

Report to Partnership Meeting 13 September 2019

PARTNERSHIP

Local Governance Review

Introduction

In early 2019, HITRANS commissioned a consultancy report on the current Scottish Government/COSLA Local Governance Review (LGR), which was the subject of presentation and discussion at April's Partnership Boardⁱ and concluded with a strong recommendation that there was a role for HITRANS in further aggregation of services across the area. The LGR report highlighted that a key recurring message is that regional transport is important in the Highland and Islands (H&I) and HITRANS is an important delivery agent for the region of positive strategic and project specific outcomes. The respect is clear from the references to HITRANS across the number of local and regional documents reviewed and also the continued willingness to consider further evaluation of joint working arrangements. Furthermore, across the H&I strategic policy context reviewed, there is a clear consistency of desired outcomes from the LTS's and LOIP's reflected up into the Regional Transport Strategy. This pointing to a clear opportunity to investigate whether further transport aggregation of service across the HITRANS in the context of NTS2.

LGR Next Steps/Consultation on NTS2 Draft

Subsequently, the LGR consultation responses have been publishedⁱⁱ with SG and COSLA outlining their desire to create a bold, new approach to types of decision-making with a clear focus on improving people's lives by achieving the National Performance Framework outcomesⁱⁱⁱ. Following, on from the publication of the LGR consultation responses in May 2019, Transport Scotland published the consultation draft of the second National Transport Strategy in late July, alongside a research report^{iv} reviewing the roles and responsibilities/transport governance within Scotland presently. There was a number of key options discussed concerning a change in the subject coverage of regional joint working and also structures that deliver it, however there was a clear understanding that any change in governance would need to be the subject of discussion with local government. This should include the retention and revision of HITRANS, as an RTP, within the current legislative context and indeed its continued role and functions as outlined in the 2019 consultancy report with potential for taking on more functions for member councils as envisaged and enabled by the legislative framework of the existing Transport (Scotland) Act 2005. Indeed, it would seem appropriate that this option is reiterated strongly in the HITRANS response to NTS2 draft, setting out a positive and proactive proposal for continuing improvement of transport services in the H&I area, an offering of positive reform to strengthen local democracy in the area as part of the proposed NTS2 reforms. This potential offer of regionalisation of resources and a clear strategic direction for HITRANS services would also maintain and indeed probably increase pressure on Transport Scotland to give greater active consideration to the de-centralisation or at the least co-location of certain regional important functions and services within the HITRANS area.

The HITRANS commissioned consultancy report on LGR, discussed the potential renewed and reaffirmed role for HITRANS going forward and the purpose of this paper is to discuss a potential plan for aggregating transport and other related services/functions over a 2-3 year timescale. One of the key conclusions of the report was the need for discussions amongst member councils and partners to identify which areas of policy and practice would be initial focus for further aggregation or pooling of services and functions through or via HITRANS.

Initial Areas of Focus for Regional Service Delivery

This could enable for member councils a greater focus on prevention, reducing inequalities and promotion of greater co-design with key stakeholders especially around some initial key areas such as Active Travel and Bus, given the increased focus on an Active Nation and the likely subsequent focus on a renewed public transport strategy post the completion of the Transport Bill later this year through Parliament and continuing focus on regional MaaS style projects. This could provide member councils with access to renewed capacity and expertise around these policy issues. It could also provide members with access to a pool of expertise at bidding for funding in these policy areas and others given the increasingly prevalence of competitive bid funds across transport policy in recent years, enabling HITRANS area collectively to bid and also lobby for greater funding of these key areas. This is in line with the human resource and lobbying capacity city councils such as Glasgow and Edinburgh have directed at these areas in recent years, with subsequent success in the receipt of significant scheme and strategy funding.

If member councils were agreeable to this proposed course of action, it is recommended that a Strategic Plan is developed through consultation and agreed, a form of continuing consultation, a roadmap for where HITRANS and partner local authorities want to go over the course of next 2-3 years. Setting out a vision for buy-in from all partners to working together better by the closure of the NTS2 consultation in late October. Identifying which areas will be subject of an offer in the consultation response and how it is proposed that change will occur and over what timescale and what mechanism.

Conclusion

Partnership Advisors are asked to consider the potential further consolidation of HITRANS as the regional transport governance model for the area. In the LGR research report commissioned by HITRANS earlier this year, it was highlighted that there is no view expressed in the local/regional plans/strategies reviewed as part of that commission, that the current role and functions of HITRANS should be static in the future. Indeed, several documents make references to a desire for greater joint working to produce strategies and projects with HITRANS and a continuation willingness to evolve methods and structures of working.

In the context of LGR and NTS2, it would appear appropriate to test the parameters of possible further development of HITRANS co-produced powers or sole functions/joint capacity in the Highlands and Islands Area to feed into a proactive and positive response to the current NTS2 consultation by end of October 2019. This would enable the initial scoping of potential further governance and sharing/aggregation arrangements around a select suite of policy areas e.g. Active Travel and Bus that could be beneficial in the delivery of local outcomes as well as increasing service resilience and sustainability locally of service but also local participative democracy, testing also the potential for further future areas of service to be aggregated if suitable methods of governance can be agreed and demonstrated to sustainable and beneficial from joint working on these first pilot areas for greater regionalisation of services and functions.

RISK REGISTER

RTS Delivery

Impact - Positive

Comment – The paper sets out opportunities to develop regional governance within the Highlands and Islands.

Policy

Impact – Positive

Financial

Impact – Positive

Budget line and value – This item sets out an opportunity for HITRANS to have a more active delivery role and potentially reduced RTP and Local Authority officers time spent bidding for funds with a collaborative pipeline process.

Equality

Impact – Positive

RECOMMENDATION

1. Members are asked to note the report.

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Date: 4th September 2019

ⁱ https://hitrans.org.uk/Documents/Item_6_-_Local_Governance_Review.pdf

ⁱⁱ <https://www.gov.scot/publications/local-governance-review-analysis-responses-democracy-matters/>

ⁱⁱⁱ <https://www2.gov.scot/About/Performance/scotPerforms>

^{iv} <https://www.transport.gov.scot/media/45102/national-transport-strategy-transport-governance-working-group-report.pdf>