

HI·LIGHTS

NEWSLETTER AUTUMN 2023

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WELCOME

Welcome to the autumn edition in 2023 of HITRANS *HI·LIGHTS*, our newsletter which keeps you informed about our work.

More detailed information is available on our website: www.hitrans.org.uk and Twitter @HITRANS_RTP



Benbecula Airport

SECURITY OF LIFELINE AIR SERVICES

We are currently working with HIAL, Transport Scotland and the wider air sector to identify effective measures that can help secure lifeline air services both within and to/from the region in the future.

Our Regional Transport Strategy recognises the importance for each region within the Highlands and Islands to be able to access the key urban centres that are essential for helping to sustain the local economy and delivering key public and private services. On many of these lifeline routes, air services offer the only means by which people are able to travel to or from a regional centre to Scotland's main cities and back in a day.

Concerns have recently been raised over the decision by Loganair to bring forward the winter timetable schedule on the Benbecula to Glasgow and Kirkwall to Edinburgh routes. The early introduction of winter timetables on these two routes follows on from a reduction in service on the Kirkwall to Inverness route that has reduced the ability for people to undertake a day trip to Inverness for business. Calls have been made for the opportunity to secure service levels through a PSO to be looked at on each of the routes. Other route development aspirations include connecting Wick to Edinburgh and there remains an interest in re-introducing a Stornoway to Aberdeen route.

Consideration of a PSO needs to recognise the existence of commercial services on some of the routes and the different regimes that have a role in the existing air networks both commercial and those operated under PSO.

UK, SCOTTISH AND REGIONAL RECOGNITION FOR OUR WORK

Great news from HITRANS is that we have picked up no fewer than three prestigious awards recently.



At the National Transport Awards held in the Park Plaza Hotel, London on 5 October we were awarded a highly commended prize in the Regional Transport Authority of the Year category. Effectively, we were runners-up to Transport for West Midlands but this is still a major achievement considering the competition from transport authorities the length and breadth of the United Kingdom. Our submission in this category demonstrated progress and improvement across a range of sustainable transport policy areas supported by measurable outcomes.

Closer to home, our pioneering project to improve accessibility to transport services for residents and visitors in and around the Highlands and Islands has been recognised with two awards. The GO-HI Maas (Mobility as a Service) Project won the Highlands and Islands Enterprise Award for Excellence in Innovation at the Scottish Council for Development and Industry (SCDI) Highlands and Islands Business Excellence Awards held in Inverness.

Earlier in the summer, the project was judged to be the Most Innovative Transport Project of the Year at the annual Scottish Transport Awards held in Glasgow.

And there is a chance of further recognition as GO-HI has also been shortlisted in three categories at the CiTTi magazine awards which will be held in London in November.



Nicola Moss, on behalf of HITRANS, collecting the award for Go-Hi at the SCDI H&I awards in September. IMAGE COURTESY OF SCDI NOW PROSPER

GO-HI is an app which integrates multiple transport and travel options into a single technology platform, providing journey planning capabilities, easy access to travel information, more reliable journey planning, in-app ticketing, hotel booking and a hassle-free payment system.

Developed in partnership with market-leading MaaS technology firm FOD Mobility, it allows users to plan, book and pay for an end-to-end, multimodal journey within one application using their smartphone or desktop devices. The platform offers instant access to buses, trains, ferries, HI Bike e-bikes, taxis, car clubs, car rental, folding bikes, flights and hotels to allow users to plan bespoke door-to-door journeys with ease.

UPDATE ON BUS PARTNERSHIP FUNDING

Our congratulations and thanks go to Julie Cromarty who recently joined The Highland Council on a permanent basis following eight years with HITRANS, where she was latterly providing excellent leadership on Highlands' bus partnership projects.



At our recent meeting in Orkney, Board members were advised that The Highland Council was successful with two applications to the first round of the Bus Partnership Fund, securing a total of £2,760,000 to transform public transport in Inverness, the Inner Moray Firth and Lochaber. This included an award of £2,053,040 to implement a number of 'quick win' improvements such as the completion of a bus gate at Raigmor Hospital, Inverness, and bus lane enforcement as well as funding to develop the business

case for bus priority measures on several key corridors around the city including on Millburn Road where work will complement the Active Travel improvements being developed. In Fort William an award of £707,000 is supporting the completion of two short bus only links within Fort William that will help both reduce bus journey times and improve accessibility. Funding was also secured to develop the business case for a further five options that include a variety of potential bus priority measures in and around Fort William

Meanwhile, in Oban, HITRANS are working with Argyll and Bute Council to deliver the Argyll Bus Partnership Fund project. The project there is seeking to implement bus priority measures designed to make local services quicker, more reliable and more attractive as an alternative to the car.

OUR INVOLVEMENT IN CREATING WORLD'S FIRST NET ZERO AVIATION REGION

We are partners in an exciting project to create the world's first net zero aviation region in the Highlands and Islands.

The Sustainable Aviation Test Environment (SATE) Project is based in Kirkwall Airport, and we have a budget of £181,000 to conduct key research and development. Our Project Officer is Rebecca Wallace, who took up her post in October, last year.

Jayne Golding is currently on secondment from HITRANS to HIAL to manage the SATE project.

Partnership Board members were taken on a site visit for the pioneering project ahead of their recent meeting in Kirkwall and were then shown presentations from two of the operators participating in the project, Hybrid Air Vehicles and ARC Aero Systems.

SATE is the UK's first operationally based, low-carbon aviation test centre based at Highland and Island Airport Ltd's Kirkwall Airport. Launched as part of UKRI's Future Flight Challenge, which supports the development of greener ways to fly, the project has attracted funding worth £8.9 million in a second phase of research and development.

The funding will allow the SATE project to build on the success of Phase 1, which saw some sustainable aviation technology demonstration flights delivered, including: a successful collaboration between drone specialist technology firm Windracers with Royal Mail on autonomous flights;



Image of the Airlander Hybrid Air Vehicle which has just published its feasibility study into its use within the Highlands and Islands

and the first hybrid electric flights for Scotland pioneered by Ampaire. This activity showcased the project on a global stage. Dedicated hangar facilities and office space have also been created at Kirkwall Airport and surrounding HIAL aerodromes will be used as required to support operations. While Phase 1 established the test centre, Phase 2 aims to allow SATE to expand on the success that has already been delivered and further develop a UK Centre of Excellence for Sustainable Regional Aviation.

SATE brings together an international consortium of 12 partners, from industry, public sector, and academia. Local partners include HIAL, HIE, UHI and the Highlands and Islands Transport Partnership.

BOTTLENECKS!

In 2011 we commissioned MVA Consultancy and Caledonian Solutions to review the current and future logistics requirements of the whisky industry and the corresponding impacts on the strategic transport network in the HITRANS area.

The study led to the successful Lifting The Spirit rail trials in 2013. Now we have been asked by the Scotch Whisky Association (SWA) to update that work in the light of increased output, new production sites, and changes to the freight network, including ferries.

Bottlenecks! Is a new project which seeks to identify current and future freight needs of the industry, identify any related freight transport issues, and make recommendations for addressing those issues. It will also identify how future transport options can address the climate emergency and

help the Scotch Whisky Industry deliver its commitment to reach net zero emissions by 2045. The project will additionally explore resilience issues of the region's transport infrastructure that could arise in relation to Scotland's changing climate. Cross-border links are also to be considered.

We will procure the study (valued at £45,000) which will be jointly funded with the SWA.

EV INFRASTRUCTURE SHARED SERVICES

The Electric Vehicle Infrastructure Shared Service is now formally established and we have appointed Gemma Robinson as Project Manager.

As Urban Foresight Consultants developed the EV strategy of Highland, Aberdeenshire and Aberdeen City, we have appointed them to analyse on-street charging demand in Moray, who wish to join the project.

Procurement was also completed for consultancy work to expand on aspects of the Islands' evaluation frameworks, create a combined strategy and expansion plan and revise figures for the EVIF grant applications.

This contract was awarded to Mott MacDonald, who will expand on the following aspects:-

- Public transport and community integration
- Charger reliability
- Sustainable tariff opportunities

We have welcomed Matt Glennon to the HITRANS team as our FASTER Project Officer to oversee the completion of the EU project installing 24 Rapid EV chargers in the West Highlands and Islands.

FASTLANE FASLANE

We continue to explore measures which will significantly improve transport issues in and around the HMNB Naval Base at Faslane, and in particular, provision of a rail link.

To this end, consultant, Stantec, have been commissioned to undertake a Sustainable Transport Options Study in line with the Scottish Government's appraisal guidance (STAG) focused on access options to the area

HMNB Clyde is a major generator of car traffic and associated traffic and carbon impacts, with limited scope to increase parking supply at the base. Operations at the base will be expanding significantly in the coming years and this will exacerbate the existing transport problems associated with the base. A survey of base workers undertaken as part of this study has 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



ACCESSIBILITY IN SCOTLAND'S RAILWAY

Ahead of the partnership meeting in Kirkwall, Members also received a presentation from John Lauder. John, Deputy CEO of Sustrans has been working with Network Rail to improve accessibility within and to / from rail stations in Scotland. He presented his work which has developed a Sustainable Travel to Stations Strategy that is seeking to grow the number of journeys passengers make to, and from, local neighbourhoods to the railway station, by healthy and sustainable modes. John's journey to the board meeting highlighted the opportunities to improve the inter-change between ferry and either bus or rail at Scrabster and Thurso.

lack of scheduled public transport connectivity for shift start times constrains the labour market and this has an impact on both labour market efficiency and equality of access to the employment opportunities at the base.

Separately, we have engaged Douglas Binns Ltd to produce an outline feasibility report into the siting of a railway station to provide access to the base. An indicative location in the vicinity of the north gate has been identified along with access route options into the base. A single platform station including a small car park has been proposed, with the preferred option maximising the use of existing roads and pavements for access. The platform length will be suitable for a seven-car train.

ACTIVE TRAVEL

Our Active Travel Officer, Vikki Trefler, continues to co-ordinate the Active Travel Advisory Group, bringing together our Local Authority partners and other partners and stakeholders. Vikki also sits on active and sustainable travel working groups in CnES, Orkney and Fort William, and has joined the steering group for Places for Everyone-funded projects in Oban and Jura. A Business Support Assistant, Leah Mackay, has been in post since April, based in the Western Isles and funded by the CnES Smarter Choices, Smarter Places allocation. Leah supports our sustainable and active travel work in the Western Isles and has also contributed to the Scottish Islands Passport project. She has supported work prioritising recommendations made in the 6 Active Travel Masterplans for the Western Isles, and is working on promoting free bus travel for Under-22's and Liftshare.

Monitoring:

A grant for £30,000 has enabled The Highland Council to install additional Vivacity Sensors on routes around Inverness City Centre, to provide baseline evidence for the Academy Street project. Locations for multi modal counters in Stornoway and other Masterplan settlements have been identified and procurement is underway.

Transport Integration:

Discussion is ongoing with Moray Council and Stagecoach around installing internal bike racks on Service 35. Initial discussion has begun with CnES on creating a Travel Hub at Stornoway Bus Station and potentially also Tarbert. We are also working with Scotrail on a Cycling World Championships legacy project to improve cycle parking facilities in Fort William and Inverness.



HIBike dock at Inverness Campus

HIBike use continues to grow with over 25,000 individual hires booked in the last 12 months.

Active Travel Masterplans & 20 Minute Communities:

This budget has been allocated to Moray Council for developing Active Travel Masterplans and for implementing recommendations from the original Keith Active Travel Audit (£36k). Some budget is also set aside for engagement and developing a delivery plan for the Stornoway Active Travel Masterplan, for bridge surveys on active travel routes in Fort William, and to prepare a bid for funding to implement the Fort William Wayfinding Strategy.

Mobility Hubs and Micro Mobility:

HITRANS have taken over the operation of the HI-BIKE E-bike hire schemes in Inverness and Fort William, project managed by the eHUBS officer, Chris Finlay. We have also taken on the customer service operative previously employed by Bewegen. HIBike use

Quiet Routes and NCN:

Approximately half of this budget is going towards implementing the three pilot routes in Glencoe, Raasay and Sleat. The remainder of the budget is earmarked for developing Quiet Routes and networks across the region, with discussions ongoing with Orkney, CnES, Highland and Moray.

Path Improvement Fund:

This fund allocates £25,000 to each of our Partner Local Authorities to carry out accessibility improvements to existing routes (eg. vegetation clearance, surfacing, barrier removal), or to create new links between existing paths and settlements. Grants have been approved for Moray and Orkney and discussions are ongoing with other councils in relation to how they intend to spend their allocations.

European funding:

We are currently involved in five active European projects, as well as providing support to the Low Carbon Travel & Transport (LCTT) projects. The total budget is £3,347,744.82. A large proportion of EU project work is targeted at improving the availability and accessibility of transport services in the HITRANS area, such as increasing the number of publicly available charge points. To this end, we have taken on additional responsibilities in the Ruralities – Horizon Project together with a budget of 158,000 Euros.



Robert Wilson

Staff matters:

Our best wishes go to Rachael Fraser, our project officer for finance, who has just begun maternity leave and Partnership Manager Frank Roach, who is reducing his working week to three days. Meanwhile, we welcome Intern Robert Wilson as project officer for Travel Information and the MaaS Project.

Board meeting schedule for 2024:

Looking ahead, we will meet in Elgin on 10th November 2023, Inverness on 2 February 2024; virtually on 26 April 2024 and then in the Western Isles on 19/20 September 2024 and in Argyll and Bute on 7/8 November 2024.

HI LIGHTS

WE HOPE YOU ENJOYED
the latest issue of our newsletter.



The Highlands and Islands Transport Partnership (HITRANS)

Rear Section, Second Floor,
6/7 Ardross Terrace, Inverness IV3 5NX

Phone - 01463 719002
Email – info@hitrans.org.uk