REGIONAL TRANSPORT STRATEGY FOR THE HIGHLANDS & ISLANDS

Final Strategy

June 2007

Prepared for:

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FOREWORD

This HITRANS Regional Transport Strategy represents a genuine milestone in transport decision-making in the Highlands and Islands. For the first time a plan – locally developed, consulted upon and refined, enjoys legal status as a statutory document. This carries with it responsibilities for those agencies who will work alongside HITRANS to implement the strategy as well as for those who will ultimately take decisions on future transport investment across Scotland.

For the Highlands and Islands the stakes are high. Our transport networks dictate to a large extent how we live our daily lives, how we travel to school, shops or hospitals, and how our businesses deliver their goods and services across the area. This region is unique in Scotland in terms of its geography of islands and mountains. Travel is costly and often disrupted by weather. Many essential journeys are unreliable. Lifeline transport services are essential to maintain our island and remote communities.

There is no doubt that our area is making progress both economically and socially, however more needs to be done. Our productivity is some 20% behind the rest of Scotland and the condition of our transport infrastructure will play a critical part in closing that gap.

This significance is underlined by the support that people across the region have shown in the development of the Strategy and the responses they have provided to the consultation exercise, a level of input I welcome greatly.

I believe that in this Strategy we have considered the needs of the whole region: from Campbeltown to North Ronaldsay, or from Carloway to Cullen; from the remote corners of the mainland to the island communities and the more populated areas surrounding the inner Moray Firth.

However any such plan inevitably involves compromises. We simply cannot address all the areas' needs at once, there is just too much to do. What this Strategy sets out to achieve are enhancements and improvements to those core routes and services – those which are most important in knitting the area together, and providing connectivity from the Highlands and Islands to the rest of Scotland and beyond. Over time we would seek to address all our transport inadequacies – and these will be covered in subsequent strategies, but we have to start somewhere.

There are also compromises between our core vision of supporting economic growth and the pressures for sustainability and environmental protection. While much of our Strategy focuses on the trunk and regional roads network, we have also not ignored the rail or ferry networks, the need to promote active travel, or better public transport integration. These and others have their place in this plan.

There are further compromises too between ambition and a realistic appraisal of the resources that will be available to the area. Not every scheme advanced for the area is included in this Strategy, but I do not believe it lacks ambition. If the action plan within this document is implemented within the intended timescale then it will have made a real contribution to the vitality and viability of the Highlands and Islands.

Finally, I would urge all those living and working in the Highlands and Islands, as well as our local authorities, public agencies, businesses and other partners to unite behind this Strategy. A strong consensus on the way forward is the best way to secure the resources we require.

I wish HITRANS and its partners every success in taking forward this first Regional Transport Strategy.

Charlie King
HITRANS Chair

March 2007

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

HITRANS was established as one of the seven Scottish Regional Transport Partnerships in December 2005. The Transport Scotland Act 2005 requires these Partnerships to prepare Transport Strategies for their regions which will enhance economic well being; promote safety, social inclusion and equal opportunity; plan for a sustainable transport system; and integrate across boundaries with other Partnerships. These Strategies must take account of future needs and set priorities for transport development and improvement.

Context

The Regional Transport Strategies do not sit alone. They are part of a suite of strategies and plans ranging from the National Transport Strategy, National Planning Framework, and national economic and sustainable development strategies, through various regional and local plans. We have taken account of these in preparing the Highlands and Islands Regional Transport Strategy, and this is detailed in Part 2, the context section of this document.

Key Issue

Early in 2006 we held workshop meetings with key stakeholders throughout the region to discuss and agree the issues which this Strategy needs to address. This region is diverse and includes many islands, remote rural communities, and also fast growing urban areas. Essential journeys are long, often over mountainous terrain and sea crossings. Many of these essential journeys are using roads that are generally not of modern standards, and public transport that is infrequent and slow. The cost of daily transport for businesses and residents is high. The key issue that emerged from these discussions is the contribution that a modern transport system can make to the competitiveness of business and the enhancement of the region's viability, and the concern that much of our system is not adequate to meet this challenge. The region at present is at 80% of Scotland's average GVA (Gross Value Added) – a huge gap. Improvements to the transport network are vital if this gap is to be reduced.

Objectives

Therefore our primary objective for the Strategy is to improve the interconnectivity of the whole region to strategic services and destinations in order to enable the region to compete and support growth. Supporting objectives are to enable people to participate in everyday life; to improve the safety and security of travel; to improve people's health; and to manage impacts on our environmental assets. These objectives were developed at an early stage, and have informed the development of the strategy options through an objective led process.

Strategic Policy

The Strategy's overarching policy is to develop a fit for purpose, multi-modal transport system. It comprises a package of policies and measures under a number of horizontal themes which apply across the region, and a package of priorities for investment to improve the transport network, across all modes.

Horizontal Themes

We have ten horizontal themes where we intend to focus action and investment during the next 15 years. These are:

- Promoting the long term development of walking and cycling across the region to reduce the use of cars for short journeys and to contribute towards health.
- Preparing a strategy for investment in the region's bus services.
- Enhancing the aviation connections between islands and peripheral communities and the regional centres and national gateways to allow for better business opportunities.
- Improving the community transport and demand responsive transport offer in the region for those who have poor access to mainstream public transport.
- Increasing the efficiency of travel in and through urban areas by tackling congestion, reducing car use on short journeys and by improving the public transport offer.
- Assisting freight transport to shift mode from road to less environmentally damaging rail and sea.
- Developing a programme of investment to improve and maintain the locally significant rural road network which has suffered from under-investment in the past.
- Preparing a strategy for investment in ports and ferries.
- Developing initiatives for reducing the cost of transport and travel.
- Develop ways to reduce and mitigating the climate change impact of travelling in the region.

Transport Network Policy

We have developed a hierarchy for the region's multi-modal transport network which identifies the strategic links connecting us to Edinburgh, Glasgow and Aberdeen, and the regional links which connect people to their main regional centre. We have set priorities for investment in this multi-modal network based on tests which assess its adequacy for current and projected traffic (informed by future land use developments) and the extent of the region served.

On the **strategic network,** priority action is required to further the Strategy objectives, in particular to reduce journey times and improve journey reliability on:

- The Western Strategic Corridor, that is the A82 corridor from Loch Lomond to Fort William
- The Central Strategic Corridor, that is the Inverness to Perth/central corridor
- The Eastern Strategic Corridor, that is the Inverness to Aberdeen corridor

On this strategic network we also require priority action to:

- Improve journey reliability connecting Argyll and Bute to Glasgow via the trunk roads and the West Highland Line.
- Reduce journey times to Caithness and Orkney from Inverness via the A9 and the Far North Line.

- Deliver the Inverness trunk link road to remove through traffic from the City centre and open up development land to the east of the City, and improve public transport services including Park and Ride to reduce growing levels of congestion.
- Improve the mainland road connections and sea crossings to the Western Isles.
- Improve Moray's road connections to the Inverness Perth corridor.

On the **regional network** we have identified priorities for investment in:

- Orkney inter-isle network of ferries and air services.
- Connections to the Argyll islands from the mainland
- The Western Isles spinal route
- Road improvement on Mull and between Oban and Loghgilphead.
- Road improvements to northwest Sutherland and Wester Ross from the inner Moray Firth growth area.
- Improvements to the Moray coastal roads.

The Action Programme

We have developed proposals to deliver these priorities using the Scottish Transport Appraisal Guidance tests. These proposals are contained in the action programme within the Proposed Delivery Plan which accompanies this Strategy.

Monitoring and review

The HITRANS Regional Transport Strategy is intended to be a live document, and needs to be reviewed and updated over its 15 year lifespan. HITRANS undertakes to prepare a monitoring strategy during the first year of the strategy which will inform Annual Progress Reports, with a full four-yearly review of the Strategy.

FIGURE 1 MAP OF THE HIGHLANDS AND ISLANDS TRANSPORT PARTNERSHIP AREA
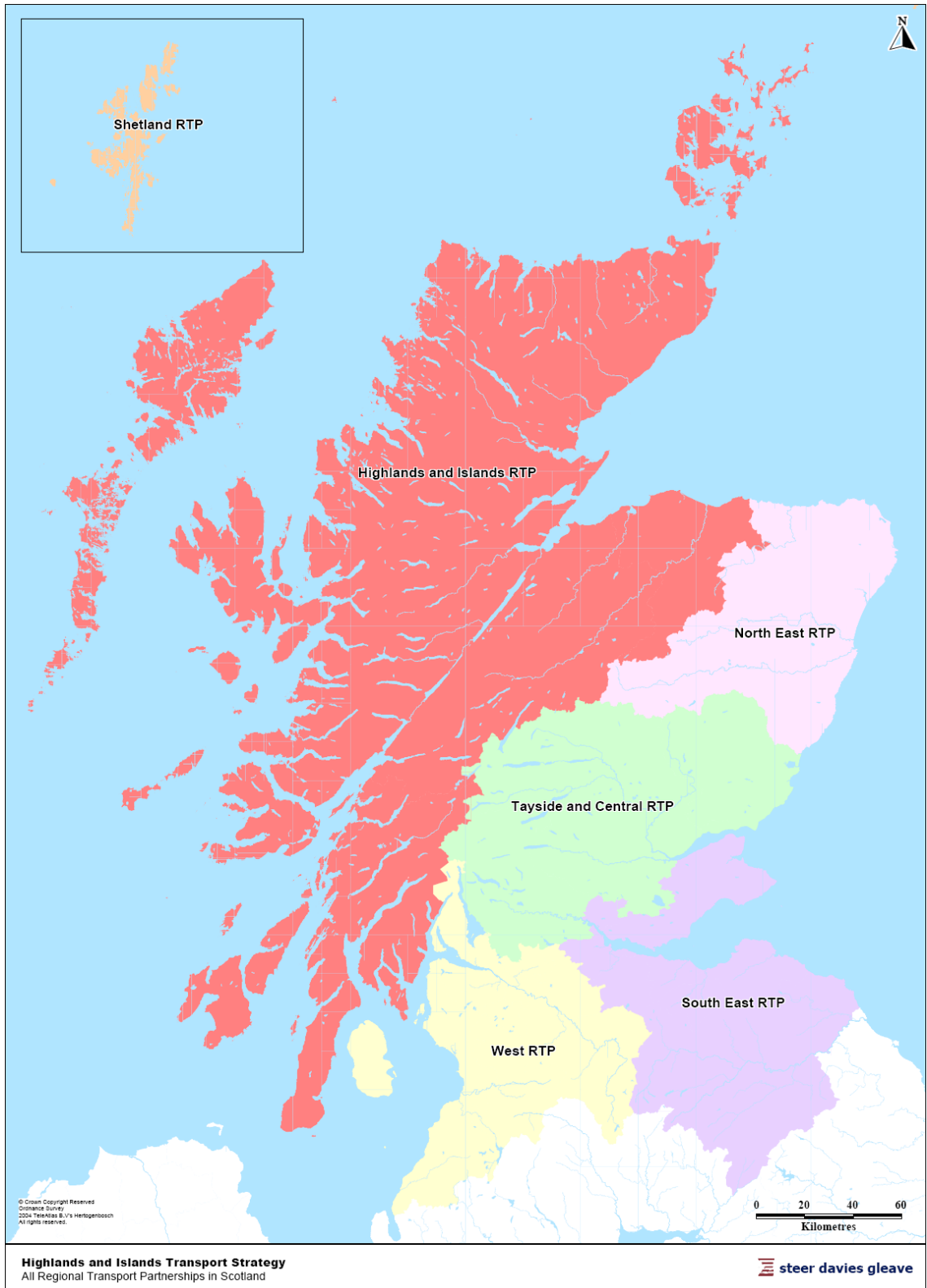
1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 The HITRANS statutory Regional Transport Partnership is tasked with preparing a strategy for the region. Indeed preparing, and maintaining, this Regional Transport Strategy is one of the Partnership's key functions. The Regional Transport Strategy (known here simply as 'the Strategy') identifies common issues, builds consensus on the ways to tackle these issues, and sets out the priorities for future investment in the region. The Strategy is therefore a framework against which policy initiatives and projects can be developed by all partners across the region and beyond the region.

1.2 The Strategy also seeks to promote the region's strategic priorities as policy develops at the national and local levels. Transport is vital to everyday life in the Highlands and Islands and enables economic development and social inclusion. Continued investment in the region's infrastructure and services will allow the region to make a full and effective contribution to national economic life. In particular, this will support the development of key and emerging sectors, such as renewable energy, tourism, food and drink and the knowledge economy. It will also enhance the region's place competitiveness by helping to attract and retain people with skills, through making it a better place in which to live and work.

The HITRANS Regional Transport Partnership

1.3 Regional Transport Partnerships came into being on 1st December 2005. HITRANS is the transport partnership for the Highlands and Islands of Scotland (excluding Shetland and Arran) and its first task was to draw up and submit a completed transport strategy for the region by April 2007. The Strategy will be the framework for investment in strategic transport infrastructure, services and demand management measures. This document constitutes that Strategy.

1.4 The partnership comprises eight members: one councillor from each of the five local authorities (Argyll and Bute, Highland, Moray, Orkney Islands and Comhairle nan Eilean Siar) and three other appointed members.

Previous HITRANS Strategy

1.5 The previous HITRANS strategy, was conceived by the voluntary partnership which preceded the current RTP [1]. The strategy contained a vision for a regional transport system which:

- Enables the optimum growth of the regional economy through a network which secures the efficient import and export of products; facilitates internal and external business travel; and encourages growth in tourism.
- Provides cost effective access to all regional transport services in pursuit of social inclusion.
- Is safe to use and operate.

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[1] A Regional Transport Strategy for the Highlands and Islands, November 2002.
http://www.hitrans.org.uk/downloads/Regional%20Transport%20Strategy.pdf

- Is sustainable and has minimal practical impact on the environment.

1.6   During the preparation of this Strategy, a review of the previous strategy was undertaken and consultation was undertaken with key stakeholders. The review of the 2002 strategy found that many of the priority strategic projects programmed for 2003-06 were expected to be substantially completed during the current Highlands and Islands Special Transition Programme, while a small number of significant others would not start under the current programme. However, it became clear that the issues of **cost**, **economic prosperity**, **safety** and **sustainability**, included in the original vision remain relevant today. The new Strategy therefore retains these ideals as its key foci.

1.7   Through consultation with HITRANS member bodies and other bodies across the region, the review identified the strengths of the Strategy as follows:

- Leverage of funding from the Public Transport Fund, leading to significant investment in public transport infrastructure [2].
- Assistance in lobbying for region interests.
- Facilitation of partnership working at a regional level.
- Prioritisation of projects at a regional level, which has supported individual project funding bids.
- Facilitation of research on cross-boundary issues.

1.8   Meanwhile the identified weaknesses of the previous Strategy included:

- Low awareness of the strategy, particularly amongst transport operators.
- Inadequate coverage of some issues such as concessionary fares, rail, accessibility and environmental sustainability.
- A lack of focus in the delivery mechanisms.
- Perceived as a political 'wish list' of projects.
- Lack of monitoring framework.

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[2]   The Public Transport Fund was set up in March 1999, and has now allocated £235 million to help deliver over 100 local projects across Scotland. The Public Transport Fund has provided for all aspects of public transport – rail, bus, ferry, air, as well as measures to help disabled people and improve facilities for walking and cycling. The fifth and final round of Public Transport Fund awards was made in November 2002.

1.9 The 2002 Strategy has clearly played a role in supporting the case for and delivery of certain projects, which have referred to the Strategy in their business case. Furthermore, it has strongly influenced the Public Transport Fund expenditure in the region, which has been guided by a set of Public Transport Fund investment themes developed from the 2002 Strategy. Thus, delivery in the field of public and sustainable transport has been achieved on the ground across the region using this set of funding.

Supporting documentation

1.10 This Strategy document should be read in conjunction with a number of supporting documents, as follows:

- **Proposed Delivery Plan**, which presents a proposed programme for delivery over the period of the Strategy, that is 2008 to 2022.
- **Network Option Development and Assessment Report**
- **Strategic Environmental Assessment Environmental Report**
- **Consultation Report**
- **Outline Equality Impact Assessment –** under the Transport (Scotland Act) 2005, Regional Transport Partnerships have a duty to encourage equal opportunities with regards their role to improve, develop, provide and operate transport. An Outline Equality Impact Assessment of the Strategy has been carried out, and accompanies this Strategy.
- **Supporting Monitoring Information – Technical Note**

2.   CONTEXT FOR THE HITRANS REGIONAL TRANSPORT STRATEGY

2.1   The development of the Strategy has been steered by the overall vision of the Partnership, has followed guidance from the Scottish Executive, and has been informed by a number of key plans and policies, particularly those relating to national transport objectives, and those relating to health, social inclusion, economic development, sustainable development and land use planning at the regional and local levels. The final Strategy is the result of extensive consultation, including a period of public consultation from November 2006 to February 2007.

2.2   During the preparation of the Regional Transport Strategy, key policy documents in all of these areas were reviewed, and their objectives and priorities have fed into the Strategy. This review is presented in an accompanying report [3], and it helped to scope the key issues to be faced by the region over the Strategy's lifespan, and beyond.

2.3   The main points of this updated review are presented below, to illustrate the wide range of issues that have both informed the Regional Transport Strategy, and which the Strategy must take into account over the next 15 years. Transport does not stand alone – it is inextricably linked to the objectives of many other sectors, and affects everyone in their daily lives. Moreover, achieving improvements to our transport system requires effective partnership working.

Hierarchy of transport objectives

2.4   The Regional Transport Strategy sits within a hierarchy of transport policies and programmes, as follows:

- European Transport Policy White Paper.
- National Transport Strategy for Scotland.
- HITRANS Regional Transport Strategy.
- Local Transport Strategies, prepared by HITRANS' constituent local authorities.
- Informal area-wide transport policies.

2.5   The Regional Transport Strategy provides a framework for the transport activities of constituent councils, health boards and others. It acknowledges that delivery of the Strategy objectives and policies are dependent upon partnership working with a wide range of bodies and funders, as the many areas of the Strategy relate to issues that will remain outside the Partnership's direct responsibility.

2.6   In addition, each local authority within the region is at different stage in developing a new Local Transport Strategy. The Guidance on preparing Local Transport Strategies states that they should cover a three-year period, whilst recognising that many transport projects will extend beyond this period. Progress on developing these strategies is mixed across Scotland and the region, and HITRANS will continue to work with local authorities to work towards common goals and objectives.

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[3] Review of the Highlands and Islands Regional Transport Strategy_final report, October 2005, HITRANS

2.7   Moreover, Regional Transport Strategies are a statutory requirement, and will be binding on constituent authorities. Local Transport Strategies therefore need to be consistent with the objectives of the regional strategy.

2.8   Across the region, there are a number of sub-regional transport aspirations, expressed by communities in various forms. One example is the Caithness Transport Vision[4], which brings together aspirations for an improved transport network across the Caithness area, including improved road and rail connections. There are specific transport infrastructure aspirations for the Inner Moray Firth, to support its substantial growth in development in recent and future years.

2.9   A wider partnership programme exists to promote a sustainable future for the most economically and socially fragile areas across the region, *Initiatives at the edge* [5]. A partnership of communities, local authorities and various agencies, it has existed since 1998 and represents the Isles of Jura, Coll, Eday, Sanday, Barra and Caithness Southeast, amongst others.

2.10   These tiers of policy are discussed in more detail below, together with a range of cross-sector policies of relevance to the far-reaching nature of the HITRANS Regional Transport Strategy.

European policy context

2.11   The European Commission in their 2001 Transport Paper [6] and the mid term review [7]. set out policy guidelines and priorities for transport across Europe. The objectives for transport policy at the European level are to help provide Europeans with efficient, effective transportation systems that:

- Offer a high level of **mobility** to people and businesses throughout the Union.
- **Protect** the environment, ensure energy security, promote minimum labour standards.
- **Innovate** in support of the first two aims of mobility and protection by increasing the efficiency and sustainability of the growing transport sector.
- **Connect internationally**, projecting the Union's policies to reinforce sustainable mobility, protection and innovation, by participating in international organisations.

2.12   The mid-term Review identifies the following key themes:

- Sustainable mobility in the internal market – connecting Europeans.
- Sustainable mobility for the citizen – reliable, safe and secure transport.

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[4] Caithness Transport Vision, Caithness Transport Forum, 2006

[5] http://www.initiative-at-the-edge.org.uk/

[6] European transport policy for 2010: time to decide, European Commission, 2001, http://ec.europa.eu/transport/white_paper/index_en.htm

[7] Mid-term review of the 2001 Transport White Paper "Keep Europe moving", European Commission, 2006, http://ec.europa.eu/transport/transport_policy_review/index_en.htm

- Transport and energy.
- Optimising infrastructure.
- Intelligent mobility.
- The global dimension.

2.13   Of particular relevance to the HITRANS context is the issue of optimising infrastructure. The White Paper mid-term review promotes investment in new or improve intelligent infrastructure to eliminate bottlenecks, to enable co-modal transport solutions as well as connecting peripheral and outermost regions with the mainland. Eliminating bottlenecks is particularly critical for many parts of the region where sub-standard sections of road still exist on long sections of high quality two track single carriageway, or where congestion exists within urban areas.

2.14   Other key areas of emphasis within the White Paper mid-term review which are relevant to the HITRANS context are (references to sections in the White Paper given):

- Promote rail freight (section 3.1).
- Reducing negative environmental effects of a rapid growth in air travel whilst maintaining the competitiveness of the sector (section 3.2).
- Further develop maritime policy, including short sea shipping (section 3.3).
- Safety for transport users (section 4.3).
- Promote energy efficiency and promote new technologies to reduce the impacts of transport on the environment (section 5).

2.15   ROADEX is a European initiative involving the Scandinavian countries of Finland, Sweden, Norway, Iceland and Greenland as well as the local authorities of Highland Council and Comhairle nan Eilean in Scotland[8]. ROADEX was formed to share knowledge and carry out research on the roads, transport and freight movements in remote rural communities. The ROADEX initiative is now in its third cycle. One of the research projects is looking at the sustainability of rural communities and the problems of declining populations. Declining populations in remote areas is a common problem throughout northern Europe and the impact of transport on these areas is being analysed. The HITRANS area has a number of fragile areas with lifeline transport services and the outcomes of the ROADEX research will be of benefit within the Regional Transport Strategy context as well as to local strategies across the Highlands and Islands. When completed this research will be able to provide a package of transport measures which will hopefully reverse the trend declining populations in fragile communities.

Achieving National Transport Objectives

2.16   The development of the new Strategy is in keeping with the *Transport (Scotland) Act 2005*, which calls for the strategy to:

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[8] www.roadex.org

> '*plan how transport in the region will be provided, developed, improved and operated so as to*:
>
> - *Enhance social and economic well-being.*
> - *Promote public safety, including road safety and the safety of users of public transport.*
> - *Be consistent with the principle of sustainable development and to conserve and enhance the environment.*
> - *Promote social inclusion.*
> - *Encourage equal opportunities and, in particular, the observance of the equal opportunities requirements.*
> - *Facilitate access to hospitals, clinics, surgeries and other places where a health service is provided.*
> - *Integrate with transport elsewhere.*' [9]

2.17   The Transport (Scotland) Act 2005 also calls for each Regional Transport Strategy to:

- Make provision in respect to how transport in the region needs to be provided, developed or improved, having regard to, among other things, future needs including those occasioned by demographic and land use changes; and what can be done, taking account of cost, funding and practicability.
- Provide an order of priority in which different elements of the provision, development and improvement of transport should be undertaken.
- Measure and monitor the achievement of the Strategy.

2.18   The *National Transport Strategy*, published in November 2006, provides national policy context and direction on how transport delivery contributes to the achievement of other national objectives, for example, on economic growth, climate change and social inclusion. The National Transport Strategy presents three key strategic outcomes that must be focused on to achieve the national vision and objectives for transport in Scotland. These three outcomes are:

- Improve journey times and connections, to tackle congestion and the lack of integration and connections in transport which impact on our high level objectives for economic growth, social inclusion, integration and safety.
- Reduce emissions, to tackle the issues of climate change, air quality and health improvement which impact on our high level objective for protecting the environment and improving health.
- Improve quality, accessibility and affordability, to give people a choice of public transport, where availability means better quality transport services and value for money or an alternative to the car.

2.19   The Strategy is intended to contribute to the overall vision, aim and objectives for transport in Scotland, as set out in the white paper *Scotland's Transport Future* of June 2004, and confirmed in the National Transport Strategy. This vision is:

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[9]   Transport (Scotland) Act 2005. Available at:

http://www.opsi.gov.uk/legislation/scotland/acts2005/20050012.htm

> *'an accessible Scotland with safe, integrated and reliable transport that support economic growth, provides opportunities for all and is easy to use; a transport system that meets everyone's needs, respects our environment and contributes to health; services recognised internationally for quality, technology and innovation, and for effective and well-maintained networks; a culture where fewer short journeys are made by car, where we favour public transport, walking and cycling because they are safe and sustainable, where transport providers and planners respond to the changing needs of businesses, communities and users, and where one ticket will get you anywhere.'* [10]

2.20   The five high level objectives for transport in Scotland are:

- Promote economic growth by building, enhancing, managing and maintaining transport services, infrastructure and networks to maximise their efficiency.

- Promote social inclusion by connecting remote and disadvantaged communities and increasing the accessibility of the transport network.

- Protect our environment and improve health by building and investing in public transport and other types of efficient and sustainable transport which minimise emissions and consumption of resources and energy.

- Improve safety of journeys by reducing accidents and enhancing the personal safety of pedestrians, drivers, passengers and staff.

- Improve integration by making journey planning and ticketing easier and working to ensure smooth connection between different forms of transport.

2.21   The objectives of the Highlands and Islands Regional Transport Strategy are consistent with these national objectives, as demonstrated in Table 4.2.

Furthering economic development goals

2.22   The HITRANS Strategy has also been developed to contribute towards Ministers' wider policy goals including their top priority of growing the Scottish economy, an issue which is particularly relevant in the Highlands and Islands context.

2.23   At the regional level, the Enterprise strategy for the Highlands and Islands, *A Smart, Successful Highlands and Islands* [11] presents an overall aim of enabling people living in the Highlands and Islands to realise their full potential on a long-term sustainable basis. This aim is supported by the Regional Transport Strategy, and has informed the overarching vision of **enhancing the viability of the region**.

2.24   Sub-regional economic and community development strategies set out local issues and priorities which the Regional Transport Strategy has to be aware of. For example, the Western Isles Community Planning Strategy: *Creating Communities for the Future,* recognises that transport has a role to play in the vision to revitalise the islands and to

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[10]   Scotland's Transport Future: the transport white paper, June 2004, Scottish Executive.
http://www.scotland.gov.uk/library5/transport/stfwp-00.asp

[11] Smart, Successful Highlands and Islands, An enterprise strategy for the Highlands and Islands of Scotland, HIE, June 2005, http://www.hie.co.uk/HIE-HIE-corporate-documents-2005-06/a-smart-successful-handi-english.pdf

transform the Western Isles into a net contributor to the Scottish Economy [12]. *Moray 2020* [13], the strategy for the diversification of the Moray economy, recognises the:

> *"need to transform the infrastructure of the area in terms of transport links…to enhance our appeal as a location for inward investment, government dispersals and growing business." [14]*

2.25 The strategy reports that the inadequacies of transport infrastructure in the area compound the relatively remote geographic position of Moray, and that this is the most all-pervading structural limitation on Moray's prosperity. The *Community Plan for the Highlands* [15] calls for infrastructure investment in transport as an essential requirement to attract higher levels of in-migration and to retain the resident population, by maintaining and underpinning the region's economy (and its quality of life) [16]. The *Argyll & Bute Community Planning Partnership Detailed Action Plan* calls for transportation and accessibility needs to be addressed through the development of an integrated transportation network [17]. The *Orkney Community Plan* focuses on three principles of survival, sustainability and equity. In terms of transport, the aim is to facilitate:

> *"…an effective and efficient transportation network that supports the economic vitality, community wellbeing and environmental integrity of all of Orkney." [18]*

2.26 At a sub-regional level, there are aspirations for local economic and community development. Examples of these include the Sutherland partnership, a Community Planning Partnership, which exists to promote further community development across Sutherland. *A Strategy for Sutherland* [19] contains an overarching aim for the area – "positively influencing population change in Sutherland to achieve, over time, a vibrant, viable and revitalised population that enjoys a high quality of life".

2.27 Tourism has a vital role to play in economic development across the HITRANS area. The Highland Area Tourism Partnership has prepared a Highland Tourism Strategy and related Action Plan [20], which aims to grow the value of tourism by 4% annually. One billion pounds is already generated annually in the Highlands and Islands from tourism, a sector which accounts for 13.5% of employment (excluding self-

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[12]   *Creating Communities for the Future:* www.cne-siar.gov.uk/ccof/index.htm

[13]   Moray 2020: Strategy for diversification of the economy of Moray following restructuring of the RAF bases at Kinloss and Lossiemouth, http://www.hie.co.uk/MBSE/9577-EXECUTIVE-SUMMARY.pdf

[14]   *Moray 2020: Strategy for the diversification of the economy of Moray following restructuring of the RAF bases at Kinloss and Lossiemouth:* http://www.moraycommunity.org.uk/documents/Moray_2020.pdf

[15]   *Community Plan for Highland 2004/07:* http://www.highland.gov.uk/cx/pdf/cp-highland.pdf

[16]   As well as Community Infrastructure, Housing, Public Utilities, Telecommunications and Waste Management Facilities.

[17]   *Argyll and Bute Community Planning Partnership Detailed Action Plan Summer 2002: http://www.argyll-bute.gov.uk/complan/pdf/Detailed_action_plan.pdf*

[18]   *Orkney 2020: Our Community Plan 2007, February 2007, :* http://www.orkney.gov.uk/nqcontent.cfm?a_id=6688&tt=orkneyv2

[19]   A Strategy for Sutherland 2005-2009, Sutherland Partnership

[20]   Highland Tourism Strategy, Highland Area Tourism Partnership, 2006

employment) across the region. The majority of the tourism market is domestic – in 2005, 86% of visitors to Scotland (overnight stays) were from the UK, of which 45% were from Scotland. Ensuring the transport system can support this growing industry is vital.

Land use planning and the Strategy

2.28   The development of the Strategy has been informed strongly by development plans in each local authority area, as well as ensuring it is consistent with the key aims of the National Planning Framework.

2.29   Published in 2004, and the first of its kind in Scotland, the National Planning Framework sets out a framework to guide the spatial development of Scotland to 2025, with a vision of Scotland to which other plans and programmes are expected to contribute [21].

2.30   The key aims of the Framework for Scotland's spatial development to 2025, which are consistent within the objectives of the Regional Transport Strategy are:

- To increase economic growth and competitiveness.
- To promote social and environmental justice.
- To promote sustainable development and protect and enhance the quality of natural and built environments.

2.31   A key theme of the strategy is "a better transport system" which is viewed to be necessary to achieve the aims of the National Planning Framework. Within this, emphasis is placed on developing external links to and from Scotland, improving connectivity particularly through improving journey times, and promoting sustainable transport modes, particularly through the land use planning system. The Framework accepts that many parts of the Highlands and Islands will continue to depend heavily on road transport in the drive to improve connectivity.

2.32   These principles have informed the development of the Regional Transport Strategy, particularly the need to improve connectivity, which forms the key delivery objective of the Strategy (see Figure 4-1), and against which Strategy measures have been tested. The National Planning Framework identifies key transport corridors, with which this Strategy is consistent [22].

2.33   During preparatory work for the development of the statutory Regional Transport Strategy, structure plans covering the region were reviewed to assess aims, areas and issues of priority, and future demand which may be placed on the transport system from new development. The hierarchy of settlements and transport network contained within this Regional Transport Strategy has been directly informed by development plans across the region, and future demand has been considered in the assessment of

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[21] National Planning Framework for Scotland: Guidance for the spatial development of Scotland to 2025, 2004, http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2004/04/19170/35317

[22] Map 22 of the National Planning Framework, ibid

the adequacy of the network, discussed further in Section 4.

2.34   Furthermore, the Cairngorms National Park Authority covers part of the region, and has a statutory National Park Plan which sets out its priorities for 2007 to 2012, as well as setting a longer term vision for the Park area over a 25 year period[23]. Amongst the Plan's strategic objectives is ensuring that new development and infrastructure is "designed to complement and enhance the landscape character of its setting". The National Park Authority shares statutory planning functions with the four local authorities within the Park boundary, and is responsible for preparing Local Plans for the Park, as well as determining planning applications of significance to the Park. In addition, the Cairngorms National Park Authority has a role in transport provision. As an example, it part-funds the "Heather Hopper", an innovative cross-Park bus service.

The Strategy's links to health

2.35   A review of key health priorities was carried out in the development of the Regional Transport Strategy, and consultation has been carried out with representatives of the North of Scotland NHS Planning Group and individual health boards.

2.36   Some of the key challenges for the Regional Transport Strategy from the health sector over the next fifteen years are likely to include:

- A changing view of the NHS towards a service delivered predominantly in local communities rather than in hospitals.
- Preventative, anticipatory care rather than reactive management – with this comes an emphasis on measures to promote health improvement, such as increased physical activity, to which greater levels of active travel can contribute.
- Implications from the Scottish Ambulance Service Health Plan and Delivery Plan 2007-2010[24] which proposes to further tailor and prioritise Patient Transport Services, the non-emergency element of the service, to target those most in need, and work with local authorities and voluntary agencies for health and social care transport [25].

2.37   The HITRANS Regional Transport Strategy is responding to these challenges, by working towards a transport network and infrastructure that is fit for purpose, improving passenger transport across the region, developing policies to promote community and health transport, and promoting active travel (see Section 4 of this Strategy and the Horizontal Sub-Strategy detail presented in the Proposed Delivery Plan which accompanies this strategy).

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[23] National Park Plan, Cairngorms National Park Authority, 2007

[24] The Scottish Ambulance Service Board Health Plan 2007/08 to 2009/10, incorporating Delivery Plan 2007/08 to 2009/10; and Development Programme, FIFTH VERSION
http://www.scottishambulance.com/docs/Health_Plans/HlthPlanDec-Jan.pdf

[25]   Building a Health Service Fit for the Future, Scottish Executive, June 2005
http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2005/05/23141307/13104

Sustainable development and climate change

2.38   A Strategic Environmental Assessment has been carried out of the HITRANS Regional Transport Strategy, as required by the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes (Scotland) Regulations 2004. This process has ensured that the strategic environmental impacts of the Strategy have been considered at every stage of planning, and mitigation measures have been put in place to minimise any negative environmental impacts arising from the Strategy. Indeed, an objective of the RTS is to *manage the impacts of travel on the region's natural assets* (see Figure 4-1). Furthermore, a specific horizontal sub-strategy on environmental impacts has been developed in response to consultation on the draft Strategy.

2.39   It is clear that the drive towards sustainable development and the requirements to respond to climate change present a significant challenge to all public policy makers. Scotland's Sustainable Development Strategy *Choosing our future*, signs up to the UK's Shared Framework for Sustainable Development, and sets the principles by which this will be adopted in Scotland. The Strategy recognises that the ability to travel is essential to maintaining a good quality of life and in helping communities to thrive, but at the same time, that it puts significant pressure on natural resources and impacts significantly on the environment. More sustainable travel choices, such as cycling and walking are recognised as bringing major health as well as environmental benefits.

2.40   In response to the climate change challenge, the Scottish Executive has published a Changing our Ways: Scotland's Climate Change Programme [26]. Scotland has set a target of exceeding the Scottish Share of carbon savings (1.7megatonnes of carbon) by 1million by 2010. In 2003, the transport sector was the second biggest contributor Greenhouse Gas emission, at 17%. The transport sector is also a major consumer of energy, the second largest after the residential sector. The need to reduce emissions is reflected in the National Transport Strategy's strategic outcome of reducing emissions.

2.41   Other key mechanisms for reducing transport's impact on climate change, as proposed in the Climate Change Programme, are:

- Working towards the inclusion of aviation and surface transport emissions in the EU Emissions Trading Scheme.
- Working towards a target of 5% biofuels of all UK fuel sold.
- Promoting new and cleaner vehicle technologies and fuels.
- Travel Plan officers in Regional Transport Partnerships, and support for travel behaviour change and modal shift to more sustainable modes.

2.42   The HITRANS Regional Transport Strategy supports initiatives to promote travel behaviour change and modal shift in urban areas, in particular through our passenger transport, urban congestion and active travel sub-strategies, as reported in Section 5. We will develop further policies on sustainable fuel throughout the review process of the Strategy, as technologies in this field develop and become more applicable to the

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[26] Changing our ways: Scotland's Climate Change Programme, March 2006

Highlands and Islands context. A set of policies on mitigating and reducing environmental impacts is contained within the horizontal sub-strategy on environmental impacts (Section 4 of this Strategy and the accompanying Proposed Delivery Plan for further detail).

2.43   In reality however, the Strategy is unlikely to achieve a net reduction in emissions in its lifetime, given the need to promote travel across the region to deliver our objective of improving interconnectivity (see Section 4). To mitigate impacts from a likely net increase in carbon emissions related to transport, HITRANS will work with partners to promote the development of alternative fuel technologies in the region, and will seek to promote off-setting of emissions by the region's developing renewable energy sector. HITRANS takes its duty to combat climate change seriously, and it is a longer term aspiration to seek to reduce emissions with the use of technology with regards transport, an increase in ICT (Information and Communication Technology) and mobile services, more environmentally sustainable land use planning decisions, and modal shift to sustainable modes for business and community travel where feasible (noting the latter will require significant investment, in for example rail freight).

Partnership working with other Regional Transport Partnerships

2.44   The Chairs of the seven Regional Transport Partnerships and the lead officers meet regularly to discuss the development of their Regional Transport Strategies. Cross boundary issues form part of these discussions. HITRANS and NESTRANS (North East Scotland) are working jointly with Transport Scotland on the Aberdeen to Inverness Transport Corridor Study which will feed into the Strategic Transport Projects Review. HITRANS, NESTRANS, SPT (West of Scotland) and the Shetland Partnership have jointly commissioned work on ferry traffic and marine bulk freight. HITRANS, NESTRANS and TACTRANs are co-operating to secure train time improvements on the services into Edinburgh from the north. Where this Strategy identifies interventions outwith the HITRANS boundary, for example the A82 south of Tyndrum, the neighbouring Regional Transport Partnership is aware and has included similar action in its own Regional Transport Strategy.

Partnership working with key players

2.45   As is evident from this review of policy priorities, the delivery of HITRANS objectives will not be achieved by only working with local authority transport departments, other Regional Transport Partnerships, and the Scottish Executive / Transport Scotland. Delivery of the Regional Transport Strategy will require strong partnership working with other key stakeholders, including bodies involved in the delivery of transport and related infrastructure across the region (such as First Scotrail, Loganair, Highlands and Islands Enterprise Limited, TranServe, bus and coach operators, Network Rail, freight operators, community transport operators), bodies with a remit in road safety (local authorities and Police Forces across the region), bodies involved in economic development and sustainable development across the region (Highlands and Islands Enterprise, Scottish Natural Heritage, Scottish Environmental Protection Agency, Historic Scotland, National Park Authorities), and organisations committed to health improvement and social inclusion (such as Community Planning Partnerships, Health Boards). This list is not exhaustive.

2.46 Moreover, it is vital that the Regional Transport Strategy policy objectives become part of the wider policy making processes across local authority departments, and does not remain vested purely within transport policy – land use planning officers (both in terms of strategic planning and development management) are key to the delivery of the Strategy, as are health improvement officers, School Travel Plan Coordinators, Road Safety Officers, Outdoor Access Officers, amongst others.

What do we expect the Regional Transport Strategy to do?

2.47 The Regional Transport Strategy contains strategies and interventions for the short, medium and long term and provides a framework for the transport activities of local authorities and others.

2.48 The Strategy makes proposals for improvements to services and infrastructure provided by others, including the Scottish Executive and Transport Scotland, where these have a regional impact. The full implementation of the Strategy will require additional funding or other action to be taken by the Scottish Ministers. The Partnership will use the Strategy to make the case to the Scottish Ministers for the inclusion of such proposals in forward investment plans.

2.49 The vehicle for doing this will be the Strategic Transport Projects Review, which will be carried out for the first time between 2006 and 2008 [27]. This Regional Transport Strategy will be the region's main input to that review process.

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[27] Transport Scotland is undertaking the Strategic Transport Projects Review, a major study to help shape Scotland's transport network from 2012 onwards. The Review represents the first opportunity to carry out a nationwide, multimodal evaluation of Scotland's key strategic transport network. The scope of this work has been enhanced by the devolution of additional rail powers to Transport Scotland by the Railways Act 2005. At its conclusion expected in summer 2008, the Review will recommend a programme of improvements for implementation between 2012 and 2022. This could include new infrastructure projects, better incentives for alternative travel and more carefully targeted investment across the country.
http://www.transportscotland.gov.uk/defaultpage1221cde0.aspx?pageID=253

3.   ISSUES

Introduction

3.1   The Strategy is based on a thorough understanding of the transport challenges faced by the region. In keeping with the Scottish Transport Appraisal Guidance, it is important that the Strategy is based on a detailed and, where practicable, quantified understanding of the transport problems, constraints and opportunities within the region. In particular it is essential to understand where established policies and objectives are not being achieved as a result of deficiencies within the transport system.

3.2   The Highlands and Islands is a very diverse region, with a mixture of rural and remote rural areas, as well as several key urban centres. A large proportion of the region and its households are located in the remote and rural areas, in the islands and the west and north mainland, with significant implications for access to services and jobs. On the other hand, significant population numbers reside in the region's more urban areas including in Inverness, Oban, Stornoway, Kirkwall and Elgin.

3.3   The region is also a distinctive one. The Highlands and Islands region is unlike any other part of the UK and its current provision of transport reflect this. It is different in terms of the provision of services or lack of services, and the community-led schemes which prevail in many of the remote rural areas. Services are slowly being withdrawn from many of the more remote parts of the Highlands and if populations continue to shrink, the remoteness and fragility of the communities will only increase.

3.4   Efforts are ongoing to reverse population decline across the region, and some areas are starting to see a turnaround in depopulation with the assistance of Initiative at the Edge for example. Transport plays a key role in helping to reverse this trend and will help in contributing to sustainable communities and a healthy economy. Transport services therefore need to be sustained and developed to serve the unique situation which prevails across the Highlands and Islands. As an example of the distinctive issues the region faces, significant diversions are often required when access on poor quality roads is interrupted due to failure of the infrastructure, accidents or indeed weather or flooding. This results in adding to the cost of travel or in extreme cases results in the cancellation of necessary journeys, making journeys unreliable for both communities and businesses.

3.5   The area covered by the HITRANS Partnership includes the most sparsely-populated area of the United Kingdom. The region comprises a huge area of land, with an indented coastline and mountainous topography. As a result, journeys tend to be slower in this region than elsewhere in the UK.

Issues

3.6   Increasingly, the need to facilitate and improve access to all manner of opportunities is being recognised, as are the social and personal costs of the lack of transport and access to these services. The specific transport needs of rural areas have long been documented:

> *"The well-being of individuals, families and rural communities depends on access to employment and to basic services and amenities. Transport is the main agent in enabling people to satisfy these needs."* [28]

3.7 This still remains true today, albeit referred to as 'social inclusion'. The ability of amenities, educational centres and businesses to go about their activities or provide services is highly dependent on the level and quality of access. Transport is therefore a critical issue for businesses in rural areas, enabling them to access goods and move products to market, and so enabling them to support the sustainability of rural communities.

3.8 The remainder of this section provides the context and rationale for the focus on these key issues to the region.

Baseline transport situation

3.9 At 66 to 79%, **car ownership** levels in rural areas have, for many years, been higher than those in urban areas (typically 51 to 64%). The proportion of households having one, two or three or more cars is also greater in rural than in urban areas. This raises a number of significant issues in rural areas:

- A lack of public transport opportunities means that car ownership can be more of a necessity than a luxury and can impose high financial costs on relatively low-income families, meaning that expenditure on other items has to be forgone.

- Higher levels of car ownership, combined with the relatively low densities of population and long distances between settlements, mean that it is more difficult and expensive to operate an effective public transport network. This perpetuates the accessibility problems, so that where services are available journeys due to the distances and higher costs are more expensive to the user.

- Fuel costs are higher in the region compared to elsewhere in the UK and this, combined with generally longer distances travelled, means that expenditure on travel is much higher than in urban areas.

- Higher car ownership is often used as a proxy for levels of affluence. However, given the necessity of a car, this is frequently inappropriate for the region.

3.10 The 2001 Census collected data on the means of transport to work and study. Across the region these data show high levels of dependence on the car, public transport and walking. The data also show high incidences of working from home in the most rural and remote areas of Scotland. The data are presented in Table 3.1 below.

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[28] Pacine M (1984) *Rural Geography* Harper & Row. Pp 281.

TABLE 3.1   MEANS OF TRAVEL TO WORK OR STUDY

	Work from home	Train	Bus, minibus, coach	Taxi, minicab	Car driver	Car passenger	Motorcycle	Bicycle	Walk	Other
Argyll & Bute	9%	4%	11%	1%	37%	11%	0%	1%	23%	2%
Eilean Siar	9%	1%	21%	1%	40%	13%	0%	1%	12%	2%
Highland	9%	1%	12%	1%	39%	11%	0%	3%	22%	1%
Moray	7%	2%	9%	1%	39%	11%	1%	4%	25%	2%
Orkney Islands	13%	0%	13%	0%	38%	10%	0%	2%	21%	3%
SCOTLAND	**6%**	**3%**	**16%**	**1%**	**39%**	**11%**	**0%**	**1%**	**22%**	**1%**

Source: Census 2001: Table UV40 Method of travel to work or study: resident population (Scotland)

3.11   The table shows that efficient access to employment opportunities, and all manner of other destinations, across the region for almost two-thirds of the region's working population is dependent upon an appropriate and efficient road network. Given that for many of those walking to work, the road network is also the main infrastructure for their journey, the road network arguably provides for almost 90% of all journeys to work across the region.

3.12   The region's **road network** comprises a mix of trunk and local roads (there are no motorways in the region). The management and maintenance of the trunk road network sits with Transport Scotland. The majority of the network is winding single carriageway roads, with limited passing places. This results in longer journey times, particularly in summer when traffic levels increase due to the volume of tourists visiting the region. The lack of suitable diversionary routes can be exacerbated by weather and topographical factors. Table 3.2 presents the public road lengths by local authority in April 2004.

TABLE 3.2   PUBLIC ROAD LENGTHS BY COUNCIL, 2004

	Trunk			Local Authority					Total
	Motorway	A Roads	Total	A Roads	B Roads	C Roads	Unclassified	Total	All roads
Argyll & Bute	-	231	**231**	549	619	431	709	**2,309**	**2,540**
Eilean Siar	-	-	**-**	333	182	174	502	**1,190**	**1,190**
Highland	-	980	**980**	1,389	979	1,437	2,846	**6,650**	**7,630**
Moray	-	97	**97**	157	291	366	693	**1,507**	**1,604**
Orkney Islands	-	-	**-**	161	205	160	452	**977**	**977**
Total		**1,308**	**1,308**	**2,589**	**2,276**	**2,568**	**5,202**	**12,633**	**13,941**

Source: Scottish Transport Statistics, No. 24, August 2005, Chapter 5, Table T5.2.

3.13   Table 3.2 illustrates the dominance of unclassified roads across the region, followed

by almost equal proportions of A, B and C classified roads. Figure 3-1 shows traffic levels on all roads in each local authority area between 1994 and 2004.

FIGURE 3-1   TRAFFIC LEVELS ON ALL ROADS, BY COUNCIL AREA
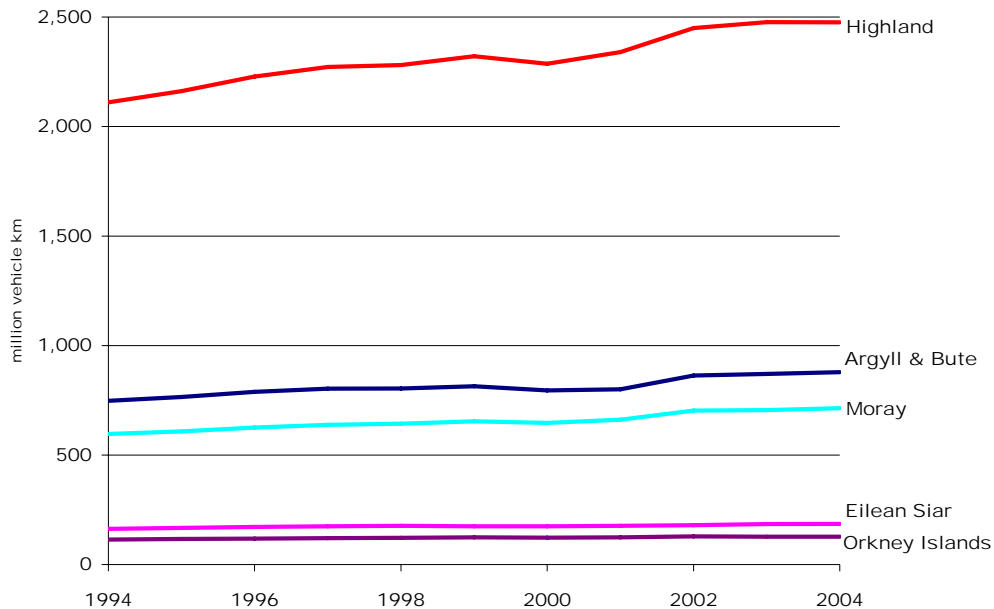
Source: Scottish Transport Statistics, No. 24, August 2005, Chapter 6, Table T6.5

3.14   Traffic volumes increase significantly in some areas during tourist season. For example, in 2004 the section of the A830 between Lochailort and Arisaig saw a 200% increase in traffic volumes in August compared to February of the same year.

3.15   **Bus services** throughout the Highlands and Islands may be sub-divided into separate categories as follows:

- Long Distance coaches (Express and frequent halt).
- Tourist coaches.
- Urban Services.
- Subsidised rural lifeline bus services.
- Education Services with public transport provision.
- Subsidised taxi services and Post Buses.
- Dial a Ride services.

3.16   Bus services carry by far the majority of public transport passengers. The long distance, tourist and urban services are in the main operated as commercial bus services and have a reasonable frequency throughout the day.

3.17   **Subsidised and lifeline bus services** make up a large proportion of the local bus network in the region. This is particularly the case across the Islands' networks. The remainder of the local bus network consists of commercial bus services, over which local authorities have limited influence. Many places are served by local services and the long distance coach routes, yet limited frequencies away from all but the main

routes severely limit opportunities for commuting and travelling to other time-sensitive destinations. Local transport services tend to consist of radial bus services out of the main built up areas, such as Inverness, Elgin, Oban, Fort William, Thurso, Kirkwall and Stornoway. The greater the distance these services are from built up areas the less the frequency, and many of these services will be at most hourly on six days per week. Furthermore, many places have only three or four buses per day and some of the more remote areas have only a daily Postbus or school bus. In the most remote areas, bus services tend to consist of a morning service and an afternoon service, perhaps with the addition of a shopping run in the middle of the day, none of which tend to be suitable for commuting.

3.18   Some areas which are classified as having buses have only a school service which is made available to the public as a public service vehicle. This service does not therefore suit shoppers or commuters to work, nor does it operate during school holidays or weekends. There is also a potential for generating efficiency in school/public transport by staggering school start and finish times, to enable one bus to be utilised for several schools, as already happens in the Western Isles and Orkney.

3.19   Research has highlighted the issue of poor public transport in remote rural areas. This poor transport leads to fragile communities with declining populations, difficult access to services, shopping and work. In these cases the elderly and younger element of the communities are isolated, forcing migration to centres of population. It is recognised that transport is an important element in sustaining rural communities and preventing a downward spiral of decline in terms of the economy and unemployment. Bus services in rural areas are recognized as lifeline services and for many are the only link with the rest of their community and the principal population centres where essential services are provided.

3.20   Provision for people with disabilities is limited. Many older, less accessible buses remain in use, particularly in the more rural areas, and few bus stops are designed for easy accessibility. Access to bus stops, especially but not only in rural areas, is often not easy for people with limited mobility.

3.21   Inverness is the hub of the region's **rail network**, with the north-south route (Thurso/Wick to Glasgow/Edinburgh) and east-west route (Aberdeen to Kyle of Lochalsh) passing through the city. Traditional long distance trains are now overlaid with Invernet services providing higher frequency links into Inverness from Lairg and Kingussie. The West Highland Lines run from Glasgow to Mallaig via Fort William and to Oban via Crianlarich.

3.22   Considering the high car ownership levels, it is not unexpected that the car is the main means of travel for the journey to work. Many of the region's areas have levels of more than 50% of such journeys by car. Most notably, in almost all of South Uist and Barra over 70% of journeys to work are by car. Areas with the lowest levels of car use for journeys to work are in the north of Highland, in the southwest of Moray and across Argyll & Bute.

3.23   The highest proportions of public transport use for the journey to work are in the northeast of Highland, around Caithness and Wick (10-30%)[29], across significant parts of Western Isles, including Stornoway with 30%+ , and some parts of Orkney - South Ronaldsay (25%) and Evie, Rendell and the isles of Rousay, Egilsay and Wyre (25%). These data compare with the Scottish averages, of 15% of adults travel to work/education by bus and 3% travel by rail [30].

3.24   **Lifeline ferry services** also make up an important part of the Highlands and Islands transport network and both mainland to island and inter-island services provide lifeline links for the populations of the islands and peninsulas. There is marked increase in network coverage and the frequency of sailings during the summer months to cope with the tourist trade. Communities benefit from increased summer schedules buoyed by tourist demand, but this then leaves deficiencies in service in the winter periods. There is poor integration, in terms of information, ticketing and timetabling, with other public transport [31].

3.25   The cost of providing the Caledonian MacBrayne and Northlink services is substantial. The resulting high fares on some routes can act as a disincentive to travel. The fare structure charged across the overall network is extremely variable, even for journeys of a comparable distance. On this basis, there seems to be scant economic rationale for for the fare levels set across the region. Services are sometimes based around operational needs rather than those of the markets they serve, and whilst incremental improvements have been made over the years, the frequency on some routes remains poor, sometimes less than daily.

3.26   **Lifeline air services** in the Highlands and Islands are a crucial part of the transport network. The network is comprised of a combination of commercial and subsidised services (supported by Public Service Obligation), serving both internal routes and destinations external to the region. In 2001, the network of scheduled air services linking the ten airports of the Highlands and Islands to the Scottish Mainland cost £22.4 million to operate 'empty', before allowing for the marginal costs of carrying the current level of 383,000 passengers a year. At the same time, there is a general consensus that fare levels on these routes are very high compared to other domestic routes and that they are holding back the economic and social development of Scotland's peripheral regions. Growth of air traffic in the Highlands and Islands has been moderate for a few years while traffic to and from Central Scotland airports has continued to grow apace.

3.27   Figure 3.2 shows terminal passengers by airport between 1994 and 2004.

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29   This reflects the number of services that are provided to connect staff at shift start and end times to Dounreay.

30   Scotland's People: Results from the 2001/02 Scottish Household Survey (Table 5.20).

31   A report for HITRANS: *Strategic Sea Crossings in the Highlands and Islands: Development Opportunities (2005-2025),* November 2005. Prepared by Fisher Associates.

FIGURE 3-2   SUMMARY OF AIR TRANSPORT
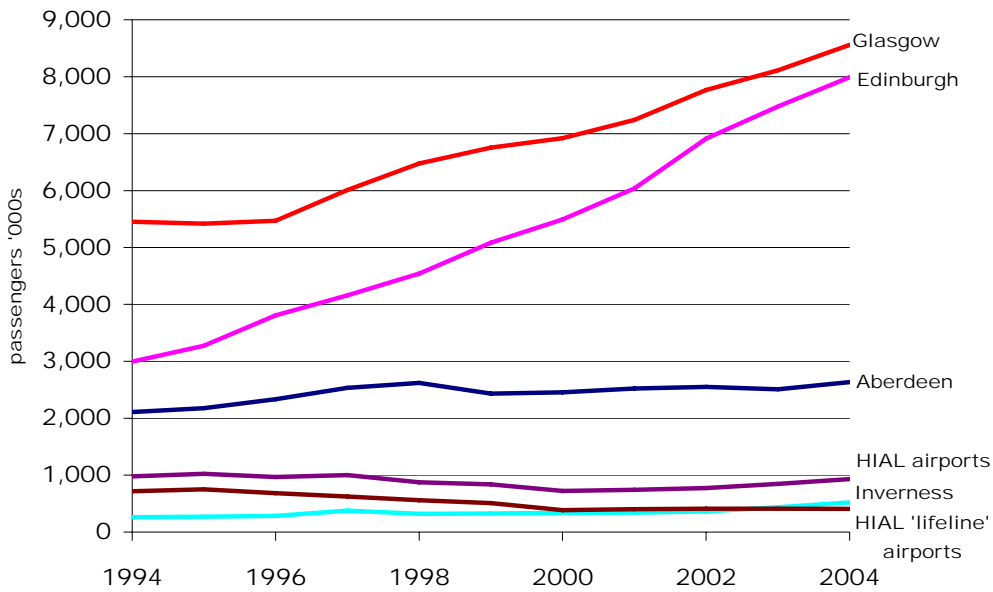
3.28   In February 2006 the Scottish Government announced plans to employ the Aid of Social Character scheme to allow public sector support to reduce air fares in remote and peripheral regions on approval from the European Commission. The Air Discount Scheme enables residents of Shetland, Orkney, Western Isles, Islay, Jura, Caithness and North-West Sutherland to access a 40% discount on air fares to Inverness, Glasgow, Edinburgh, Aberdeen and local airports in the region. The Scheme is intended to better link isolated populations to commercial centres and so is not available to those whose main residence is not in the eligible geographic area, or on routes that are already operating under a Public Service Obligation.

3.29   There remains a need across the region for a more integrated internal UK service, which provides onward links to European destinations. This is particularly important for more remote communities within the Highlands and Islands. The Inverness Airport Master Plan sets out a programme of continued expansion of this important hub airport.

Current transport problems

3.30   A widely-dispersed **population** can make the delivery of public transport expensive and inefficient, leading to difficulties in providing an effective transport network. Poor transport networks detract from the attractiveness of an area to live and work in. Thin transport networks also limit the ability of businesses to compete with their counterparts in less peripheral areas.

3.31   The 2001 Census identifies 86 localities across the region, ranging from Aird with a population of 443 to Inverness with a population of 40,949. The region has two localities with populations greater than 10,000 people: Inverness and Elgin (20,829). There are a further 16 localities across the region with between 5,000 and 10,000 people.

3.32   There are many much smaller communities across the region, 29 localities with between 500 and 1,000 people, and many yet smaller settlements and hamlets dispersed across the region's vast area. Many of these areas are remote and peripheral in nature, particularly in terms of access to employment, services and facilities.

3.33   The Highlands and Islands region is home to approximately half a million people, living in an area of 39,000 square kilometres. The region is seeing a shift in its population dispersal with some areas seeing marked increases and others marked out-migration. Overall, the population of the region grew by 0.8% between 1991 and 2001 and is projected to grow by 2.3% in the twenty years to 2024 [32 & 33] This growth is shown by local authority area in Table 3.3.

TABLE 3.3   POPULATION CHANGE 2004-2024

Local Authority area	Population 2004	Population projection 2024	Population change
Argyll & Bute	91,190	94,676	3.8%
Eilean Siar	26,260	22,413	-14.6%
Highland	211,340	218,894	3.6%
Moray	87,720	90,942	3.7%
Orkney Islands	19,500	19,108	-2.0%

Source: General Register Office for Scotland: Projected population by council and (NHS board) area (2004-based), 2004-2024. Table 1

3.34   However, authority-level population changes mask variations across the region and across local authority areas. The general population trend in the Highlands and Islands is that the more remote and peripheral areas are experiencing population decline, while population centres, especially around the Inner Moray Firth, are experiencing population growth. Despite these trends, Highlands and Islands Enterprise and the island communities have a programme for revitalising communities which is expected to slow and even halt this population decline – improved transport has a key role. Furthermore, Orkney has experienced an upward trend since 2001.

3.35   Population growth in the Highlands and Islands is dominated by the Inner Moray Firth. The Inverness and Nairn area is home to 37% of the Highland (Council area) population and 45% of all employees in the region work there.[34] This generates a great deal of demand for travel, and the Inverness network must carry both these local trips and the travel demand of movements through Inverness. Inverness and the surrounding areas suffer from acute **congestion**, for example on the A96 through Moray. Bottlenecks on the network often exacerbate the problems associated with high levels of traffic.

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[32]   Taken from Highlands and Islands Enterprise Network Economic Information, October 2003 Economic Update. Available from: http://www.hie.co.uk/HIE-highlands-and-islands-area-profile-2003.pdf

[33]   General Register Office for Scotland: Projected population by council and (NHS board) area (2004-based), 2004-2024. Table 1, available at: http://www.gro-scotland.gov.uk/statistics/library/popproj/04pop-proj-scottishareas/list-of-tables.html#table1
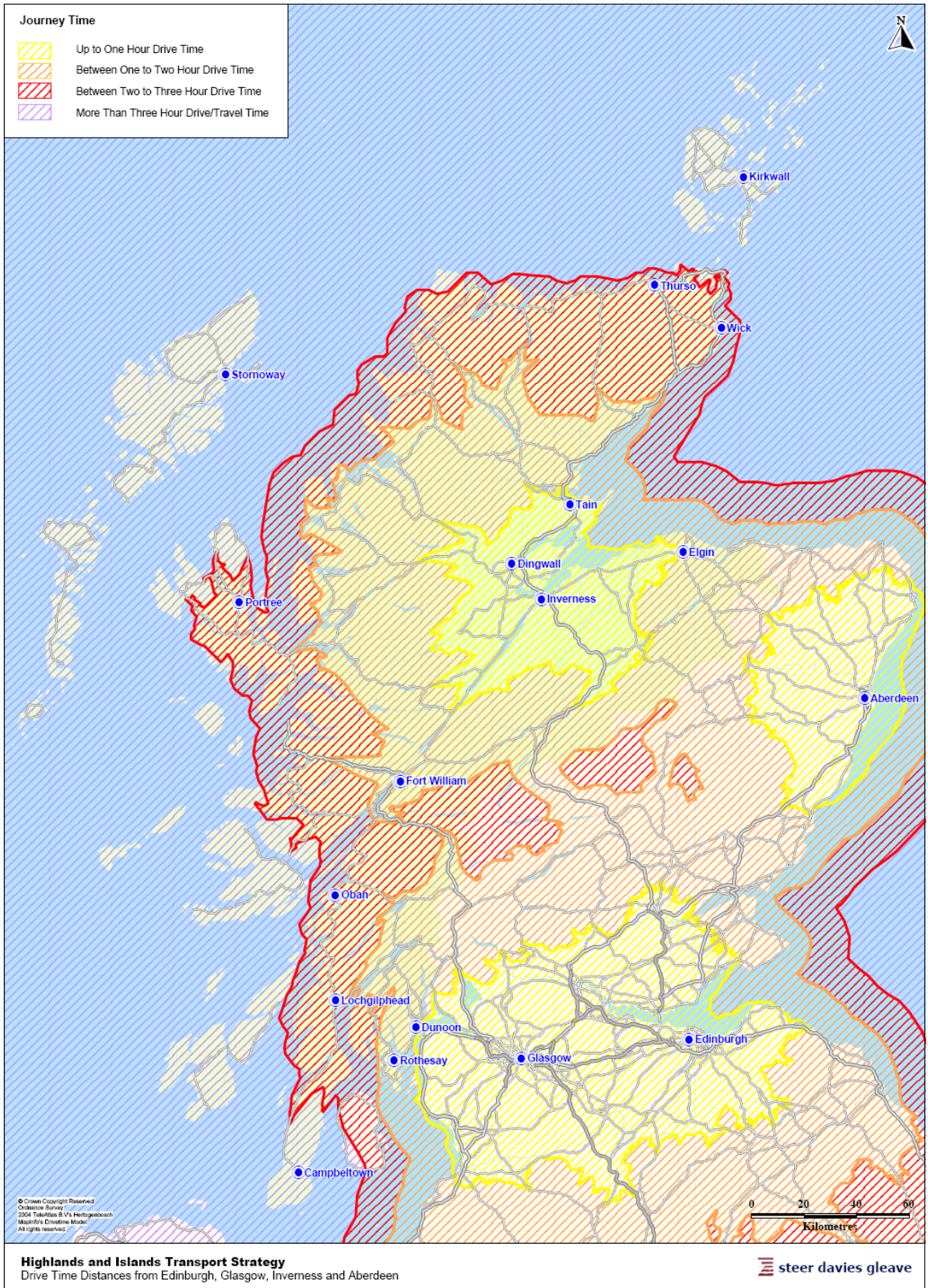
[34]   Annual Business Inquiry, 2001.

3.36 Moreover, congested and queuing vehicles contribute to emission levels. There is a need to reduce the level of traffic in our urban areas, not only to reduce emissions but to improve the environment of town centres, enhancing the shopping experience and improving the quality of life for people living within the city environment. Addressing congestion at a local level will also contribute to the national traffic stabilisation target[35].

3.37 Local centres are also projected to continue to grow, including Stornoway, Kirkwall, Elgin and Oban. These too present travel demand issues, which may lead to localised traffic conflict / congestion.

3.38 Limited accessibility (and local facilities) can deter people from returning to their home to seek employment upon the completion of education or training programmes or a period of employment elsewhere. This is particularly the case in the most remote localities, such as islands, but also significant parts of the mainland such as Caithness. This means an ever-increasing loss of working-age population, which severely compromises the viability of island and remote communities [36]. Moreover, some parts of the region are particularly affected by unemployment due to declining industries.

3.39 Due to the settlement patterns in the area, many journeys are relatively **long distance,** including transportation of goods to the marketplace, filling up with fuel, travelling to school, the shops, health services and the regional centres. Longer journey distances incur a time penalty (they take longer) and also add to the cost of travel. Across the region, 14% of people are travelling more than 20km to work, compared to 10% of the Scottish population as a whole.

3.40 Long journey distances, and slow and circuitous routes result in **long journey times** for private and public transport. The limited nature of diversionary routes for road and rail journeys mean should diversions be necessary (due to for example adverse weather conditions or accidents), journey times are significantly longer, and sometimes, journeys must be cancelled completely. Figure 3-3 shows the significant drive times involved from the national gateways across the region.

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[35] The Executive's target (to stabilise road traffic levels at 2001 levels by 2021) was introduced in the Executive's transport report 'Scotland's Transport: Delivering Improvements'.

[36] Consultation report from workshop session, Tuesday 21st February 2006, Stornoway.

FIGURE 3-3 DRIVE TIME DISTANCES FROM EDINBURGH, GLASGOW, INVERNESS AND ABERDEEN

Journey Time

- Up to One Hour Drive Time
- Between One to Two Hour Drive Time
- Between Two to Three Hour Drive Time
- More Than Three Hour Drive/Travel Time

Highlands and Islands Transport Strategy
Drive Time Distances from Edinburgh, Glasgow, Inverness and Aberdeen

steer davies gleave

3.41   The significant journey times by rail are shown in the following maps, which display journey times from Glasgow and Edinburgh, and journey times from Inverness.

FIGURE 3-4 RAIL JOURNEY TIMES FROM GLASGOW AND EDINBURGH
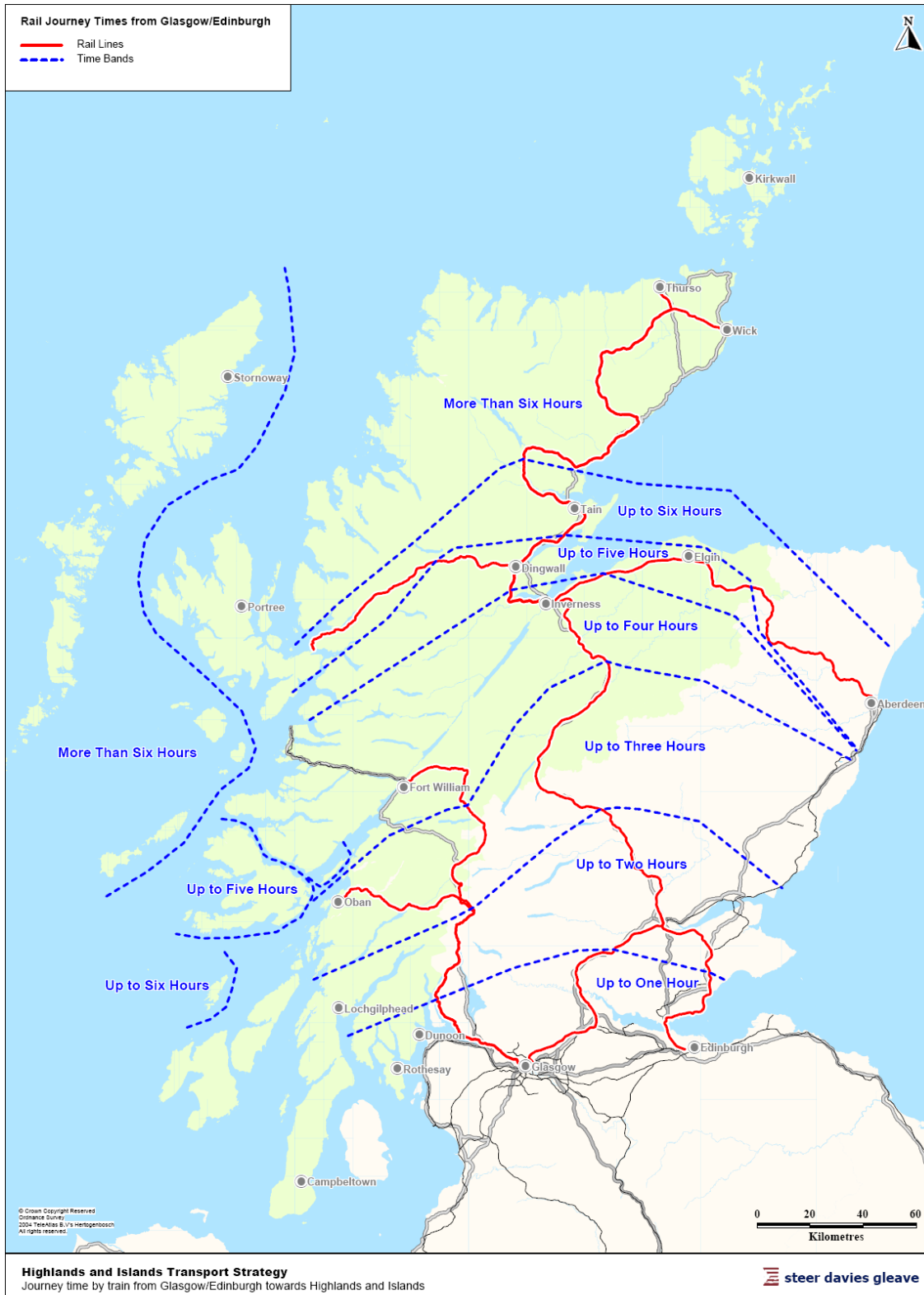
FIGURE 3-5 RAIL JOURNEY TIMES FROM INVERNESS

Highlands and Islands Transport Strategy
Journey time by train from Inverness
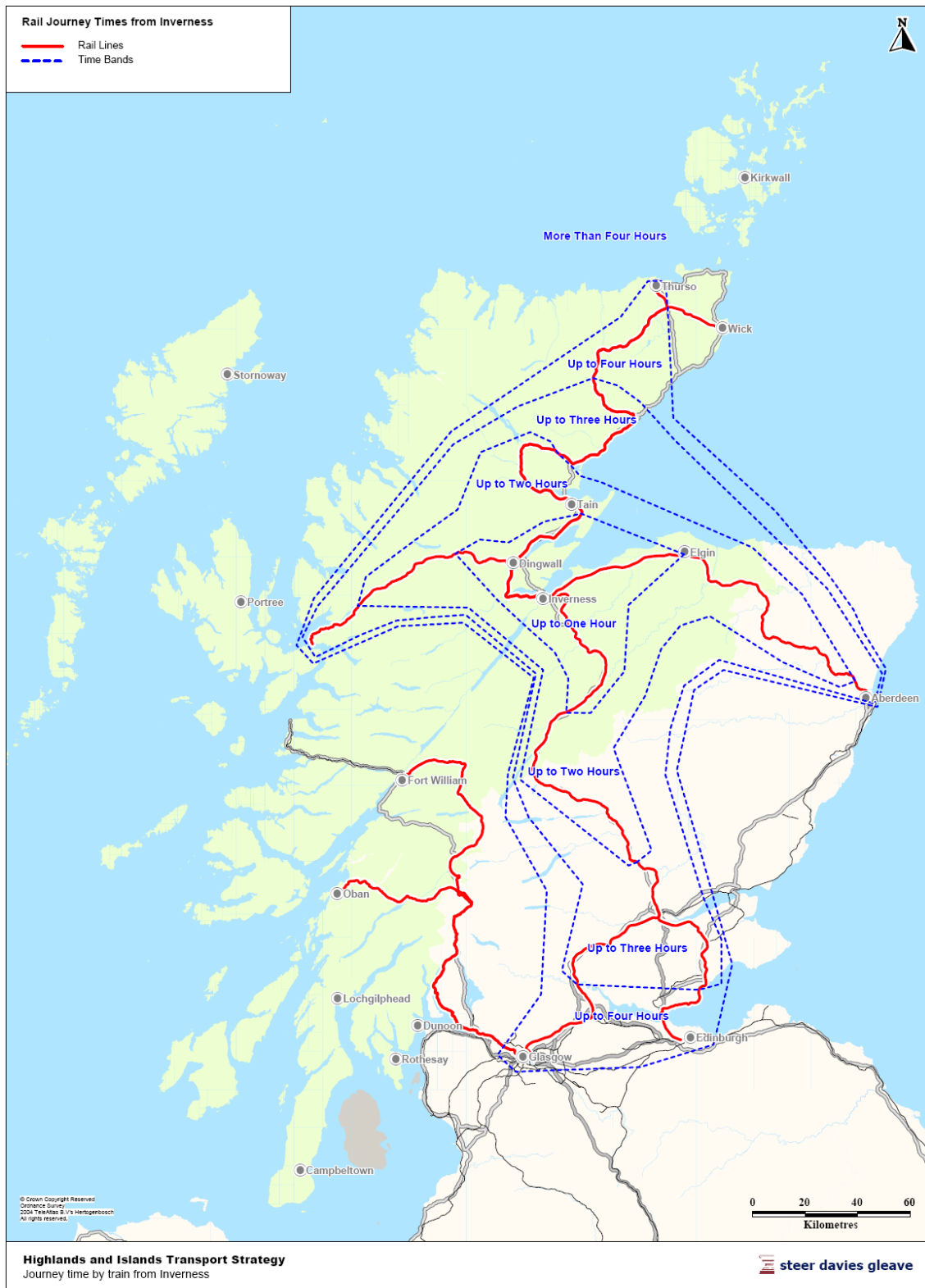
3.42   Figure 3-6 and Figure 3-7 show average travel speeds along the main corridor routes around the region and to key destinations outside the region, ferry and rail network, and road networks respectively.

FIGURE 3-6   AVERAGE TRAVEL SPEEDS ALONG MAIN FERRY AND RAIL ROUTES

Highlands and Islands Transport Strategy
Average travel speed along ferry and rail corridors
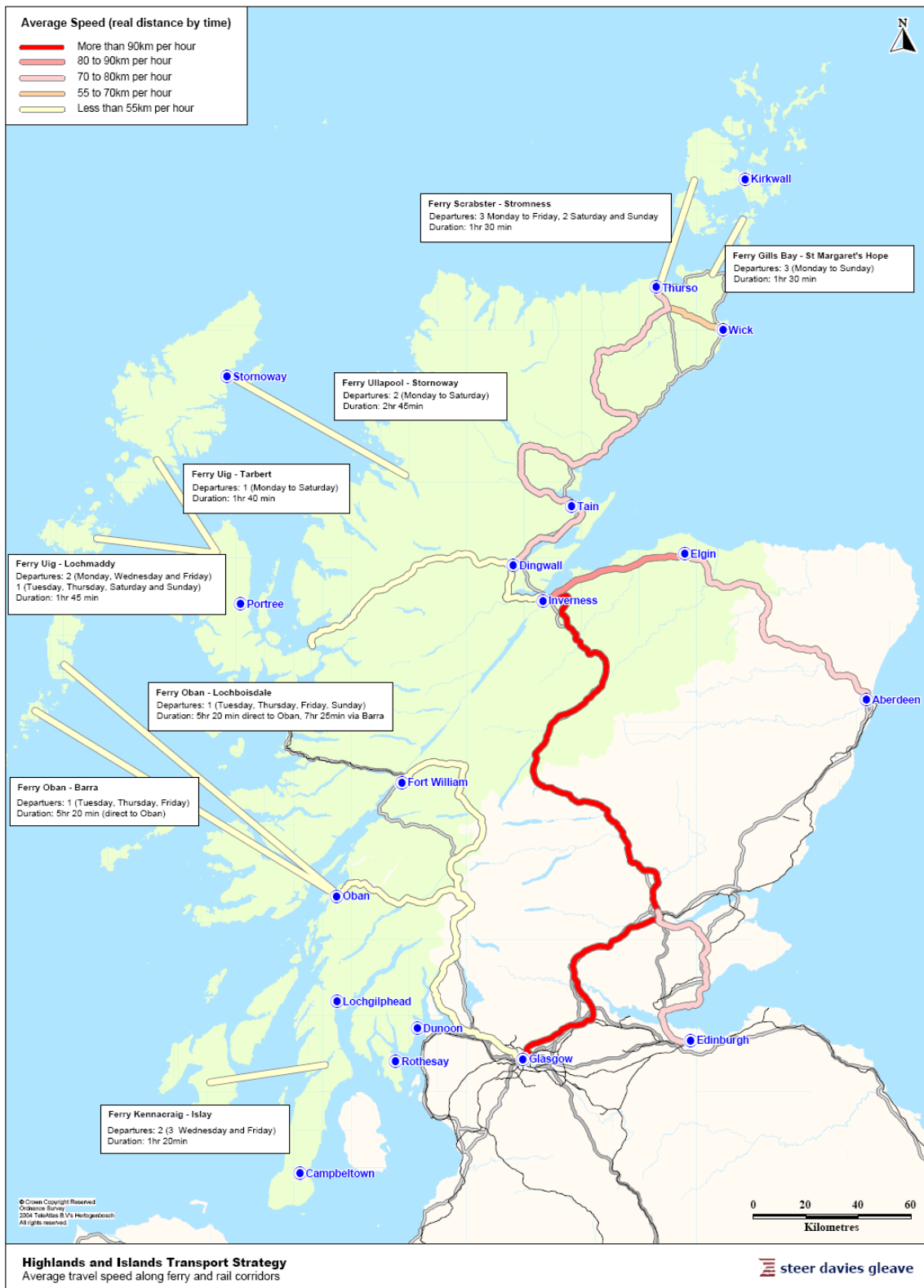
FIGURE 3-7 AVERAGE TRAVEL SPEEDS ALONG MAIN ROAD CORRIRORS
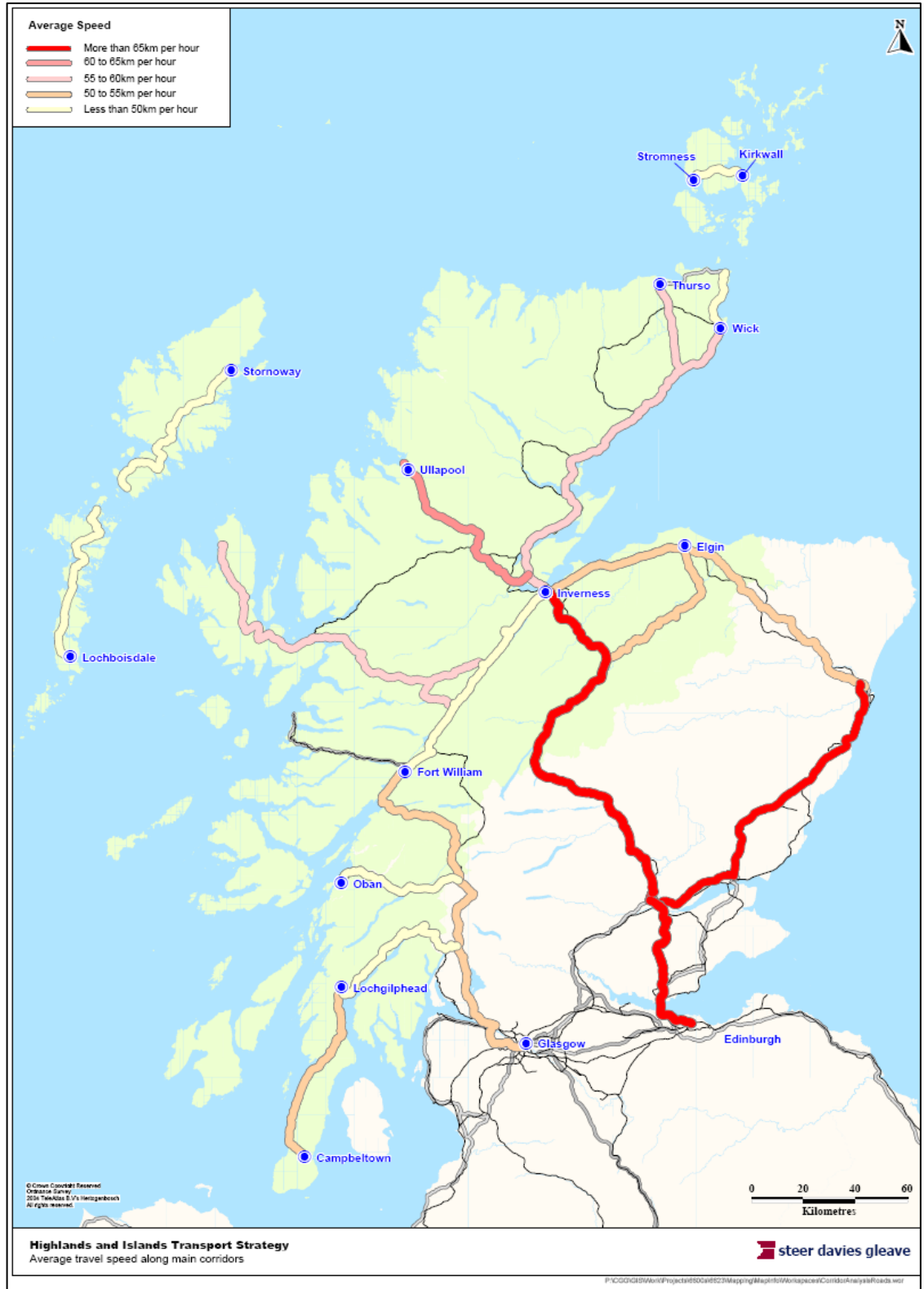
3.43   From Figure 3-6 it is possible to compare the relative travel speed along each of the corridors around the region. On pure journey time, the Inverness to Elgin (rail) and Inverness to Edinburgh (road) corridors appear the quickest, with average speeds of 65-70km per hour. The 'slowest' road routes around the region are the Western Isles spinal route, the Great Glen, and Oban and Lochgilphead to Glasgow. The 'slowest' rail routes are Caithness to Inverness and Oban and Fort William to Glasgow, while Inverness to Edinburgh is slightly 'faster' with a 3 hour 20 minute journey, but a very slow average speed south of Perth [37].

3.44   Businesses have stated that the candidates most likely to be successful in getting a job are those who live close to their place of work. Therefore, those living in more remote areas with longer distances to travel are at a disadvantage. By virtue of the need to travel long distances across the region, combined with the fact that fuel is often up to 10% higher than, say, the Aberdeen price, **affordability of transport** is a more significant and widespread issue for the Highlands and Islands than for other areas across Scotland [38].

3.45   Businesses commonly comment upon the **detrimental impact of transport to their business** or service. Businesses say that high travel costs mean that they can struggle to send staff to training courses, and that business growth and prosperity is constrained by high operating costs and a constrained geographical area from which to draw their staff. One business reported that it costs £1,400 to take a trailer load from Stornoway to Belgium and that half of this cost is accounted for on the leg of the journey from Stornoway to Ullapool [39].

3.46   As discussed in Section 2, **economic development** is a focus for the region. Many of the issues affecting the region reported in this Section, such as long journey times, long distances, and high cost of travel could be inhibiting the development of a viable economy across the region.

3.47   The small scale of the internal market place within the region means that many of the region's businesses have a strong outward focus, selling goods and services outside of the region. In 2002, Highlands and Islands companies exported over £1 billion of goods to countries outside of the UK, accounting for 16% of Scotland's food and drink exports. For this reason the movement of goods is of critical importance to the region's economic prosperity. Road transport is the dominant mode for **freight transport** in the region. Approximately 8.7 million tonnes of freight are lifted annually by UK HGVs in the Highlands and Islands (excluding Argyll & Bute). However, existing road traffic flows are such that present levels of HGV volumes on the region's roads do not have significant negative environmental impacts [40].

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[37]   Journey times are based on public transport timetable information and for private car travel from link speeds taken from TransportDirect (NADICS).

[38]   A report for Highlands and Islands Enterprise: *Affordability of Travel for Work and Education in the Highlands and Islands.* September 2004.

[39]   Consultation report from workshop session, Tuesday 21st February 2006, Stornoway.

[40]   Scottish parliament local government and transport committee freight transport inquiry: submission by highlands and islands enterprise. Available at:

3.48   **Tourism** is a key sector for the economy of the region. The region has a strong national and international appeal as a visitor destination. This appeal stems from a diversity of activities, locations and attractions, built upon the natural and the built environment.

3.49   However, issues facing the development of the tourism sector in the region include:

- The area is perceived as remote to access.
- Variable weather across the region.
- Limited direct access flights.
- Poor frequency for certain transport provision.
- Relatively high cost of transport (fuel, internal flights and ferry services).
- Increasing number of destinations offering similar experiences and more established "activity" from a lower cost base (for example, Eastern Europe) [41].

3.50   Globally, tourism is the world's largest industry in terms of outputs, creating some 8% of jobs worldwide and expanding annually at the rate of 4-5%. The region has the potential to contribute to the *Tourism Framework for Change* and in delivering 50% growth in tourism revenues for Scotland by 2015. [42] Travel is an essential part of the visitor's stay, and as most people will only be in the region for a short break (or at least a limited time period) the ability to move around quickly, easily and comfortably is directly related to the prosperity of the sector. The *Framework for Change* reports that most tourists travel to, and around, Scotland by car and so there is a commitment that the:

> "*Executive will work to maximise the efficiency of the national motorways and trunk roads.*" [43]

3.51   However, as much of the region's network connecting to tourist attractions consists of non-trunk roads, as well as the ferry, air, and public transport network, it is crucial that the efficiency of the whole transport network is considered for the purposes of tourism, in order that the region is not left trailing behind the remainder of Scotland.

3.52   Part of the attraction of the Highlands and Islands as a tourist destination is the remote and rural idyll, the island locations, the unique natural and built heritage and biodiversity that is prevalent across the region. The Strategic Environmental Assessment of the Regional Transport Strategy, which has been carried out alongside the Strategy development, has explored the environmental baseline in full detail and has assessed the potential impacts of the Strategy on the **environment**. It is important

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http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/business/committees/lg/inquiries/fti/Highland%20and%20Islands%20Enterprise.pdf

[41]   Highlands and Islands Enterprise: Network Economic Information: *Tourism Economic Update*, March 2004: http://www.hie.co.uk/sectoralprofiles-tourism20.pdf

[42]   *Tourism Framework for Change – Scottish Tourism: the next decade:* http://www.hie.co.uk/Tourism-Framework-for-Change.pdf

[43]   *Tourism Framework for Change – Scottish Tourism: the next decade:* http://www.hie.co.uk/Tourism-Framework-for-Change.pdf

to the future prosperity of the region that the region's environment is protected, not only that it remains an attraction for visitors, but continues to contribute to the quality of life and wellbeing of residents.

3.53   Environmental conditions are generally good across the region, although there are areas where the negative impacts of traffic are beginning to pose particular problems in terms of congestion, air quality and noise, for example. These areas concentrate on the most populated areas, such as Inverness, Elgin, Fort William, Oban and other district centres across the region. Conversely, many district and local centres across the region have historical townscapes, which provide attractive environments in which to walk and cycle for residents and visitors.

Conclusions on the key issues for the region

3.54   It is evident that the key issues facing the region today are consistent with those that were the focus for the voluntary partnership's first regional transport strategy. It has been useful to validate these issues, particularly through the consultation programme, and the reporting of the issues presented above are strengthened by the latest experiences of communities and businesses around the region.

3.55   Table 3.4 sets out a summary of the problems, constraints and opportunities identified for the region. These issues are then extrapolated to consider the future problems that could ensue under a no-change/known changes scenario.

TABLE 3.4   PROBLEMS UNDER A NO-CHANGE/KNOWN CHANGES SCENARIO

Issue	Problem, constraint, opportunity	Future problem / opportunity
Car ownership	High dependence on car. High cost associated with car use. Social exclusion resulting from unavailability of a car.	Increasing car dependence is expected, together with increasing costs associated with running a car. Widening divide in social outcomes between those who have and do not have access to a car.
The regions roads	Mainstay of road network. Winding single-carriageway roads with limited passing opportunities. High and seasonal volumes. Lack of alternative routes.	Worsening situation, whereby increased traffic and worsening conditions, without investment in maintenance and upgrading of the trunk road network, will result in longer journey times.
Subsidised bus network	Thin network, mainly radial out of built areas. Limited frequencies. Congestion in built up areas compromising service reliability and attractiveness. Some areas have no buses at all. More provision for people with disabilities is required.	Thinning out of routes as the car becomes more attractive. Increasing congestion in the most built up areas reduces the attractiveness of public transport as a journey option.
Rail network	Increasing populations and demand for rail services, including by tourists. Low frequency services. Poor passenger facilities.	Long lead times on service enhancements. Appetite for improving end-to-end journey times. Potential for rail commuting into Inverness and other growing Inner Moray Firth settlements. Worsening facilities as they age.
Ferries	High fares on some routes, with large variances for similar journeys. Services are sometimes based around operation needs rather than those of the markets they serve. Frequency on some routes remains poor, sometimes less than daily. Fragility of land-based infrastructure as a consequence of the effects of climate change.	Long lead times on service enhancements (tendering process and securing funding). Opportunities for mode shift for coastal shipping – therefore saved lorry miles. Vessels and infrastructure approaching the end of workable life. Requirements to meet legislation in respect to vessels may compromise provision. Requirements are for all vessels, but small operations face a higher relative cost and tend to operate at lower margins. Increasing fragility in respect to climate change effects.

Issue	Problem, constraint, opportunity	Future problem / opportunity
Air services	High costs for those not resident on Island. Limited route options. Capacity constraints.	High costs for those not resident on Island and relatively for those island residents on low incomes. Requirements to meet legislation in respect to airfields may compromise provision.
Population	Difficult to deliver efficient and effective transport systems. Poor transport networks detract from the attractiveness of an area to live and work in. Limit the efficiency of businesses to compete. Declining populations make rural communities hard to sustain.	Vicious circle, as area becomes less attractive to live in/stay, it becomes increasingly difficult to deliver transport to meet needs. Particularly felt as younger generations move away, and more importantly, do not return. Higher service needs and expectations of the aging and inward population. Revitalisation of islands and remote communities to stem population decline.
Long distances and lack of diversionary routes	Time penalty. High relative cost of travel.	Worsening network conditions will increase time penalties and the costs associated with maintaining vehicles and transport services.
Affordability of transport	Access to employment and education. Access to other services / amenities. Social exclusion.	In an increasing number of cases, high travel costs become a discernable barrier to individuals' ability to progress their career/education. For many others, travel costs become an increasingly limiting factor.
Detrimental impact of transport to business	Employer and employee skill levels. Artificially high costs for products and services. Declining business, job losses. Congestion in built up areas.	Under these threats to business, industries will continue to decline, leading to fewer employment vacancies. This could further fuel the trend of a declining population in the most remote area and particularly amongst the younger generations.
Economic development	Economic development is a focus across the region. Transport is recognised as an inhibitor to economic development.	Economic development will be inhibited further and businesses and then communities will become less viable, until they reach the point of collapse.
Freight	Relatively high levels of freight movement. Poor infrastructure / inadequate road network for internal and external journeys. High fuel costs / high ferry costs.	Worsening infrastructure, worsening journey times and reliability – businesses will be less able to compete. Potential for damage to infrastructure from freight traffic. Under these threats to business, manufacturing will continue to decline. Competition for capacity on rail (and ferry) routes.

Issue	Problem, constraint, opportunity	Future problem / opportunity
Tourism	Limited motorway and trunk road access to visitor attractions and so no Executive commitment to maximising the efficiency of said network. Poor frequency for certain transport provision. Relatively high cost of transport (fuel, internal flights and ferry services).	Widening gap as region's attractions become more difficult to access, and especially relative to competition from other destinations.
Environment	Extensive environmental assets. Increasing congestion in built up areas.	Worsening congestion across the network and specifically in regional and district centres. This will lead to worsening air quality, noise and an increase in CO_2 emissions. Increasing congestion will constrain economic efficiency and development and will result in worsening health of those exposed to the worsening conditions.

3.56   A number of themes emerge from the analysis of problems, constraints and opportunities for the region:

- **Economic development.** There is consensus across the region on the need to grow business, to tackle economic inactivity and get more people into jobs.

- **Population change.** Population growth is mainly focussed around the Inner Moray Firth and the Skye and Lochalsh area. Remote and rural areas have however declined over recent decades, with steady population decline in Caithness and Sutherland, Argyll and the Islands and in Lochaber. The population of the region is slightly older than that of Scotland as a whole, and there is a trend towards an ageing population.

- **Accessibility.** Poor accessibility, in the form of affordability, availability, awareness and physical accessibility limits the people of the region from accessing life opportunities. This impacts upon all people, to varying degrees, but most severely on those who are recognised as being most prone to social exclusion – young people, those on low incomes, the unemployed, people in remote areas, those without access to a car and/or public transport services.

- **Congestion.** Inverness is one of the fastest-growing cities in Scotland and the popularity of the locality to live and work in is bringing with it increasing levels of congestion. Elgin and Oban are also particular growth areas in the region.

- **Environmental impacts.** The region has a multitude of environmental assets which are an attractor for tourists and provide the quality of life enjoyed by residents across the region.

4.   THE CORE STRATEGY

Development of the vision, objectives and policy

4.1   The Transport (Scotland) Act 2005 requires the Strategy to provide for meeting the needs of all inhabited places particularly those that are remote or sparsely populated. It requires the Strategy to provide for meeting the need for efficient transport links between heavily populated places. The Act also requires the Strategy to enhance social and economic well being and public health; safety; the environment; social inclusion and equal opportunities; transport integration; and access to health service locations.

4.2   Various stages of consultation have fed into the development of a vision and objectives for the Regional Transport Strategy, which are reported separately [44]. These have included discussion of strategic issues at the Nairn National Transport Strategy Highlands and Islands Regional Consultative Event in 2005, the Regional Transport Strategy Spring 2006 stakeholder meetings, and at a Stakeholder Conference in Nairn in October 2006 [45]. The issues contained in the previous Strategy have been revisited to determine if they are still relevant.

4.3   The Strategy and its objectives fit with the previous HITRANS strategy and its objectives, which consisted of the following goals:

- *We want to see a reduction in costs to the users of the transport network and reduced costs in the movement of goods. Cost of transport is one of the most pressing concerns of communities and businesses in the region because of the long distances to be travelled.*

- *We want to improve journey times by investment in better infrastructure particularly roads, public transport vehicles and vessels, and the rail network. Over the strategy period, modernising the road network will be a key priority.*

- *We want to improve integration in public transport system to increase choice, reduce delays and waiting periods, and make public transport more attractive. We also want to increase the choice of destinations provided by public transport particularly for movements to centres outside the region. We want to improve the frequency and flexibility of public transport particularly in rural areas and in the external links to centres outside the region. Developing the region's air service network will be a key priority.*

4.4   The vision and objectives of the new strategy, presented below, are founded on the existing strategy combined with a clear understanding of the current and future problems, constraints and opportunities that are intrinsic to, and faced by, the communities of the region.

- The development of planning objectives has also been steered by the overall

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[44] Highlands and Islands Regional Transport Strategy Consultation Report, March 2007

[45] The Regional Consultative Event for the Highlands and Islands took place on 25 August 2005 in Nairn. This event was held in conjunction with HITRANS. Details at:
http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Transport/NTS/HITRANS/HITRANS

vision of the Partnership and fit with the Scottish Executive's five key transport objectives and those of other national and local policies and strategies, as discussed in Section 3 of this report.

4.5   The Scottish Transport Appraisal Guidance (STAG) states that care must be taken when developing specific objectives to take account of the subtleties of the planning environment. For the development of this Strategy, the planning environment is the entire transport system as described in Section 3. The Strategy is concerned with the interconnectivity of this network for residents, business and visitors alike. This is a complex network which requires a strategic planning approach. Such a Strategy has to capture complex issues associated with the numerous transport challenges that are under scrutiny.

4.6   STAG offers some guidance in respect to such a case:

> "*where the full set of potential proposals is unmanageably large, a transparent mechanism must be used to narrow the choice down to a selection that can be more thoroughly analysed...*" [46]

4.7   Objectives have therefore been developed that allow the study to hold true to the principles of enabling the development of apposite and creative proposals to the problems, constraints and opportunities that have been identified in the region.

Vision and objectives for the Regional Transport Strategy

4.8   The Strategy vision and objectives are presented in Figure 4-1. Overarching the Strategy is the vision for the region, which is to ***enhance the region's viability,*** enhancing the region's place competitiveness and thereby attracting and retaining people in the region and making the Highlands and Islands a more attractive place in which to live, to work, to conduct business and to visit. The vision for transport in the region is a statement of the final high-level outcome the Strategy is intended to achieve.

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[46]   STAG para 29 of the Executive Summary.

FIGURE 4-1   STRATEGY VISION AND OBJECTIVES

Enhance the region's **viability**	Vision
Improving **interconnectivity** of the whole region to strategic services & destinations	Delivery objective
Economy – enable the region to compete & support growth	Primary outcome objective
Enable **people** to participate in everyday life · Improve the **safety and security** of travel · Manage the impacts of travel on the region's environmental assets · Improve the **health** of the region's people	Supporting outcome objectives

4.9   To deliver the vision, the critical issue of connectivity needs to be addressed – improving how people and businesses get access to services and destinations. A delivery objective has therefore been developed for the Strategy: *to improve the interconnectivity of the region to strategic services and destinations*. Improving connectivity is central to all the problems and constraints that have been identified through analysis of the issues and during consultation with stakeholders around the region.

4.10   From improved connectivity comes the focus on the desirable outcomes for the region, the more specific planning objectives that have shaped the Strategy and against which the initial range of Strategy options has been sifted. The planning objectives, while being focussed on the issues identified as being important to the region, are also designed to fit with Government's five main objectives for transport (economy, safety, accessibility, integration and environment).

4.11   The objectives are strategic in nature. They have been used to focus thought for the development of options and interventions, both in the initial process of assessment which has aimed to narrow the choice of these options into a workable package, and the later assessment process which has more thoroughly analysed and prioritised options.

4.12   The planning objectives for the Strategy are as follows, to:

- Enable the region to compete and to support growth – this is the primary planning objective, or desirable outcome. This fits with regional and national priorities. For example, in the Partnership Agreement[47], *"Growing the economy is our top priority."*

- Enable the people of the region to participate in everyday life.

- Improve the safety and security of travel.

- Manage the impacts of travel on the region's environmental assets.

- Improve the health of the region's people.

4.13   The relationship between these objectives and the problems, constraints and issues that are described in the Section 4 is presented in Table 4.1 below.

TABLE 4.1   OBJECTIVES FIT WITH PROBLEMS AND CONSTRAINTS

KEY ✓ Minor fit ✓✓ Moderate fit ✓✓✓ Major fit	Enable the region to compete and support growth	Enable people to participate in everyday life	Improve the safety and security of travel	Manage the impacts of travel on the region's environmental assets	Improve the health of the region's people
Economic development	✓✓✓	✓✓✓	✓		✓
Population change	✓✓✓	✓✓✓	✓✓✓	✓✓	✓✓✓
Accessibility	✓✓✓	✓✓✓	✓✓		✓✓✓
Congestion	✓	✓	✓✓	✓✓	✓
Environmental impacts				✓✓✓	✓✓✓

4.14   As well as ensuring that the transport planning objectives are relevant to the problems in question, it has also been necessary to assess their appropriateness in relation to the Executive's five broad transport objectives: environment, safety, economy, accessibility and social inclusion, and integration (which relate to the three strategic outcomes for transport in the National Transport Strategy discussed in Section 3). Table 4.2 presents this assessment.

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[47]   A Partnership agreement for a better Scotland: Partnership Agreement.
        http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2003/05/17150/21952

TABLE 4.2   RTS OBJECTIVES AND THE EXECUTIVE'S FIVE BROAD TRANSPORT OBJECTIVES

KEY ✓ Minor fit ✓✓ Moderate fit ✓✓✓ Major fit	Enable the region to compete and support growth	Enable people to participate in everyday life	Improve the safety and security of travel	Manage the impacts of travel on the region's environmental assets	Improve the health of the region's people
Environment		✓✓		✓✓✓	✓✓
Safety	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓✓		✓✓
Economy	✓✓✓	✓✓✓	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓
Accessibility and social inclusion	✓✓	✓✓✓	✓✓	✓	✓✓✓
Integration	✓✓	✓✓	✓	✓✓	✓✓

4.15   Each of the Strategy options has been appraised against the Regional Transport Strategy objectives and the Executive's five broad transport objectives. As part of this process, the potential strategic environmental impacts of each option have been considered, through the Strategic Environmental Assessment process.

4.16   The Regional Transport Strategy sets out HITRANS' vision and objectives for transport in the region over the period of 2008 to 2022. To achieve these objectives, a set of high level policies has been developed, together with measures to deliver these policies and consequently the Strategy objectives.

Strategic Policies

4.17   The overarching policy is focused on ***developing a fit for purpose, multi-modal transport system with associated infrastructure***.

4.18   In developing the Strategy, it has become clear that there are a number of key policy areas in which concerted effort is needed to deliver improvements across the region. Therefore, under this overarching policy, a package of sub-strategies and their related policies and measures has been developed by HITRANS and their partners. This has been subject to extensive consultation, as reported in the accompanying Consultation Report.

4.19   These key policy areas, which form the core of the Strategy, are as follows:

- Horizontal themes which apply across the region:
  - Active travel.
  - Aviation and the region's air network.
  - Community and health passenger transport.
  - Congestion and urban issues.
  - Freight transport.
  - Locally significant network and maintenance of the region's roads.
  - Mainstream passenger transport.

> - ▪ Ports, ferries and waterway transport.
> - ▪ Cost of transport and travel.
> - ▪ Environmental impacts.
> - The strategic and regional network.

4.20 A proposed action programme of initiatives against each of these policy areas has been developed, and is presented in the Proposed Delivery Plan that accompanies this Strategy. This covers each of the key policy areas, and each of the three time periods covered by the Strategy – short (2008-2012), medium (2013-2017), and long term (2018-2022). Whilst HITRANS is committed to aspirations within each of these policy areas, as discussed further in this section, further work is required to refine this programme in partnership with partners across the region, the Scottish Executive and Transport Scotland.

4.21 The rest of this section describes how these policies and associated measures have been developed, and provides further detail of the individual policy areas.

How our policies and associated measures have been developed

4.22 In this section the process used to generate Strategy options is described. The Regional Transport Strategy Guidance suggests that options should be packages of complementary measures such as:

- Improving strategic transport corridors (Act requirement regarding efficient transport between heavily populated places – for example, Inverness to Aberdeen; Inverness/Elgin to Edinburgh/ Glasgow; West of the region to Glasgow; Western Isles spinal; Western Isles, Orkney and Caithness to Inverness; Strategic sea crossings and air routes).
- Dealing with neglect of the region's road conditions.
- Securing capital and revenue support for thin routes/remote and sparsely populated communities (for example, Orkney internal ferries; island air services; rural bus services; fixed links).
- Changing travel behaviour (for example, modal shift to coastal/rail freight; public transport improvement; increasing levels of walking and cycling; business/facility travel planning).

4.23 The generation of options has systematically followed on from the scoping, vision and objective-setting stages. However, in reality, options for projects, services and initiatives have been generated throughout the strategy development process, and indeed prior to commencing the development of the new Strategy. A two-part phased approach has been employed to systematically generate options that will contribute to the strategy objectives.

4.24 The Guidance on preparing Regional Transport Strategies is based on planning for integrated transport networks that take account of the needs of all users (road, rail, waterborne and air; personal and freight) and of the contribution that can be made by all means of travel, including walking and cycling. With this in mind it is apparent that there are two main types of issue of relevance to the Strategy. The first is those that have a relevance across the whole region and which cut across local circumstances (here referred to as 'Horizontal' Themes); and secondly those which have a particular

spatial reference (the Strategic and Regional Network).

4.25   One part of the approach focused on the region's Strategic and Regional transport networks, whilst a parallel exercise focused on particular users of the region's transport network and other key cross-cutting (or 'horizontal') themes of relevance right across the region.

4.26   The Strategic Network, Regional Network and the Horizontal Themes were then assessed in terms of understanding functions and purpose; then evaluating problems, constraints and opportunities; and then developing options to overcome these problems and constraints and take advantage of the opportunities.

Horizontal themes

4.27   The Horizontal Themes relate to cross-cutting issues that are best progressed at a strategic, region-wide level, particularly where benefits arise from integration and uniformity. Horizontal issues relate to the entire population of the region and / or are relevant to certain groups which share travel patterns / needs and socio-economic / socio-demographic characteristics. The Horizontal Themes were identified through consultation with stakeholders across the region, as has the entire Strategy.

4.28   Each of the **Horizontal Themes** is inextricably linked to the region's transport network, since delivering improvements within each theme is dependent upon the use of an adequate transport network. If the network is of poor quality, for example a link with many pinch points and poor alignment, then the quality of the public transport offered will be adversely affected. Public transport journeys will be slow and unreliable, and will therefore not be an attractive alternative to the car. The nature of the service, and the impact on demand for that service, will constrain the public transport operator from developing the service.

4.29   The Horizontal Themes are often closely related in that they may work towards the attainment of similar outcomes, a desire for better integration between two different means of travel, or a (potential) conflict between the development of one over the other. Figure 4.2 shows the connections between the horizontal themes.

FIGURE 4-2   RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN HORIZONTAL THEMES IN THE STRATEGY
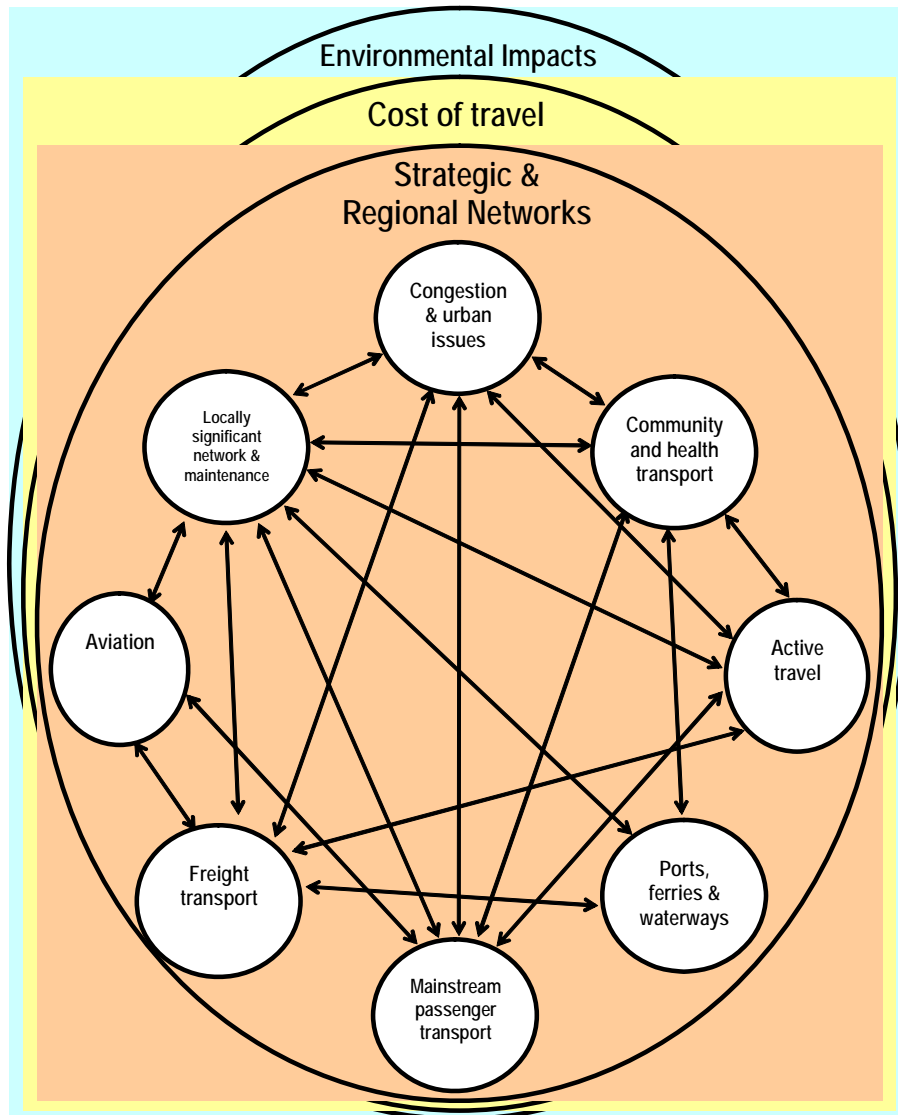
4.30   For each theme the following assessment has been undertaken:

i.   **Assessing the key issues and key opportunities** for the theme in the region.

ii.   **Setting policy aspirations** for this theme within the Strategy.

iii.   **Generation of options.**

iv.   **Assessment of options to produce a final series of measures to help deliver the policy aspirations – contained within Horizontal Sub-Strategies**.

4.31   Aspirations for each theme were set to ensure that the emerging options for policies and initiatives within each Horizontal Sub-Strategy were developed to be consistent with the issues / inadequacies relating to that theme. The achievement of these aspirations for each theme relate closely to achievement of the Strategy objectives themselves. The aspirations for each of the themes are:

- **Active Travel:**

- Promote the long-term development of active travel across the region.
- Enable progress in active travel to be monitored across HITRANS.
- Promote partnership working in promotion of active travel.
- Achieve consistency of standards in infrastructure to support active travel.

- **Aviation:**
  - Enhance intra-regional connectivity between island and peripheral communities and regional centres and national gateways.
  - Retain and increase links with European and intercontinental services, in particular with the London Gatwick/Heathrow hubs.
  - Manage the environmental impact of the vital air services to, from and around the region without adversely affecting economic growth and sustainability.

- **Community and Health Transport:**
  - Increase the sustainability of the sector.
  - Achieve consistency of standards across the sector.
  - Improve communications internal to the sector and between the sector and other bodies.
  - Improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the sector.

- **Congestion and urban issues:**
  - Reduce congestion and increase the efficiency of travel in and through urban areas.
  - Improve the reliability of journey times.
  - Improving accessibility and the attractiveness of public transport, walking and cycling.
  - Reduce car use, especially on short journeys, and increase average car occupancy.

- **Freight Transport:**
  - Enhance effectiveness and efficiency of freight transport.
  - Optimise modal shift opportunities for freight transit by rail and coastal shipping.
  - Enhance co-ordination within, and support for, the freight industry.
  - Co-ordinated freight policies and plans, locally, regionally and nationally.

- **Locally significant network and road maintenance:**
  - Asset management plans for all road infrastructure elements.
  - Sustainable programme of road maintenance and enhancement that allows control over future spending on maintaining the network.
  - Maintain access and connectivity between communities and Local and Regional Centres.
  - Improve the quality of travel for all travellers, focussing on enhancing the travelling experience for passenger and community transport.

- **Mainstream passenger transport:**
  - Develop a comprehensive bus and long distance coach strategy and investment programme.
  - Achieve consistency of standards throughout passenger transport in the region.
  - Improve communications between passenger transport providers.

- Improve efficiency and effectiveness of passenger transport.
- Improve accessibility and enable greater confidence in, and usage of, passenger transport around the region, particularly for those with disabilities.
- Improve integration and information.

- **Ports, ferries & waterways:**
  - Develop a long term strategy for ports, ferries and waterways that is driven by socio-economic goals.
  - Encourage diversity and innovation in supply of services.

- **Costs of transport and travel:**
  - Make travel more affordable to individuals and businesses.
  - Achieve equity and consistency in the concessionary fares system, across all modes.
  - Explore ways of reducing the cost of freight transport.

- **Environmental impacts:**
  - Develop ways to mitigate the climate change impact of socially and economically necessary travel across the region.

4.32 Further detail of the Horizontal Themes, and the Sub-Strategies of proposed policies and initiatives that have been developed in response to the themes is provided in the Proposed Delivery Plan which accompanies this Strategy.

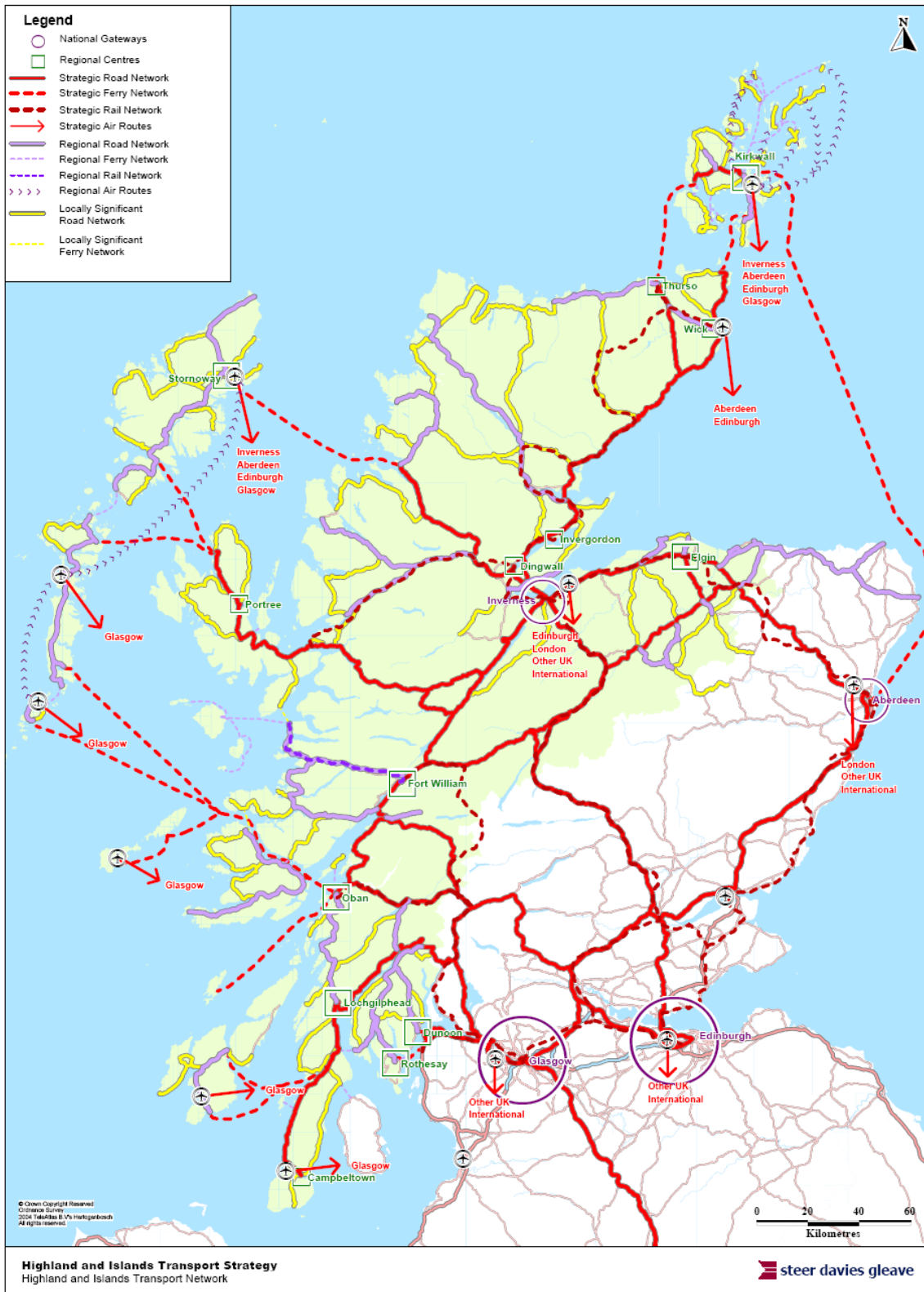**The Strategic and Regional transport network**

Settlement hierarchy

4.33 A hierarchy for the region's transport network has been agreed by the Partnership which is consistent with the settlement hierarchies in the Structure Plans in place across the region. The hierarchy has been defined using three levels of settlements: Each is described below and is shown in Figure 4-3.

4.34 **National Gateways** are settlements with direct onward connections to the rest of the UK and beyond. National Gateways provide a full complement of services and functions, such as employment, health, education, cultural, leisure and retail opportunities. Inverness, Aberdeen, Edinburgh and Glasgow are the National Gateways for the region.

4.35 **Regional Centres** fulfil a wide range of functions and provide a range of services to support surrounding hinterlands. Some Regional Centres are the administrative centre for the local authority area and tend to be a focus for development and growth. Most Regional Centres function as gateways for onward travel from their hinterland to other Regional Centres and ultimately to the National Gateways. This is particularly the case for the region's island communities, although for some islands the connection to a National Gateway is via a route other than from the Regional Centre. These port / airport gateways have also been included therefore in the top level of the region's network hierarchy. The Regional Centres are: Kirkwall, Thurso / Wick, Dingwall / Invergordon, Elgin, Stornoway, Portree, Oban, Lochgilphead, Campbeltown, Fort William, Dunoon and Rothesay.

4.36 **Local Centres** provide a range of facilities and services and fulfil an important

function as a focus for the community and often for public transport. In rural areas, a range of shops and other facilities are provided in small towns and villages. These locations form an important part of a network as the uses provide vital local community and economic services. Their loss can therefore have a severe impact not only on small settlements but also on the surrounding rural hinterland. As Paragraph 9 of *Scottish Planning Policy 15* indicates, planning policy should support the vital role of these centres. Protecting and enhancing such centres is therefore a key consideration which underpins Government policy [48].

4.37   The Local Centres as defined in Structure Plans are: Aberlour, Aird, Alness, Balivanich, Beauly, Bettyhill, Bowmore, Buckie, Burghead, Castlebay, Coll, Craigellachie, Craignure, Cullen, Dounby, Drumnadrochit, Dufftown, Fochabers, Forres, Fort Augustus, Fortrose, Gairloch, Golspie, Grantown-on-Spey, Hopeman, Inveraray, Kames/Tighnabruaich, Keith, Kingussie, Kinlochbervie, Kinlochleven, Kinloss, Kyle of Lochalsh, Lhanbryde, Lochboisdale, Lochcarron, Lochinver, Lochmaddy, Lossiemouth, Mallaig, Mosstodloch, Nairn, Nis, Port Ellen, Portgordon, Portknockie, Rothes, Scarinish, St Margaret's Hope, Sandwick, Stromness, Strontian, Tain, Tarbert (Argyll & Bute), Tarbert (Western Isles), Taynuilt, Tobermory, Tomintoul, Tong and Ullapool.

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[48]   SPP15 Planning for Rural Development, Scottish Executive, 2005 (ISBN 0-7559-2527-0).

FIGURE 4-3   NETWORK AND SETTLEMENT HIERARCHIES

Network hierarchy

4.38   The highest level of the network hierarchy is the **Strategic Network**. The Strategic Network provides connections between Regional Centres and National Gateways and comprises all modes of transport. The National Planning Framework for Scotland recognises that:

> *"place competitiveness relies heavily on adequate investment in infrastructure, including transport and communications networks... Small economies have the potential to adapt to changing economic circumstances more readily than their larger competitors. However a common thread running through all economic scenarios is the importance of infrastructure, particularly transport infrastructure."* [49]

4.39   The next level of the network hierarchy is the **Regional Network** which provides connections between Local Centres and Regional Centres. Again, the Regional Network comprises all means of transport – road, rail, air and sea.

4.40   Finally, the **Locally Significant Network** provides connections between smaller and dispersed communities and Local Centres, and links into other parts of the Strategic and Regional Networks.

Assessing the Strategic and Regional network

Strategic network assessment

4.41   The first step towards identifying options for the Strategic Network was to assess each link in the network. This assessment has been done by:

i.   **Assessing 'functionality'** – scoring each link based on the number of Regional Centres which it connects to National Gateways.

ii.   **Assessing 'adequacy'** – scoring each link based on the number of defined adequacy tests which it fails.

iii. **Assessing future transport needs** – adjusting the adequacy score of each link to reflect the future transport needs occasioned by demographic and land use change.

Assessing functionality

4.42   Each link in the Strategic Network has been scored based on its function. This score relates to the number of Regional Centres that this link connects to one or more of the National Gateways. For example, the A82 road corridor provides a connection between six Regional Centres and Glasgow. These Regional Centres are Fort William, Portree, Stornoway, Oban, Lochgilphead and Campbeltown, as well as providing a connection for other crossings from the Western Isles via Uig or Oban. Therefore, for example, the A82 road corridor has a high function score.

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[49]   National Planning Framework for Scotland: guidance for the spatial development of Scotland to 2025, Scottish Executive, 2004. (ISBN 0-7559-4195-0).

Assessing adequacy

4.43   Each link in the Strategic Network has also been given an 'adequacy score'. This score relates to the current adequacy of the link in performing its strategic function. A set of adequacy tests have been applied and these vary depending on the means of transport – road, rail, air or sea. For example, the A82 road corridor is given a low adequacy score due to its performance against the following criteria: alignment / topography, limited overtaking opportunities, pinch points, accidents / safety, environmental risks, alternative route availability and passenger transport provision.

4.44   Further information on the adequacy testing is contained within the supporting technical report, Network Option Development and Assessment.

Assessing future transport needs

4.45   Each link in the Strategic Network has been assessed in respect to the potential impact of future development over the lifetime of the Strategy. The Transport (Scotland) Act 2005 requires the Partnership and Strategy to have regard to future needs, including those occasioned by demographic and land-use changes. This assessment is intended to ensure that future changes in land-use and demographics are taken into account in the generation and appraisal of Strategy options.

4.46   A subjective assessment has been made for each link in the Strategic Network as to the magnitude of the land-use changes. The 'adequacy score' has then been adjusted to reflect this assessment. For example, the A96 corridor will see significant development over the course of the Strategy period and beyond. The adequacy score for the A96 corridor is thus reduced to reflect the future demand on this transport corridor, and the future transport problems that will ensue without intervention.

Regional network assessment

4.47   A similar process as described above for the Strategic Network has been applied to the Regional Network. However, in this case each of the links connect just one Local Centre to Regional Centres(s), and so the function of each link is alike.

4.48   The adequacy of each link in the Regional Network has been assessed according to the adequacy tests, giving an 'adequacy score' for each link. The link has then been considered in respect to future demands.

Priority links

4.49 The function and adequacy scores of each link in the Strategic Network were plotted against each other. By comparing function and adequacy (see Figure 4-4) in this way four types of links emerged: those with high function and low adequacy; those with moderate function and low adequacy; those with high function and high adequacy; those with moderate function and high adequacy.

FIGURE 4-4 STRATEGIC NETWORK FUNCTION AND ADEQUACY SCATTER CHART
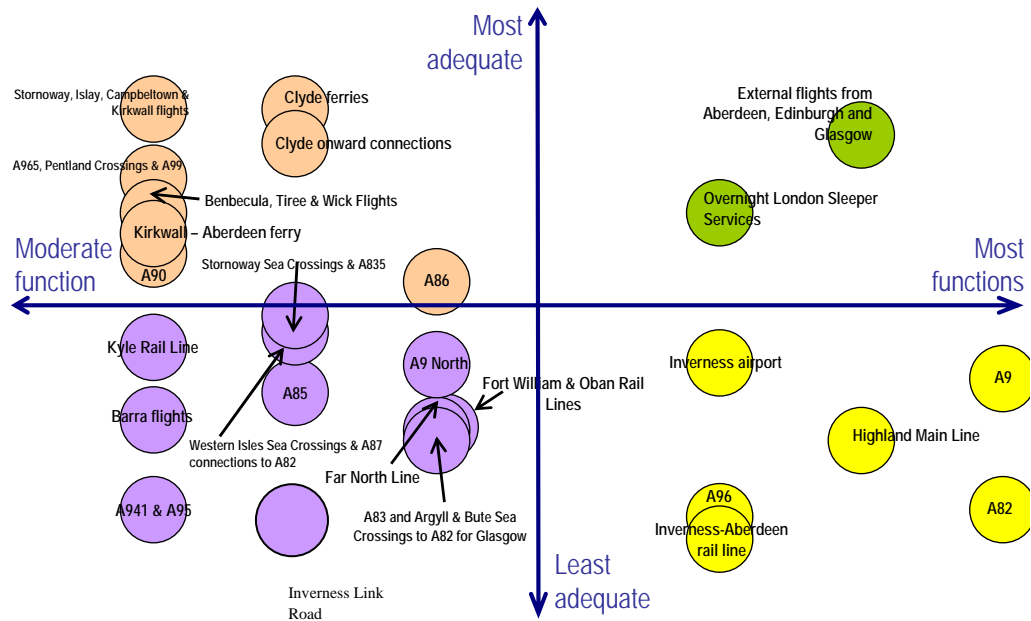
4.50 The Guidance on preparing Regional Transport Strategies states that, at the time of these (first) Strategies being developed:

"…there are a number of proposals for projects and interventions in each region at various stages of development, including those that have already undergone a full appraisal; prioritisation should be used to decide which of the new or current identified projects should move forward to the next stage of development and which should not (at least not yet)."

4.51 By assessing and comparing the function and adequacy of links in the Strategic Network, and the adequacy of links in the Regional Network (see Figure 4-5), links have been identified which are seen as priorities for intervention. In the Strategic Network, links that have high or moderate function and low adequacy are the priority links. These are the links below the x-axis in Figure 4-4. In the Regional Network, links that have low adequacy are priority links.

FIGURE 4-5   **REGIONAL NETWORK ADEQUACY RADAR CHART**
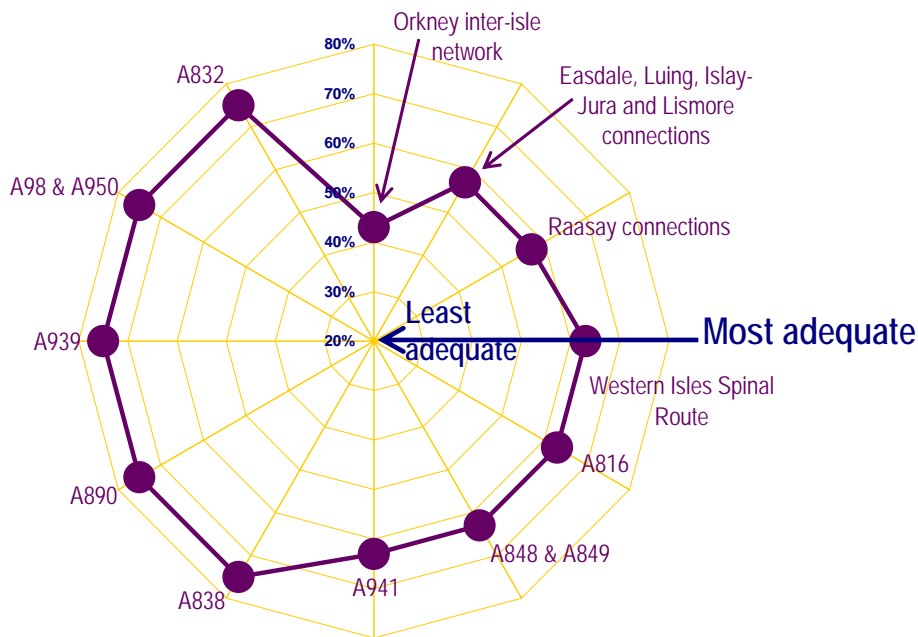
4.52   Whilst addressing these top Priority Links in the first instance, the Partnership will also undertake research into those issues which currently lack an evidence base. This will enable the Partnership to be in an informed position for future refinement of the Strategy and for future Investment and Delivery Plans. In addition, the links in the network that are not identified as Priority Links will be monitored for any changes in their adequacy. All links in the Strategic Network have both a degree of Strategic Function and a varying degree of inadequacy. Similarly all links in the Regional Network have a degree of inadequacy.

4.53   It is intended that, in time, all inadequacies in the network are tackled, including those which may be identified in the future. In this first Strategy however, it is important that there is a focus on those links in the Strategic and Regional Networks that have been shown to be most in need of attention.

4.54   Descriptions of the Priority Links in the Strategic and Regional Networks are provided in the Proposed Delivery Plan which accompanies this Strategy.

Generating options for the Strategic and Regional Network Priority Links

4.55   Outcome aspirations are identified for each of the Priority Links; which describe what is hoped to be achieved for each link. They are intended to ensure that the emerging options for each link are developed to be consistent with the issues / inadequacies of that particular link. The achievement of these aspirations anywhere in the network would generally enable the satisfaction of the Strategy objectives. Table 4.3 demonstrates the fit between link aspirations and the Strategy objectives. An 'other' category of aspirations provides scope for flexibility in the aspirations. Typical 'other' aspirations include modal shift and improving integration.

TABLE 4.3   LINK ASPIRATIONS VERSUS THE STRATEGY OBJECTIVES

	Improve journey reliability	Reduce journey time	Increase journey frequency	Improve journey consistency	Provide a daily link	Enable a days' business	Improve safety and security	Other
Enable the region to compete and support growth	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
Enable people to participate in everyday life	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	
Improve the health of the Region's people							✓	✓
Improve safety & security of travel	✓		✓				✓	
Manage the impacts of travel on the region's natural and built heritage assets			✓	✓				✓

4.56   The aspirations for each of the Priority Links in the Strategic and Regional Network are provided in Table 4.4 and Table 4.5 respectively.

TABLE 4.4 **LINK ASPIRATIONS FOR THE PRIORITY LINKS IN THE STRATEGIC NETWORK**

	Journey reliability	Reduced journey time	Journey frequency	Journey consistency	Daily link available	Days business / commute	Safety	Other
A82 Corridor (Road)	✓	✓		✓			✓	
Highland Main Line		✓	✓					✓
A9 Inverness to Edinburgh (Road)	✓	✓						
A96 Corridor (Road)	✓	✓		✓			✓	
Inverness Trunk Road Link	✓	✓		✓				✓
Inverness-Aberdeen rail line (A96)		✓	✓	✓		✓		
Inverness airport and flights						✓		✓
A83 and Argyll & Bute Sea Crossings to A82 for Glasgow	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	
Far North Line		✓	✓			✓		
Fort William & Oban Rail lines (A82)		✓	✓			✓		
A9 north (Road)	✓	✓						
Oban A85 connections to A82 for Glasgow	✓	✓					✓	
Western Isles Sea Crossings & A87 connections to A82 for Glasgow		✓			✓	✓		
Stornoway Sea Crossings and A835 to Inverness		✓			✓		✓	✓
Kyle Rail line						✓		✓
Moray A941 and A95 to A9 for Edinburgh	✓	✓		✓			✓	
Barra airport and flights			✓	✓		✓		✓

TABLE 4.5   LINK ASPIRATIONS FOR THE PRIORITY LINKS IN THE REGIONAL NETWORK

	Journey reliability	Reduced journey time	Journey frequency	Journey consistency	Daily link available	Days business / commute	Safety	Other
Orkney internal connections	✓					✓		✓
Easdale, Luing, Islay-Jura, Lismore and Raasay ferry connections			✓			✓		✓
Western Isles spinal route (A859, A867, A865, A888) & Sound of Harris and Barra crossings	✓	✓	✓	✓				
A816 Oban to Lochgilphead	✓	✓		✓			✓	
A848 & A849 Tobermory to Fionnphort & Iona ferry	✓			✓				
A941 Dufftown to A95	✓			✓			✓	
A838 Kinlochbervie to Lairg	✓							
A890 Lochcarron to A832	✓			✓			✓	
A939 Tomintoul to A95	✓						✓	✓
A98 from Elgin to Fraserburgh & A950 to Peterhead							✓	
A832 Gairloch to Garve	✓			✓			✓	

4.57   The next stage in developing the Strategy was, for each Priority Link, to develop options designed to achieve these aspirations, and ultimately to achieve the Strategy objectives.

4.58   The types of interventions considered can be grouped into three broad categories which reflect the existing evidence base in the region and beyond, the need to make the best use of existing and future resources and assets. The interventions or options categories are:

- **Network development options:** interventions to make best use of, or enhance, the transport network, including roads and the rail network, and infrastructure pertaining to aviation and ferries.
- **Service options:** interventions to enhance the passenger transport provision across the region, including the bus, coach, rail, ferry and air network. These interventions are intended to enhance service connectivity, and, where passenger transport is a viable alternative to the car, to make it more attractive than the car.

- **Demand management options:** interventions here are intended to change travel choices. Measures in this category may 'ration' use of the transport network in favour of travel means at the top of Scottish Planning Policy 17 [50] hierarchy, that is walking, cycling and public transport. They may include promotion of these alternatives through information / marketing, together with measures to help individuals, business and organisations to plan travel using these alternatives to the car.

Long list options for the Strategic and Regional Network and Horizontal themes

4.59   The outcome of the processes discussed above was a long list of potential options for inclusion within the Strategy. This long list of options set out interventions that would assist in realising the Strategy objectives. The long list of options comprised interventions for the Strategic Network, the Regional Network, and each of the Horizontal Themes.

Sifting and prioritising the strategic options

Prioritisation step 1

4.60   In the first stage of the prioritisation process, each of the interventions identified was tested against the objectives of the Strategy in order to sift out those which did not achieve the necessary outcomes. This is a requirement of the STAG process and has been detailed in supplementary guidance on prioritisation for the Regional Transport Strategies from the Scottish Executive.

4.61   Assessment against the strategy objectives was undertaken using a three point scale, as follows:

- ☑ **Green: the option will have an unambiguously positive impact on the objective.**
- ⊘ **Amber: the option will have a positive impact, but this will be lesser and / or may have mixed or a distribution of positive and negative impacts.**
- ✘ **Red: the option will have an adverse impact on the objective. This is a warning for the option development / refinement to consider.**

4.62   In the assessment against the **Environment** objective (manage the impacts of transport on the Region's natural and built heritage assets) a fourth score was used which indicated if this option interacted with one of the following environmental issues, that have been identified through the Strategic Environmental Assessment process:

- Sites of Special Scientific Interest.
- Nature Park.
- Special Area of Conservation.

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[50]   Scottish Planning Policy 17: Planning for Transport gives the order of priority for personal travel: walking, then cycling, then public transport, then other motorised modes.
http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2005/08/16154406/44078

- Special Protection Area.
- Wetland Area.
- Historic Gardens and Design Landscapes.

Options that would come into such an area are flagged thus: ⊠

4.63   As a result of the assessment exercise, a number of options on the network and in the horizontal themes were dropped, refined or packaged with other options.

Prioritisation step 2

4.64   The second step in the prioritisation process was to test the remaining options against their contribution to achieving the **connectivity** objective and the national objectives of improving the environment, health and safety. A similar process to that described for Step 1 was employed, whereby each of the options were given a score on the three point scale in relation to their contribution to the policy tests of connectivity, environment, health and safety.

4.65   The policy tests were:

- **Connectivity** for the economy:
  - Option reduces journey time to national gateways and beyond.
  - Option improves journey reliability to national gateways.
  - Option allows a days business at a national gateway and vice versa.
  - Option removes / reduces road congestion.
  - Option improves journey consistency.
  - Option increases journey frequency for passenger transport.
- **Connectivity** for accessibility:
  - Option improves accessibility to labour market / jobs.
  - Option improves accessibility to training and education.
  - Option reduces affordability barriers.
  - Option reduces physical barriers.
  - Option extends the reach of passenger transport.
  - Option makes passenger transport more attractive than the car.
- **Environment**, **health** and **safety**:
  - Option enables shift in freight transport from road to rail and water.
  - Option reduces transport emissions.
  - Options increases active travel.
  - Option reduces road accidents.
  - Option reduces traffic speeds in sensitive areas.

4.66   From this assessment, a set of 'best fit' options were identified. 'Best fit' options are those which have scored the greatest number of 'greens' in the assessment against these tests.

4.67   These best fit options form the core action plan of the Regional Transport Strategy for the Highlands and Islands from 2008 to 2022, and are presented in the Proposed Delivery Plan which accompanies this Strategy.

Costing and prioritisation Step 3

4.68   Guidance from the Scottish Executive recommends a final stage of prioritisation within Regional Transport Strategies, focusing on the key principles of feasibility and deliverability; effectiveness; acceptability; and policy. This final stage was applied to the proposed options for the Strategic and Regional Networks, whilst measures within the "horizontal" themes have been packaged into sub-strategies.

4.69   The principle of effectiveness was applied to the generation of options in Steps 1 and 2 of Prioritisation described above. In addition, the principle of policy was applied through the testing of all options against a hierarchy of policy objectives. Therefore, this final stage of prioritisation focused on deliverability and acceptability. Acceptability was largely measured through the consultation process of the draft Strategy.

4.70   In terms of deliverability:

- A short summary note on each option was prepared in consultation with HITRANS authorities, highlighting the key impacts of options where such information was available, and critically, identifying key issues for delivery including potential costings.

- A broad estimate of existing annual transport expenditure in the Highlands and Islands was developed, to inject a sense of realism about potential funding available for the HITRANS Regional Transport Strategy.

- Workshops were held with HITRANS Permanent Advisors to cost the proposed programme of measures, and to prioritise based on deliverability. The criteria focused on were cost, deliverability and planning stage of the proposed measures. Key risks to deliverability were examined for each option – for example, significant environmental constraints such as landscape designations or topographical constraints.

4.71   The key outcomes of this process has been:

- A Short Term Action Plan, prioritised with measures for the first five years of the Strategy – further detail is shown in the Proposed Delivery Plan that accompanies this Strategy.

- A methodology for prioritisation based on deliverability which can be applied to future iterations of the Strategy as it is reviewed, should funding constraints or opportunities require it.

5.   DELIVERY AND MONITORING OF THE STRATEGY

Overview

5.1   A Strategy is nothing without a plan to deliver it. As the Scottish Executive sets out in its Guidance to Regional Transport Partnerships on the development of Regional Transport Strategies, there should be a hierarchy of plans to assist with the delivery of the Strategy, as follows:

- The Regional Transport Strategy - the 15-year strategy reviewed, revised and refreshed every 4 years in line with the local government electoral cycle.

- Investment Plan: investment plan covering the first 5 to 10 years of the strategy that sets out a programme of capital investment required for the successful implementation of the RTS. This would need to be updated when the Regional Transport Partnership judged it appropriate.

- Delivery or business plan: three-year plan for the implementation of the Regional Transport Strategy, updated annually to reflect local and central government planning and funding cycles. Includes plans for revenue and capital spending and borrowing.

- Annual report: Yearly update of progress

5.2   This section of the Strategy sets out our approach to delivery, as follows:

- Discussion of functions which the Regional Transport Partnership could take on to assist with delivery.

- A proposed monitoring framework, including indicators which relate directly to our vision and objectives.

- The programme for review of the Strategy.

5.3   During the review process of the previous non-statutory Regional Transport Strategy, HITRANS collected an extensive body of information on the policies and priorities of sectors relevant to the HITRANS Strategy (including health, land use planning, economic development, sustainable development), and also carried out a review of existing data sources to inform the development of a monitoring framework for the statutory Strategy. This work has been revisited, updated and drawn on extensively in the development of this monitoring framework.

5.4   Highlands and Islands Enterprise currently carries out an annual monitoring of transport provision and expenditure across the region. HITRANS will work in partnership with Highlands and Islands Enterprise, to avoid any duplication of resources and ensure that information gathered is of benefit to all parties.

Functions of the Regional Transport Partnership

5.5   Delivery of the Strategy is very much linked to the functions the statutory Regional Transport Partnership will take on. In the case of HITRANS, this issue will be discussed in the first year of the Strategy, during which time our partners will be consulted further. Decisions made on this issue will be reported upon in future updates of the Strategy, most likely in the first four year Review of the Strategy in 2011.

The need for monitoring

5.6   HITRANS has a duty under the Transport (Scotland) Act 2005 to monitor and measure the progress of the Regional Transport Strategy. Moreover, such monitoring is crucial to measure how the Strategy is making progress towards it objectives.

5.7   In addition, HITRANS has a duty to monitor the impacts of the Strategy through the Strategic Environmental Assessment process. A set of indicators has been developed through this process, which are summarised in this Strategy for the sake of completeness (see Table 5.2). Further detail on the indicators relating to the Strategic Environmental Assessment however can be found in the Environmental Statement for the HITRANS Regional Transport Strategy, which accompanies this document.

5.8   A comprehensive review of available data was carried out in a review of the previous HITRANS Regional Transport Strategy (see section 2 for reference), specifically aimed at informing the development of a monitoring framework for the statutory Strategy. Where significant gaps in data exist, HITRANS is working with partners to develop data collection systems.

Developing a monitoring framework

5.9   In developing a monitoring framework for the HITRANS Regional Transport Strategy, a number of sources of information has been drawn upon, in particular:

- The strategic outcomes and related indicators identified in the National Transport Strategy for Scotland.
- Indicators being developed by the individual local authorities within HITRANS in their Local Transport Strategy development process, and within land use Development Plans.
- Indicators related to other partners who will have a role in helping HITRANS to deliver the Strategy and have a role in monitoring the outcomes of their own strategies and plans, in particular, neighbouring Regional Transport Partnerships (NESTRANS, TACTRANS and SPT), Highlands and Islands Enterprise and the NHS.
- Indicators developed as part of the Strategic Environmental Assessment process for the HITRANS Regional Transport Strategy.
- Relevant transport indicators from Audit Scotland.

5.10   The indicators presented in the National Transport Strategy are shown in the following table. HITRANS agrees that Regional Transport Strategy indicators should be consistent with the national set to enable regional efforts to contribute to national objectives. At the same time however, indicators at the regional level need to reflect regional priorities and objectives, as well as data availability at the regional level. There may be a need to develop indicators that take account of the spatial variability within the region, from islands to mainland, remote rural to urban.

TABLE 5.1   NATIONAL TRANSPORT STRATEGY INDICATORS

Strategic outcome	Indicators
Improve journey times and connections, to tackle congestion and the lack of integration and connections in transport which impact on our high level objectives for economic growth, social inclusion, integration and safety	• Congestion – through the existing measure of time lost on trunk roads due to congestion (or other causes) and, if appropriate, through the development of new measures (see box on traffic growth) • No. of international routes from Scottish airports • ScotRail passenger kilometres • Rail punctuality
Reduce emissions, to tackle the issues of climate change, air quality and health improvement which impact on our high level objective for protecting the environment and improving health	• Carbon emissions from the transport sector • Tonnes of carbon saved • Average distance walked and cycled per person per year
Improve quality, accessibility and affordability, to give people a choice of public transport, where availability means better quality transport services and value for money or an alternative to the car	• Passenger numbers on buses, through lifeline airports and on lifeline ferries • Satisfaction of bus and rail passengers • Walking time to nearest bus stop and frequency of bus service at nearest bus stop (for urban and rural areas) • Access to key services

5.11   A review of other relevant indicators which have been developed by HITRANS' partners within and outwith the region has been carried out, and is presented in the supporting Technical Note on Supporting Monitoring Information which accompanies this Strategy. It should be noted that not all local authorities have developed their Local Transport Strategies at the time of writing, and therefore this list is incomplete. To make the monitoring of the Regional Transport Strategy as effective and efficient as possible, however, HITRANS are aiming to utilise data collection and monitoring systems at the local level as far as possible, to avoid the need for extensive new data collection.

Proposed monitoring framework for HITRANS Regional Transport Strategy

5.12   Having considered the data collection ongoing in the region for related indicators amongst HITRANS' partners, and the best-fit of indicators to measure progress against the HITRANS objectives and policies, the set of draft indicators has been developed. However, further work is required to develop an appropriate monitoring strategy for the Strategy, and this will be done within the first year of the Strategy. Consequently, indicators and any related targets will be reviewed throughout the first year of the statutory Strategy, and any amendments will be reported in the first Annual Report of the Strategy in 2008.

TABLE 5.2   HITRANS DRAFT MONITORING FRAMEWORK

Indicator	Data source	RTS Objective and *sub-policy area*
National Transport Strategy indicators in Highlands and Islands context		
Congestion	Through the existing measure of time lost on trunk roads due to congestion (or other causes) and, if appropriate, through the development of new measures	Economy, Environment, Health – ***Active Travel, Passenger Transport, Congestion and Urban issues, Environmental Impact***
No. of international routes from Highlands and Islands airports	HIAL	Economy – ***Aviation***
No. of national routes from Highlands and Islands airport	HIAL	Economy – ***Aviation***
No. of London routes from Highlands and Islands airports	HIAL	Economy – ***Aviation***
ScotRail passenger kilometres	First Scotrail	Economy, Environment – ***Passenger transport***
Rail punctuality	First Scotrail	Economy, Environment – ***Passenger transport***
Carbon emissions from the transport sector	See indicator in SEA section below	Environment, Health – ***Environmental impact***
Tonnes of carbon saved	See indicator in SEA section below	Environment, Health – ***Environmental impact***
Average distance walked and cycled per person per year	Local authorities	Environment, Health – ***Environmental impact, Active Travel***
Passenger numbers on buses	Operators and local authorities	Environment, Participation in everyday life – ***Passenger transport, Congestion and Urban issues***
Passenger numbers through lifeline airports	HIAL	Economy, Participation in everyday life – ***Aviation***

Indicator	Data source	RTS Objective and *sub-policy area*
Passenger numbers on lifeline ferries	Operators and local authorities	Economy, Participation in everyday life – ***Ports and ferries***
Satisfaction of bus and rail passengers	Rail and bus operators	Environment, Participation in everyday life – ***Passenger transport, Congestion and Urban Issues***
Walking time to nearest bus stop and frequency of bus service at nearest bus stop (for urban and rural areas)	Scottish Household Survey	Participation in everyday life – ***Passenger Transport, Active Travel, Congestion and Urban Issues***
Access to key services	Scottish Household Survey, new regional accessibility model	Participation in everyday life – ***Passenger Transport, Active Travel, Congestion and Urban Issues, Community and health transport***
Other suggested indicators		
National Cycle Network length	SUSTRANS	Environment, Health – ***Environmental impact, Active Travel, Congestion and Urban Issues***
Travel to work (modal share)	Scottish Household Statistics	Participation in everyday life, Environment, Health – ***Active Travel, Passenger Transport, Congestion and Urban issues***
Travel to school (modal share)	Scottish Household Statistics	Participation in everyday life, Environment, Health – ***Active Travel, Passenger Transport, Congestion and Urban issues***
Road safety (general, fatalities and casualties)	Road Accident Statistics	Safety and security
Road safety (children, fatalities and casualties)	Road Accident Statistics	Safety and security
Public transport information provision	Existing rail performance monitoring (SQUIRE), data gap for bus, ferry, rail	Participation in everyday life, Environment – ***Passenger Transport, Congestion and Urban Issues***
Removal of freight road miles	Scottish Executive (FFG)	Environment – ***Freight, Environmental impacts***

Indicator	Data source	RTS Objective and *sub-policy area*
Proportion of bus fleet DDA compliant	Operators	Participation in everyday life
Proportion of ferry fleet DDA compliant	Operators	Participation in everyday life
Population change (growth or decline)	Census	Viability of the region
Indexing of ferry, air, rail and bus fares on selected routes	Operators and local authorities	Economy, Participation in everyday life – ***Ports and Ferries, Travel Costs***
Indexing of journey times by road and rail	Operators, Scottish Executive	Economy, Participation in everyday life – ***Passenger transport, Freight, Locally significant roads***
Rail and bus journey times	Scheduled timetables	Participation in everyday life, Environment, Economy – ***Passenger Transport, Congestion and Urban Issues***
Maintenance/quality of road infrastructure	Local authorities	Economy, Participation in everyday life, Safety and Security – ***locally significant roads***
Proportion of carbon emissions from transport offset by other reductions across the region	HITRANS and HIE	Environment, Health – ***Environmental impact***
Strategic Environmental Assessment of HITRANS RTS		
Noise: Prediction of road traffic noise at key locations on the road network	Tbc	Environment
Greenhouse Gas Emissions: Predicted emissions of CO_2 from transport	Tbc	Environment
Air quality: **NO_2:** Annual mean, **PM_{10}:** Annual mean	Local authority Air Quality Monitoring Reports	Environment
Water: The quality of river, coastal and estuary waters	Tbc	Environment
Soils: Presence of contaminated land	Tbc	Environment
Biodiversity: Number of designated sites affected in RTS	Tbc	Environment

Indicator	Data source	RTS Objective and *sub-policy area*
Landscape: Area (in ha.) of areas of protection designated to protect visual amenity affected	Tbc	Environment
Cultural Heritage: Number of listed buildings, scheduled monuments, Historic Gardens, Designed Landscapes and areas within a World Heritage Site affected by RTS	Tbc	Environment
Health: Air quality indicators (respiratory health) The proportion of the population feeling in 'good health'	Scottish Household Survey	Environment

Review process

5.13   The review process for the Strategy is formalised within statutory guidance from the Scottish Executive. This guidance states that the Section 7 of the Act requires Regional Transport Partnerships under review. The Strategy should be reviewed and rolled forward every 4 years.

5.14   HITRANS undertakes to prepare an Annual Report of the Regional Transport Strategy, reporting on progress and achievements, as well as identifying areas which require attention to progress. Any information available to assist with monitoring will be included in the Annual Reports, although a full review of progress indicators will take place at the four-yearly Review. These four-yearly Reviews will provide an opportunity to revisit the policies and programmes within the Strategy.

5.15   In addition, during 2007/08, HITRANS undertakes to assess additional proposals that have come forward during the consultation period from HITRANS partners. These additional proposals emerged during the consultation period and need to be assessed as to whether they should be included in the Strategy fifteen-year programme. For more information on these, see the Proposed Delivery Plan that accompanies this Strategy.

	CONTROL SHEET

Project/Proposal Name:	REGIONAL TRANSPORT STRATEGY FOR THE HIGHLANDS AND ISLANDS
Document Title:	Final Strategy
Client Contract/Project Number:	
SDG Project/Proposal Number:	206623

ISSUE HISTORY

Issue No.	**Date**	**Details**
1	**19.02.07**	**Revised draft strategy**
2	**15.03.07**	**Revised draft strategy_version 2**
3	**23.03.07**	**Revised draft strategy_version 3 (post Members meeting 23 March)**
4	**30.03.07**	**Final submission to Ministers, approved by HITRANS**
5	**25.06.07**	**Final Strategy for approval, minus Proposed Delivery Plan and Supporting Information**

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