

## **Report to Partnership Meeting 8<sup>th</sup> November 2024**

### **RESEARCH AND STRATEGY DELIVERY**

#### **Western Isles Transport and Health Working Group**

##### **Purpose of Report**

To provide Members with an overview of work being undertaken through the Western Isles Connectivity for Health Travel Working Group that the Cabinet Secretary has asked HITRANS to chair and report on in December 2024.

##### **Background**

Following representations about the increasing challenges in accessing healthcare by residents in the Uists and Barra, the Scottish Governments transport to Health policy team arranged a workshop in Benbecula on 21<sup>st</sup> August. The workshop was chaired by Alasdair Allan MSP in conjunction with the Benbecula Medical Practice Patient Participation Group and was attended by the Cabinet Secretary for Health and a wide range of local stakeholders.

The aim of the workshop was to consider the short term and longer actions that could be taken to mitigate impacts and improve future planning in relation to issues relating to accessing healthcare in the Western Isles.

Subsequent to the meeting, HITRANS were asked by the Cabinet Secretary to convene a short life Working Group tasked with considering “the immediate issues and opportunities which have been identified across the Western Isles in relation to health services and transport, making recommendations for actions. The group will foster relationships to improve integration of transport provision for health services and consider alternatives.”

There was also recognition that the wider health transport action plan work being developed by HITRANS and that of the Working Group may inform and be informed by the wider HTAP work led by HITRANS across the Highlands and Islands.

##### **Western Isles Transport and Health Working Group**

A copy of the Terms of Reference for the Western Isles Transport and Health Working Group is enclosed as Appendix A to this report. The initial meeting of the group took place on 8<sup>th</sup> October to consider how the actions of the meeting convened by the cabinet secretary could be taken forward and to also consider any additional challenges or opportunities for improving access to healthcare within and from the southern isles.

The actions and next steps identified at the meeting on 28<sup>th</sup> August are outlined below:

- CnES and Airtask committed to looking at solutions for timetabling to see if any improvements can be made to the capacity/ demand profile.
- NHS WI will consider whether there is an opportunity to utilise existing helicopter flights as requested.
- Scottish Government will work to consider issues around digital connectivity, and whether further guidance is required on travel for patients.
- HITRANS will convene a working group to consider the issues and opportunities raised during the meeting, with input from the Cabinet Secretary on terms of reference and participation needed. Work should link to wider work including that in other island groups.
- Further information to be considered on the issue of the Benbecula short runway. [an update was provided from the Community Council representatives]
- Consider whether there is any opportunity to bring forward MRI installation at Western Isles Hospital.
- NHS WI to continue to consider what services can be delivered at a local level in discussion with Scottish Government.
- NHS WI to consider the current SLA contracts and provide more information to Scottish Government for discussion as part of wider Rural and island task and finish group work.
- Review islander accessibility report and ongoing work to consider implications and opportunities.

The initial meeting of the Working Group identified a number of other areas for consideration including;

- Partners to provide information and data on patient and passenger movements to help the Working Group understand the demand for the various health and transport services;
- NHS to provide cost impact from Di Not Attend / Could Not Attend patients from Uists and Barra to Stornoway;
- Identification of costs to reinstate refuelling facility and hangarage at Benbecula airport;
- Explore opportunity to utilise Barra Community Flight Bank to provide Stornoway flights rather than Glasgow as intended within the current PSO;
- Explore whether CalMac's Urgen Medical Guarantee Protocol could be adopted to allow travel from Barra to meet the PSO flight from Benbecula. Currently the protocol is only available for island to Mainland travel
- Improving the planning of overland trips to appointments
- Need to ensure that when NHS WI Travel Team have made flight bookings, information on any disruptions/changes is sent to NHS rather than to the patient/traveller

HITRANS will provide an update of progress made against the actions at the next meeting of the Working group on 21<sup>st</sup> November with a final report then being submitted to the Scottish Government in December 2024.

## Recommendations

Members are invited to:

1. Note this report

## RISK REGISTER

### RTS Delivery

Impact - Positive

Comment – Establishing a Health and Transport Action Plan was one of the key actions in the draft Delivery Plan for the updated Regional Transport Strategy. The work being undertaken by the Western Isles Transport and Health Working group offers a opportunity to make progress on many of the key issues that the wider Action Plan will seek to address within a specific part of the area.

### Policy

Impact – Positive

Comment – This work supports a number of National Transport Strategy priorities in particular *Improving our Health and Wellbeing* and policies within our updated Regional Transport Strategy including “facilitating access to public and personal services such as health, education, retail and banking. Access to healthcare facilities is particularly important in this respect given the pressure on, and challenges in, the delivery of patient transport” and Policy ST1i:

- **Policy ST1i:** The RTS supports the local delivery of public services, including health and education, and other day-to-day retail and personal services (e.g., banking) which minimise the need to travel.

### Financial

Impact –

Comment – HITRANS have committed £5,000 of funding to support work to address actions and report on the Western Isles Transport and Health Working Group.

### Equality

Impact – Positive

Comment – This working group is helping to facilitate closer and more cohesive working across public bodies in relation to transport for medical purposes in the Western Isles.

**Report by:** Neil MacRae  
**Designation:** Partnership Manager, HITRANS  
**Date:** 30<sup>th</sup> October 2024

## **Appendix A:**

### **Western Isles Transport and Health Working Group: Terms of Reference**

HITRANS will convene a working group at the request of the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care following the meeting held in Benbecula on 21 August 2024.

#### **Purpose:**

The group will consider the immediate issues and opportunities which have been identified across the Western Isles in relation to health services and transport, making recommendations for actions. The group will foster relationships to improve integration of transport provision for health services and consider alternatives.

#### **Health Transport Action Plan:**

The wider health transport action plan work is being developed by HITRANS and this groups work may inform and be informed by the wider HTAP work led by HITRANS across the Highlands and Islands.

#### **Participants:**

- HITRANS
- CnES Transportation Manager
- NHS WI Finance Director
- Representative from Uist and Barra Hospital/ Service planning lead
- CalMac Area Manager
- Airtask
- Loganair
- HIAL
- Patient representatives Uists and Benecula and Barra
- Scottish Ambulance Service
- MACS
- Scottish Government Transport to Health team

#### **Timelines:**

- First meeting 8<sup>th</sup> October 2024
- Update on progress 21st November 2024
- Final report and recommendations by December 2024

#### **Reporting to:**

- Scottish Government Transport to Health Policy team who will provide advice to Cabinet Secretary for Health and Cabinet Secretary for Transport.
- Scottish Government Policy Officials will work with the Remote Rural and Islands Working Group, a Task & Finish Group established through Strategic Planning Board, which is considering core services to be delivered locally and then what services are delivered in collaboration with other Boards.