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Report to Partnership Meeting 8th November 2024

RESEARCH AND STRATEGY DELIVERY

Highlands and Islands Health and Transport Action Plan / BN Islander Accessibility

Purpose of Report

To update on progress made to establish a Health and Transport Action Plan for the HITRANS area and specific work investigating how accessibility can be improved on Britten-Norman Islander aircraft which currently operate on PSO services within three of our partner Local Authorities and Shetland.

Highlands and Islands Health and Transport Action Plan

A draft version of the Highlands and Islands Health and Transport Action Plan Scoping Review was shared with Members for comment at the Last HITRANS Partnership meeting in September. A copy of the final version of the Review is contained in **Appendix A**.

Members also approved a recommendation that HITRANS Chair write to the Cabinet Secretary to update them on the progress being made and to seek their assistance in taking forward the recommendations outlined within the Scoping Review.

Following a response from the Cabinet Secretary, it is proposed that HITRANS write to members of the each NHS Boards that operate in the HITRANS area (NHS Grampian, NHS Western Isles, NHS Orkney and NHS Highland and Argyll and Bute) and NHS Shetland, the Scottish Ambulance Service and representatives from each Local Authority, sharing a copy of the Scoping Review and to invite them to an initial meeting to discuss the Reviews recommendations.

The Scottish Government has also just published its Transport to Health Delivery Plan (30th October 2024). A copy can be found at the following link <https://www.gov.scot/publications/transport-health-delivery-plan/documents/> and is also attached as **Appendix B** to this report. The Delivery Plan has been prepared to deliver actions to take forward recommendations from the Transport to Health and Social Care Report (2019), which was prepared by the Mobility and Access Committee for Scotland (MACS) at the request of Ministers. This report made 27 recommendations that the Scottish Government should take forward regarding transport to health and social care services. In early 2023, a joint review by officials of the original recommendations was concluded and a draft delivery plan for discussion with MACS was agreed by Ministers with further updates to Ministers pending further engagement.

The Delivery Plan has identified 16 commitments which can be taken forward, based on their feasibility, deliverability and affordability. Several of these commitments relate directly to the work outlined in this report.

BN-Islander Accessibility

The PSO contracts supported by four Local Authorities (Shetland, Orkney, Argyll and Bute and Western Isles Councils) are provided by the 8 seater Britten Islander aircraft. The PSOs in Shetland, the Western Isles and Argyll and Bute are operated by Airtask and the PSO serving the outer Orkney Isles is operated by Loganair, who recently celebrated the 50th anniversary of this service.

The BN-Islander has some unique attributes which make it ideal for fulfilling such services including its ability to operate on short airstrips that is common on many of the island destinations which the different PSO's serve. At present the current four PSOs operated by PSO's serve 16 airstrips.

Orkney

- Kirkwall
- Eday
- Stronsay
- Sanday
- Westray
- Papa Westray
- North Ronaldsay

Argyll and Bute

- Oban,
- Coll
- Collonsay
- Tiree

Shetland

- Tingwall – Shetland Mainland
- Fair Isle
- Foula

Western Isles

- Stornoway
- Benbecula

A key element of the passenger demand on all of the PSO services is related to accessing and providing healthcare, with these services relied on by patients, family visitors or carers and by staff providing services to different islands.

In common with all aircraft, the BN-Islander is not fully accessible but due to its small size and specific design, presents a number of additional challenges that make it particularly challenging to access for Persons with Reduced Mobility (PRMs).

With the age profile of the area increasing and health services increasingly being provided in fewer specialised facilities, the demand to transport people with often complex health and mobility requirements is increasing.

Following separate representations being made by members of the public in Orkney and the Western Isles this year, HITRANS has convened a working group that is seeking to identify an improved solution or solutions that will improve the accessibility of the aircraft for as many of those with temporary or permanent reduced mobility that rely on these services. The group includes representation from Transport Scotland, HITRANS, Zetrans, Orkney Islands Council, Comharlie, Argyll and Bute, HIAL, Airtask and Loganair.

There are currently no other similar aircraft available on the market that would be suitable for the requirements of many of the PSO contracts so partners have recognised the need to identify where adaptations could be made to improve the Islanders accessibility.

Both Aritask and Loganair have already undertaken considerable work to investigate potential solutions. Copies of the reports they have developed are contained as Appendices to this report (**Appendix C & D**). These reports consider the operators obligations for carrying PRMs under current regulations and potential solutions that they have independently explored.

From the work to date, it would appear that there is no off the shelf product available that would improve accessibility onto and off the aircraft. However, there is ongoing work through a current UKRI project that is considering how the aircraft doors may be adapted on the BN-Islander and also developing a prototype for a bespoke lift that would improve accessibility onto the aircraft. HITRANS is currently engaging with project partners to see how this work might help identify a deliverable solution.

In addition, the group is also considering the wider implications of rolling out any solution/s to 16 airfields including the potential need for supporting infrastructure as well as the operational and maintenance and training requirements that would need to be considered in any business case.

The Working Group continues to meet on a frequent basis and officers will provide updates on its progress towards identifying a preferred solution/s.

Recommendations

Members are invited to:

1. Note this report
2. Approve that HITRANS Chair writes to members of the each NHS Boards that operate in the HITRANS area, NHS Shetland, the Scottish Ambulance Service and representatives from each Local Authority, to share a copy of the Scoping Review and to invite them to an initial meeting to discuss the Reviews recommendations.
3. Consider how HITRANS can best support the Commitments set out in the Scottish Governments Transport to Health Delivery Plan
4. Support the ongoing efforts of the Working Group established to help identify how the accessibility of BN Islander aircraft can be improved for Persons with Reduced Mobility (PRMs)

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 to identify a solution/s

that will improve the accessibility of the BN-Islander aircraft is seen as an early action that supports the objectives of this work.

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 – Funding of £10,000 in the HITRANS Business Plan for 2024/25 was approved by members to support the initial scoping review to help establish a Health and Transport Action Plan for the HITRANS area.

Equality

Impact – Positive

Comment – By Establishing a Health and Transport Action Plan, we will help facilitate closer and more cohesive working across public bodies in relation to transport for medical purposes. Access to healthcare is most challenging in the remote, rural and island areas of the HITRANS region. This is exacerbated by the fact that the aging demographics within many of these areas have the highest demand for health and social care.

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