

Minute of Meeting held via
Microsoft Teams on Friday 23 April
2021 at 9.00am.

PRESENT		<p>Cllr Allan Henderson, The Highland Council Member (Chair) Cllr John Cowe, Moray Council Member (Vice Chair) Cllr Uisdean Robertson, Comhairle nan Eilean Siar Member Cllr Robin Currie, Argyll and Bute Council Member Mr Robert Andrew, Non Councillor Member Prof David Gray, Non Councillor Board Member Mrs Naomi Bremner, Non Councillor Board Member</p>
IN ATTENDANCE		<p>Mr Ranald Robertson, Partnership Director Mr Neil MacRae, Partnership Manager Mr Frank Roach, Partnership Manager Mr Mike Mitchell, Partnership Treasurer Mr Richard Gerring, Highland Council Mr Angus Murray, Comhairle nan Eilean Siar Mr Gavin Barr, Orkney Islands Council Mrs Nicola Moss, Moray Council Ms Moya Ingram, Argyll & Bute Council Mr Nicky Sobey, HIE Ms Jayne Golding Ms Linda Cunningham, Comhairle nan Eilean Siar Mr Ewan Tait, Business Development Executive, ScotRail Mrs Yvonne Maciver, Comhairle nan Eilean Siar</p>
APOLOGIES		<p>Cllr Graham Sinclair, Orkney Islands Council Member Mr Grant Campbell - SCDI Mr Derek Mackay, Partnership Secretary Mr Fergus Murray, Argyll & Bute Council</p>
Declaration of Interest	of	<p>Mr Robert Andrew indicated that he had retired as Stagecoach Scotland Regional Director in June 2020 and was employed on a part-time basis as a Director of Scottish Citylink.</p>
MINUTES		
Minute of Meeting of 5 February 2021	1	<p>It was agreed to approve the Minute of Meeting of 5 February 2021 with the inclusion of the following amendments:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • That the final sentence at Item 8(1) be amended to read as follows: <p style="margin-left: 40px;">“This would enable appropriate targeting and learning between areas across the region for a pipeline approach to delivery on the ground.”</p> • That recommendation (2) at Item 15 be amended to read as follows: <p style="margin-left: 40px;">“that the Chair and Partnership Director be authorised to submit the results from the Case for Change, following circulation to the membership of the Partnership.”</p>
Matters Arising	2	<p>There were no matters arising.</p>

FINANCE

Revenue Budget Monitoring Report – 1 April 2020 to 28 February 2021 3 With reference to item 3 of the Minute of Meeting of 5 February 2021, Mr Mike Mitchell, Partnership Treasurer, submitted the Revenue Budget Monitoring Report for 1 April 2020 to 28 February 2021. The Report stated that the annual budget was approved at the Board Meeting held on 7 February 2020 and had subsequently been amended for the inclusion of the 2019/20 underspend of £7,072. The budget also included income from The Highland Council, as part of the Inverness City Active Travel Network Programme, and income contributions for research and strategy development work. The summary statement was attached as an Appendix to the Report and detailed the financial position to 28 February 2021 which indicated that in total income and expenditure was broadly in line with the budget out-turn target.

It was agreed to approve the Report and the attached schedule showing the revenue monitoring position for the period to 28 February 2021.

HITRANS External Audit Plan Draft 4 With reference to Item 5 of the Minute of Meeting of 7 February 2020, Mr John Boyd, Grant Thornton LLP submitted a Report providing an update on HITRANS External Audit Plan. The Report detailed the overarching principles of the audit, the audit approach and risk based audit methodology.

It was agreed to note the Report.

HITRANS Business Plan for 2021-22 5 With reference to item 5 of the Minute of Meeting of 24 April 2020, Mr Randal Robertson, Partnership Director, submitted a Report seeking approval of the HITRANS Business Plan for 2021/22. The Report indicated that the Business Plan set out how it was intended to support delivery of the Strategy during 2021/22 working with constituent Councils and Stakeholders with a view to improving transport services across the Highlands and Islands. The Report stated that as with previous Business Plans the programme of work set out included a two year Research and Strategy Development Programme in line with the recommendation of the Partnership Board discussion at the February 2021 meeting.

It was agreed to approve the Business Plan for Financial Year 2021/22.

RESEARCH AND STRATEGY DELIVERY

Research/ Strategy Development Programme for 2020/21 6 With reference to item 6 of the Minute of Meeting of 5 February 2021, Mr Randal Robertson, Partnership Director, submitted a Report providing an update on progress on delivering the Research and Strategy Development programme and seeking approval of amendments to the programme to reflect commitments made and changing priorities identified since approval of the 2019/20 Business Plan at the Partnership meeting on 24 April 2020. The Report stated that the HITRANS Business Plan for 2020/21 included a programme for Research and Strategy Development for 2020/21 in support of development, implementation and delivery of the HITRANS Regional Transport Strategy. The Report highlighted that work was progressing on delivery of the Programme.

The Report indicated that with external funding from EU and Scottish Government in place and added to the Research and Strategy Delivery programme budget identified in the core programme there was currently sufficient funding in place to meet a £1,300,000 programme.

It was agreed to note the amendments to the Research and Strategy Development Programme 2020/21 as detailed in the Appendix to the Report.

Opportunity
Cromarty Firth

7 Mr Frank Roach, Partnership Manager, submitted a Report detailing that Opportunity Cromarty Firth was an ambitious and collaborative initiative, exploring the potential for the Cromarty Firth to become a 'Free Trade Zone', as part of the UK Government's post-Brexit economic growth strategy. The Report highlighted that the creation of a free trade zone in the Cromarty Firth would help secure a sustainable 50-year pipeline of supply chain opportunities, primarily in the offshore renewable energy sector.

The Report stated that HITRANS was a funding partner in the consortium. It was highlighted that HITRANS interest was in port logistics, and connections to the hinterland- road, rail, pipeline and cable. The Report indicated that the availability of green hydrogen offered a real possibility for transport decarbonisation of rail, bus and HGV. It was indicated that the creation of 'Free Trade Zones', also referred to as a 'Free Ports', was part of the UK Government's post-Brexit economic growth strategy. Plans were in place to create up to 10 Free Ports across the UK which would have unique operational, regulatory and customs rules.

The Report stated that whether Freeport/Greenport was achieved or not, conditions for the Firth to play a major role in the creation of floating offshore wind sites looked very favourable., with the majority of the sites in the current ScotWind leasing round accessible from Invergordon for construction and operation. The Report highlighted that large scale electricity production would landfall in the Firth, with at scale green hydrogen production likely, with supply to distilleries, industrial processes, the gas grid, aquaculture, agriculture, transport and export in bulk.

It was agreed to approve the Report.

Active
Update

Travel 8

With reference to item 12 of the Minute of Meeting of 5 February 2021, Ms Vikki Trelfer, Active Travel Officer, submitted a Report providing an update on Active Travel projects in which HITRANS were currently involved. The Report stated that a total of £187k was available for projects in 2020/21 through the Regional Active Travel Fund. The Report provided a breakdown of the Regional Active Travel Budget spend. The Report indicated that in 2020/21 HITRANS had £187k from Transport Scotland for projects with match funding from partners for Bikes on Buses, Cycle Parking and Masterplan Small Interventions. The Report further indicated that a bid of £381,000 for 2021-22 had been submitted to Transport Scotland in January 2021 and which now had been approved. Proposed projects for 2021-22 were detailed within the Report as follows:

- Transport Integration
- Active Travel Masterplan Interventions
- Active Travel Project Design

The Report stated that the Sustrans Partnership Fund ran from June 2020 to May 2021 and provided an update on the following projects:

- Wick and Thurso Active Travel Masterplan updates - Complete
- Elgin Active Travel Map - Complete
- Carrbridge Rural Spaces – 20mph, traffic calming, place-making – Would be complete by May 2021
- Inner Moray Firth Active Travel Masterplans - Being taken forward across two financial years

An update was also provided on the progress of the following projects:

- Inverness eBike Share Scheme – HIBIKE
- Black Parks Active Travel Route, Fort William
- Rural eBikes

- Active Travel Strategies

It was agreed:

- (1) to note the Report; and**
- (2) to consider opportunities for advancing projects within the Active Travel funding streams which would support HITRANS wider policy objectives and priorities.**

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| STPR 1.2 | 9 | <p>Mr Frank Roach, Partnership Manager submitted a Report providing an update on STPR rail enhancements. The Report stated that in October 2009 Transport Scotland published its Strategic Transport Projects Review for implementation to 2032. The Report provided detailed information in respect of the following projects:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rail enhancements on the Highland Main Line between Perth and Inverness; and • Rail Service enhancements between Aberdeen and Inverness |
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The Report indicated the importance of full delivery of HML and A2I taking place without the delay in order to facilitate the journey times, frequency improvements and freight enhancements proposed in 2009.

It was agreed to note the Report.

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| Rural Bus Service Support and Funding | 10 | <p>With reference to item 8 of the Minute of Meeting of 5 February 2021, Mr Ranald Robertson, Partnership Director, submitted a Report providing an update of the finalised version of the Rural Bus Service Support and Funding Case for Change Report which was published on the HITRANS website on 24 March 2021. The Report set out a number of recommended actions that Scottish Government could take that would allow Transport Scotland, RTPs, Local Authorities and Community Transport groups to work together to deliver a pipeline approach that would make a real and lasting difference for sustainable travel in rural areas.</p> |
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The Report stated that the Report was shared with the Cabinet Secretary for Transport, Infrastructure and Connectivity before the dissolution of Parliament ahead of the Scottish Parliament elections. The Report highlighted that a response was received on 8 April which noted that Mr Matheson was very interested to read the paper about the issues facing rural bus and community transport operations and the ideas set out around potential future funding options specifically targeting rural areas. The Report indicated that Mr Matheson asked Transport Scotland officials to take the matter forward by meeting with the Chair and Partnership Director at a future date.

Mr Ranald Robertson indicated that the possibility of holding a parliamentary reception had been discussed to raise awareness of the issues surrounding Bus Services and Community Transport Operations and the need to increase resourcing to offer a better alternative to the car in rural areas. It was further indicated that a more detailed Report would be brought to a future Meeting of HITRANS prior to a parliamentary reception being held.

It was agreed to note the Report.

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| Bus Partnership Fund | 11 | <p>Mr Neil Macrae, Partnership Manager, submitted a Report providing an update on applications to the Scottish Governments Bus Partnership Fund within the HITRANS area. The Report stated that the Scottish Government had committed to providing a long-term investment of over £500m to deliver targeted bus priority measures on local and trunk roads. This was intended to reduce the negative impacts of congestion on bus services</p> |
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and address the decline in bus patronage. Details of the Bus Partnership Fund Applications received within the HITRANS area were provided within the Report.

The Report indicated that the Fund would operate via a competitive process over two phases, with the first being a light-touch process, designed as a proportionate ask of local authorities and their partners. This call for proposals acts as the launch of Phase 1 and invites partnerships to come forward with outline proposals. The Report stated that in Phase 1, Transport Scotland expect partnerships to give an indication of the level of funding they would need to deliver their long-term ambitions. The Report indicated that a decision on which proposals would receive funding to move forward to Phase 2 was expected in June 2021, where proposals would then be developed through the proportionate application of the Scottish Transport Appraisal Guidance (STAG), and ultimately move into project delivery.

It was agreed to:

- (1) note the Report; and**
- (2) support partners application to the Bus Partnership Fund and an allocation of funding from HITRANS to support the administration and monitoring of any Bus Service Improvement Partnership which would be established following a successful application.**

Fort William 12
Opportunities
Around Rail

With reference to item 9 of the Minute of Meeting of 5 February 2021, Mr Frank Roach, Partnership Manager submitted a Report which indicated that Fort William suffered from well-known congestion problems, with low journey reliability on the road networks across the town especially during April-September. The Report indicated that the increase in tourist traffic impacted on HGV movements at major industrial sites including the smelter, sawmill, and fish processor and this was further exacerbated when accidents occurred leading to very lengthy diversions. The Report highlighted that the congestion was not only in the peaks but could also be impacted by tourists staying in the town overnight leaving their accommodation to journey out to visitor attractions. The Report stated that uniquely rail could provide alleviation for some of these problems. The Report indicated that Systra had been engaged to carry out some timetabling work, based on an additional Class 156 being available, and two theoretical new stations at Nevis Range and Lochy Bridge.

The Report provided details of four potential options and commented in relation to each of the options. The Report indicated that HITRANS awaited the draft final Report which would include details on the traincrew resources, fuel required etc.

It was agreed to approve the Report.

Scottish Islands 13
Passport

With reference to item 7 of the Minute of Meeting of 5 February 2021, Ms Sarah Compton-Bishop, Scottish Islands Passport Project Manager, submitted a Report providing an update on the Scottish Islands Passport Project. The Report stated that since the February Partnership meeting there had been a number of welcome developments in relation to funding support for the ongoing development of the Passport including the following:

- The original LEADER funding extended until the end of October 2021.
- An additional £98,000 of LEADER funding was potentially available over this same period. Working with The Highland Council to confirm this.
- New funding of £175,000 from Scottish Government – £150,000 from Tourism and £25,000 from the Islands team
- £10,000k of additional funding from HITRANS plus continued in-kind support.

The Report highlighted that this combination of funds gives the project security until at least the end of March 2023. The Report provided information in relation to the progress of the project in respect of:

- Funding
- Launches
- Physical Passport
- Future Development
- Resourcing

It was agreed to:

- (1) note the Report; and**
- (2) welcome the additional funding for the Scottish Islands Passport which had secured support for its development and resourcing through to March 2023.**

Fastline Fastlane 14 With reference to item 7 of the Minute of Meeting of 11 September 2020, Mr Frank Roach Partnership Manager, submitted a Report indicating that the Local Rail Development Fund Project HITRANS was awarded £50k by Transport Scotland to study the Case for Change at Faslane. The draft Report had been completed by Stantec and sent to Transport Scotland for their comments and once the Report was finalised the Options Appraisal stage would begin. The executive summary was detailed in the Report.

The Report indicated that in summary there was a clear Case for Change based primarily on the fact HMNB Clyde was a major generator of car traffic and associated traffic and carbon impacts. In addition, there was very limited scope to increase parking supply at the base. The Report highlighted that operations at the base would be expanding significantly in the coming years and this would exacerbate the existing transport problems associated with the base. A survey of base workers undertaken as part of this study had confirmed an appetite for change with 42% of respondents indicating that they would change mode away from car if suitable alternatives were in place. In addition, the lack of scheduled public transport connectivity for shift start times constrains the labour market and this had an impact on both labour market efficiency and equality of access to the employment opportunities at the base.

It was agreed to note the Report.

Evanton Station 15 Mr Frank Roach, Partnership Manager submitted a Report providing an update on the feasibility of re-opening Evanton Station. The Report stated that the re-opening of Evanton Station (formerly Novar) had been under discussion for some years and comes on the back of recent Beaully and Conon Bridge re-openings. The Report highlighted that the community of Evanton sought to achieve better low-carbon connectivity to its neighbouring towns, and the city of Inverness, in order to support the population as it travels for work, education and leisure. This would have a positive effect on emissions and fits well with Transport Scotland's National Transport Strategy policy on the hierarchy of transport mode, and with the Rail Decarbonisation Plan. The Report indicated that the station reopening was included in the Regional Transport Strategy and the Inner Moray Forth Development Plan2 draft.

The Report stated that HITRANS would investigate the technical feasibility of a new station, to study how it would impact on current rail services in terms of capacity, and to understand the infrastructure changes as a result of the Far North Line Enhancements programme.

It was agreed to approve the Report.

Rail Policy –
ScotRail Franchise

- 16 Mr Frank Roach, Partnership Manager, submitted a Report detailing that Scottish Government had announced that the Abellio franchise would be terminated on 31 March 2022 and until then Abellio would continue under an Emergency Measures Agreement (EMA) funding package. The Report stated that an Operator of Last Resort wholly owned by Transport Scotland would operate from 1 April 2022.

Mr Ewan Tait, Business Development Executive, ScotRail gave a presentation providing information in relation to the Rail industry in Scotland.

It was agreed to approve the Report and to note the presentation.

CONSULTATION

Scottish
Government
Strategy
Consultation
Update
and

- 17 With reference to item 15 of the Minute of Meeting of 5 February 2021, Mr Neil Macrae, Partnership Manager, submitted a Report providing an update on the Strategic Transport Projects Review 2 (STPR2). The Report stated that Transport Scotland published its Phase 1 recommendations together with an updated national Case for Change and updated Regional Case for Change Reports. The Report indicated that during this stage options were assessed against the Transport Planning Objectives with projects either carried forward for further appraisal or sifted or scoped out from STPR2.

The Report indicated that a workshop involving HITRANS Partnership Board members and advisors was held on 22 March 2021 which provided an opportunity to discuss HITRANS submission so that a formal submission could be made ahead of purdah deadline. A copy of HITRANS final submission was contained in the Appendix to the Report.

It was agreed to note the Report.

UK Government
Consultations and
Funding

- 18 Mr Neil Macrae, Partnership Manager, submitted a Report providing an update on recent UK Government consultation and challenge funds. The Report provided detailed information in relation to the Union Connectivity Review and the Levelling Up Fund.

It was agreed to:

- (1) note the Report; and**
- (2) consider opportunities to apply for funding which would help implement priorities identified within the HITRANS Delivery Plan.**

EUROPEAN PROJECTS

EU Funding
Consolidated
Update

- 19 With reference to item 16 of the Minute of Meeting of 5 February 2021, Ms Jayne Golding, Projects and Policy Officer, submitted a Report providing an update on HITRANS involvement in European funded projects. The Appendix to the Report provided details on all projects including current status, timelines, description of main activities, a Gantt Chart showing involvement into 2023 and a consolidated budgets table.

It was agreed to note the Report.

PARTNERSHIP

Equalities Duties Update

20 Ms Jayne Golding, Projects and Policy Officer, submitted a Report providing an update on HITRANS Equalities Duties which had been updated with two Reports required to be published by 30 April 2021 – the Equalities Outcomes Report and Mainstreaming the Equality Duty Report. The Report stated that HITRANS Equalities Outcomes had been compiled based on available evidence of national and local transport inequality as well as involvement through a Transport Equality Survey launched in February 2021.

It was agreed to:

- (1) note the content of the Report; and**
- (2) approve the draft Mainstreaming of Equality Duty and Equalities Outcomes Reports as a basis for publishing them by 30 April 2021.**

It was agreed that the public, including the press, be excluded from the Meeting during consideration of the following item on the grounds that exempt information as defined in Paragraph 1 of Schedule 7A to the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973 namely information relating to a particular employee, former employee or applicant to become an employee of, or a particular office holder or former office holder, or applicant to become and office holder under, the Comhairle would be disclosed.

Staffing

21 * Mr Ranald Robertson, Partnership Director, submitted a Report seeking approval for a review of staff responsibilities and job descriptions to be undertaken by the Director and Human Resources Adviser in respect of roles within the HITRANS team. The Report stated that as a result of increased budget being secured by HITRANS for delivery of work in areas including Active Travel; Mobility as a Service; EU Projects; Low Carbon Mobility and Autonomous Vehicles there had been a significant impact on duties particularly affecting four posts within the HITRANS Team.

It was agreed to:

- (1) note the Report;**
- (2) approve the review of the SCP grading of the roles of Office Manager, Active Travel Officer, Projects and Policy Officer; and Business Support Assistant (EU Projects) as proposed by the Partnership Director subject to evaluation with HITRANS Human Resources Adviser; and**
- (3) approve the recruitment of an Intern to provide project support on the MaaS programme and not to replace the vacancy created by the Project Officer (MaaS) on a like for like basis.**