hope that the Scottish Executive will take this forward in a similar manner to the Air Discount Scheme.
- › We have continued to gather environmental and aerodrome design and costing data for providing **new air services to Skye**. Previous economic and market appraisals suggest potential for a twice daily return service of a 30 seat aircraft to Glasgow. A review of potential airport sites has identified the current airstrip at Broadford as the best location for development. We will work with the CAA and HIAL as well as the Enterprise Network in preparing a STAG appraisal for this proposal.
- › We have worked closely with the **Highland Rail Partnership** and the Enterprise Network to help develop rail services in the region. The Room for Growth Study identified a number of improvements which have been included in Network Rail's RUS. Improvements to the Highland main line and Fife services will speed up the Central Belt – Inverness service over the coming years. Around Inverness commuter services have been improved with the Invernet services and we aim to open station at Conon Bridge in the next two years. HITRANS is now the main funder of the core costs of HRP and the staff and administrations of the two bodies are planned to be amalgamated in 2008.
- › In May, the Minister indicated that he intended to disband the Shipping Services Advisory Committees and asked the Regional Transport

Partnerships to set up arrangements for **consultation between operators**, ferry users and public agencies on the Clyde, Hebrides and Northern Isles services. HITRANS took the lead in devising these new arrangements which were approved by the RTPs at their meeting with the Minister in November 2006. The first meetings will take place in summer 2007.

- › We have worked with Argyll, Highland and Western Isles Councils and the Enterprise Network to promote “**Cearcaill na Gaidhlig**”. This is a



tourism marketing initiative linking the transport infrastructure of the Hebridean Islands and the West Highland mainland with the unique language and cultural heritage of the area.

- › Our **budget** is outlined in detail in the final section of this report. We had a revenue budget of £850,000 for the year contributed by Member Councils and the Scottish Executive. Administration and staff costs were £260,000; the preparation of the Regional Transport Strategy £200,000; research and feasibility studies £330,000; and contributions to rail partners £60,000. The capital budget of £4.5 million was provided by the Scottish Executive. This allowed us to continue the programme of public transport infrastructure improvements for a fourth year and also to assist Councils to undertake a number of major projects.

› The Regional Transport Strategy

The Transport Scotland Act 2005 places the preparation of the Regional Transport Strategy as the first duty of the new Regional Transport Partnerships. Guidance from the Scottish Executive requires the Strategy to be submitted to the Minister by the end of March 2007. Therefore the preparation of this document and its associated reports has been the main activity of HITRANS during the year.



The Regional Transport Strategy builds on the issues identified in the previous voluntary Strategy; the vision and objectives set in this Strategy; and its action programme. Steer Davies Gleave were appointed to provide consultancy support in preparation of the new Strategy.

The first stage involved a programme of consultation with key stakeholders in 5 sub-regional workshops during February and March 2006. These confirmed the issues and objectives of the previous Strategy and identified the sub-regional aspirations for transport.

The consultants undertook a review of the context for the Strategy in terms of European, national, and local plans and policies for development, transport and health, to ensure that the objectives and policies of the Regional Transport Strategy reflect and conform

to these context documents. After several workshop sessions with HITRANS Members and permanent advisers the emerging policies and interventions were tested with stakeholders at a regional meeting in October 2006.

The draft Strategy was published for comments in November 2006 and was amended in January 2007. The final draft was then presented to Member Councils, the Board of Highlands and Islands Enterprise, and Scottish Council Development and Industry Members, and was adopted for submission to the Minister in March 2007.

The key issue that has emerged for the Regional Transport Strategy is the contribution that a modern transport system can make to the competitiveness of business and the enhancement of the region's vitality, and the concern that much of our system is not adequate to meet this challenge. Therefore the primary objective is to improve the inter-connectivity of the whole region to strategic services and destinations in order to enable the region to compete and support sustainable growth. The overarching policy is to develop a fit for purpose, multi-modal transport system.

Ten horizontal policy themes applying to the whole region aim to:

- › Promote the long term development of walking and cycling.



- › Prepare a sub-strategy for investment in the region's bus services.
- › Enhance aviation connections between islands and peripheral areas and national gateways.
- › Improve the region's community and demand responsive transport provision.
- › Increase efficiency of urban travel by tackling congestion, reducing car use on short journeys, and improving public transport.
- › Assist freight transport to shift from road to less environmentally damaging modes.
- › Develop a programme of investment to improve the locally significant rural road network.
- › Prepare a sub-strategy for investment imports and ferries.
- › Develop initiatives to reduce the cost of travel.

- › Develop ways to reduce the climate change impact of transport in the region.

The Strategy also identifies policy for the transport network. Priority action is required:

- › To reduce journey times and increase journey reliability on our three strategic corridors linking the western parts of the region to Glasgow; the north of the region and the Inner Moray Firth to central Scotland; and Inverness to Aberdeen.
- › And on the regional network to improve the Orkney inter isles services; to improve the Western Isles spinal route and sea crossings; and to reduce journey times and increase reliability on the roads on Mull; the road between Oban and Lochgilphead; the roads to north west Sutherland and Wester Ross; and on the Moray Firth coastal route.



- › As a separate document, a proposed delivery plan identifies the actions required to deliver this Strategy and estimates the investment that will be required.

› Capital programme

HITRANS receives an annual capital grant from the Scottish Executive to support our investment in strategic transport projects. In 2006/07 this was just over £3.5million. In addition to this funding HITRANS was also granted a further £1million of funding which was ring fenced to help provide wheelchair accessible buses for rural services.

Progress reports on the delivery of the capital programme are provided to each meeting of the Partnership Board and are available for download on the HITRANS website at www.hitrans.org.uk

Accessible Bus Funding

A major focus in 2006/07 was the need for our rural communities to catch up with urban parts of our area and the rest of the country in having wheelchair accessible buses on local services. 29 new easy access buses have been secured for service in the region including the first low floor bus to enter service in the Western Isles.

Air Services and Airport Facilities

The largest capital funding contribution made by HITRANS in 2006/07 was the £1.2million awarded to Argyll and Bute Council for the Argyll Air Services Project. This project will see the redevelopment of Oban Airport to CAA standard and two new airports are being built in Coll and Colonsay. These routes will be operated under PSO by Highland Airways.

Air travel is hugely important to the Highlands and Islands. Inverness Airport is currently the fastest growing hub in Scotland. Since 1999 radar cover has been provided by RAF Lossiemouth but with the help of a £50,000 grant from HITRANS a new radar control room has opened at Inverness Airport.

Bus Interchange Facilities

In common with other parts of Scotland the bus is the most used mode of public transport in the Highlands and Islands. With the often infrequent nature of many services it is essential that good interchange facilities are provided at stops. New waiting shelters, bus stop poles and infrastructure such as turning circles for buses have been provided across the region in 2006/07.

Cycling and Walking

In the past year detailed design work and land acquisition has been completed for a major new cycle link from Connel to Oban. It is hoped construction will commence in 2007 with funding having been confirmed from a number of sources including a £300,000 grant from HITRANS 2007/08 programme.

HITRANS has funded recently completed design on an important cycle link from Hatston Ferry Terminal to Kirkwall town centre. This link will also be built with funding from HITRANS 2007/08 programme.

Cycle carriage on trains is being boosted through the £9million refurbishment of the Class 158 trains operated on the Far North, Kyle and Aberdeen – Inverness lines. This includes a £30,000 contribution from HITRANS towards the enhancement of cycle carriage facilities.

Intelligent Transport Systems

Two real time passenger information systems went “live” in the past year. The first of these systems provides up to the second information to passengers travelling between Inverness City Centre and Inverness Airport. The second scheme is particularly interesting as it is the first in Scotland to utilise GPRS mobile phone technology to communicate between buses and stops and does this on the long distance corridor linking Campbeltown in Argyll with Glasgow. Passengers can get information updates at stops along both routes.

The Orkney Islands are to become the third part of the Highlands and Islands to benefit from real time passenger information when a new system is rolled out in 2007. This system is also to have GPRS communications.

Elsewhere Moray Council and Argyll and Bute Council have introduced innovative travel information kiosks at bus stops.

Ferry Terminal Facilities

Our ferry network provides a lifeline link to island and peninsular communities. It is important that the right quality of facility is provided at terminals to complement the network of services.

Significant improvements have been made to the traffic management, public transport interchange and marshalling areas at Rothesay and Lochmaddy ferry terminals.

A new passenger terminal opened early in 2007 at Leverburgh Ferry Terminal. Renewable energy has been incorporated into the design of the building to provide a sustainable energy source for heating the building and its water supply.

HITRANS contributed to an improvement of Orkney Ferries ticketing and information systems with information now available to passenger registering for SMS alerts and ticket purchase possible at an electronic kiosk in the Kirkwall ferry office.

Railway Station Facilities

HITRANS continues to work with Highland Rail Partnership and First ScotRail to identify infrastructure improvements at the 56 stations in the region.



The biggest scheme HITRANS contributed to in 2006/07 was the redevelopment of Fort William Railway Station which will transform this dated facility into a 21st Century multi modal travel centre. HITRANS has contributed £200,000 towards this £700,000 project which will be completed in time for the World Mountain Bike Championships taking place in the town in September 2007.

Smaller in scale but no less important improvements have also seen CCTV and a new waiting shelter provided at Dingwall Station, CCTV at Brora Station and extra luggage trolleys for Inverness Station.

Roads

HITRANS contributed £455,000 to upgrade the A941 road linking Rothes to Elgin.

› Travel plans and active travel

At the core of HITRANS' commitment to Travel Plans and Active Travel is the need to reduce over-dependence on the car for travel, and to ensure that alternatives are available.



HITRANS submitted a Travel Planning Strategy and Action Plan to the Executive for approval in December 2006.

The initial 'target' establishments are the five local authorities and all major hospitals and health centres throughout the region.

These are required to have effective Travel Plans in operation by April 2008.

HITRANS is encouraging active travel. The benefits of active travel contribute to four main policy areas: health, mode shift, the environment, and tourism.

HITRANS has worked closely with the Scottish Executive, local authorities, and the other Regional Transport Partnerships to develop shared experience in delivery of travel plans. We have played our part in the Scottish Sustainable Travel Group and the National TravelWise Association in Scotland. An Active Travel Advisory Group has been established in response to the consultation process on the Regional Transport Strategy to give direction to our Active Travel Agenda.

The procurement process for an Active Travel Regional Audit Study was started in March 2007. This study aims to encourage short-distance 'utility' active travel in all our regional centres. Infrastructure improvements are expected to be recommended, but the study is also likely to endorse a number of 'soft' measures, including information and publicity, signage, maps and other promotional material to encourage mode transfer and a greater use of existing facilities.

Progress has been made towards getting the right information tools for Travel Plans into place, and deploying them effectively. A good communications strategy is essential in encouraging the acceptance of Travel Plans, and two of the main means of promotion are printed publicity and journey sharing websites.

HITRANS commissioned a pilot journey sharing site in the Caithness area in December 2006. If this site is a success, a Highlands and Islands branded portal will follow.

HITRANS supports travel awareness events and promotions, and will continue to work with local authorities' to encourage the use of active and sustainable transport modes to and from schools.

› Bus route development grant scheme

In partnership with Rapsons Coaches HITRANS has secured funding of £2.084 million from the Scottish Executive to deliver a step change in quality and accessibility of bus services to the rapidly growing Inverness Airport.

The funding awarded in March was the result of a carefully prepared proposal submitted by HITRANS in 2006.

The scheme has seen the core service linking Inverness Airport with the City Centre increased to a 30 minute frequency with the route extended to Holm Park. New highly specified double deck buses provide the highest levels of comfort and luggage capacity on this key route. The route has been branded as JET and boasts a striking livery which ensures the buses are truly eye catching.



A new service from Nairn to the Airport provides a long awaited link to the Airport for communities to the east of Dalcross. This service operates on an hourly basis and is operated by a modern low floor easy access midibus.

Links with the Airport have been improved for residents of Lochardil and Ardness whose service has been increased to a 30 minute frequency with times set to connect with the JET service to the Airport. Three new modern low floor buses have been introduced on the route offering easy access for passengers.

The final service to be upgraded as a result of the project is the service from Croy to Inverness. This service benefits from extended operating hours, a new low floor easy access bus and good links to Inverness Airport.

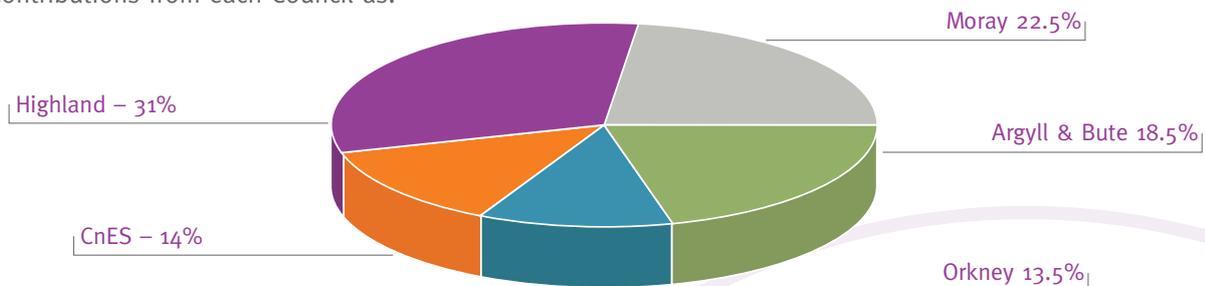
All four routes involved in this development package benefit from modern accessible buses, real time passenger information and a range of improvements to waiting facilities at bus stops. In total nine new low floor buses have entered service as a result of this package. The buses all meet the latest Euro IV engine emissions standards. This scheme has really delivered a step change in the quality of buses serving Inverness Airport. Passengers can truly feel they get business class standards for travel to Inverness Airport.

› Revenue budget

The annual budget for 2006/7 totalled £852,500.

Income

Income was contributed by Member Councils and the Scottish Executive. Council's income was based on a temporary formula agreed by the voluntary Partnership in the autumn of 2005. This formula calculated contributions from each Council as:



This formula has been changed for 2007/8 to reflect each Council's voting weight and population. The Councils' contribution in total was set at £200,000 to draw down the maximum match funding available from the Scottish Executive towards core costs

Income comprised:	
Member Councils	£200,000
Scottish Executive – match funding of core costs	£200,000
Scottish Executive – Strategy funding	£200,000
Scottish Executive – Travel Plan Officer support	£60,000
Scottish Executive – Capital programme management support	£50,000
Scottish Executive – Feasibility studies support	£130,000
2005/06 Surplus	£12,500
Total income	£852,500

Expenditure

The running costs of the Partnership include staff, administrative and office costs and expenses for travelling and running the HITRANS meetings. New office premises were occupied in January 2006 at Inverness Airport, and members of staff were appointed to fill clerical and travel plan posts in July 2006.

The budget to run the Partnership comprised:	
Co-ordinator fees and expenses	£55,000
Transport development officer	£38,000
Travel plans officer	£34,000
Clerical assistant	£18,000
Staff travelling and subsistence	£7,000
Members and advisers travelling and subsistence	£24,000
Office costs – property	£27,000
Office costs – admin	£20,000
Financial and administrative services from Member Councils	£20,000
Total running costs	£243,000

Programme costs comprise the production of the Regional Transport Strategy; research studies; feasibility reports on future projects; and contributions to partners.

The budget to run this programme of work comprised:	
Regional Transport Strategy	£200,000
Research studies	£181,500
Feasibility reports	£130,000
Contribution to Highland Rail Partnership	£50,000
Contribution to Elgin traffic model	£11,000
Contribution to NESRFDG	£10,000
Publicity for Regional Transport Strategy	£15,000
Travel Plan work	£12,000
Total programme costs	£609,500

The detailed final accounts will be published later in 2007 therefore no detailed out turn data is available. However it is anticipated that there will be a small under-spend on this budget of about £20,000.