HITRANS Regional Transport Strategy

SEA Environmental Report

On behalf of the **Highlands and Islands Transport Partnership**

Project Ref: 330610615 | Date: March 2024

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Contents

Figures

Tables

Appendices

1 Introduction

1.1 Background

1.1.1 Stantec UK, in partnership with Eyland Skyn, has been commissioned by HITRANS, the Highlands and Islands Transport Partnership, to assist with the preparation of a new Regional Transport Strategy (RTS). This commission includes undertaking a multi-stage Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) of the emerging new RTS for the HITRANS region ('the emerging RTS') in accordance with the statutory requirements.

1.1.2 HITRANS is the statutory Regional Transport Partnership (RTP) for much of the Highlands and Islands covering the entire council areas of Comhairle nan Eilean Siar, Orkney Islands Council, Moray Council, The Highland Council and much of Argyll and Bute Council Helensburgh and Loch Lomond excepted, which are covered by Strathclyde Partnership for Transport, SPT). A map of the region is provided below:

Figure 1-1: The HITRANS region

1.1.3 HITRANS is by some distance the largest of the Scottish RTPs by landmass, although the population is estimated to be only 8% of the Scottish total. The diverse region includes the city of Inverness; several regional service centres such as Fort William, Oban, Portree, Stornoway and Thurso; large rural hinterlands; and most of Scotland's island communities. Transport services in the HITRANS region are equally diverse covering active travel, bus, rail, road, ferry and aviation – the coordination and planning of these services is critical to the social and economic wellbeing of the region.

1.1.4 The emerging RTS has been developed in line with the principles of the refreshed Scottish Transport Appraisal Guidance (STAG) and marks the final stage in a three-stage process which involved the delivery of a 'Case for Change Report' (initially developed in September 2022) and a Preliminary Options Appraisal Report (initially developed in August 2023).

1.1.5 This Environmental Report (ER) has been prepared to accompany a draft version of the new Regional Transport Strategy (RTS) for HITRANS. This updated version incorporates comments from statutory stakeholders received through the consultation, providing a final ER.

This ER documents the findings of a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) which has been carried out to inform the Draft RTS. The SEA has been undertaken as a plan-making tool to help shape the emerging RTS throughout the key stages of its development (see **Section 2.2**) and by iterative working between the transport planning, environmental and equalities assessment teams. It builds upon previous stages and takes account of comments and information received from an extensive stakeholder and public consultation exercise held in 2023; the SEA Scoping Report; the Case for Change Report and its accompanying ER.

1.2 Consultation on this Environmental Report

This SEA Environmental Report and its Non-Technical Summary were published for consultation alongside the Draft RTS which has been prepared by HITRANS together with supporting reports including the Equalities Duties Report.

1.2.1 The Draft RTS and supporting assessment reports, including this environmental assessment, were published for consultation from 19th April 2024 for eight weeks. The consultation process reached a broad range of stakeholders and the general public who have been able to provide their feedback through a dedicated website facility (see below). The Draft RTS and SEA Environmental Report, together with other supporting reports, have been made available for public access on the HITRANS website (HITRANS - Highlands and Islands Transport Partnership). The documents were also made available in hard copy for inspection at the principal offices of HITRANS.

1.2.2 Details of how to participate in the consultation were published by HITRANS and, in accordance with statutory requirements, an advert was placed in a local newspaper inviting expressions of interest and stating where a copy of the relevant plan could be inspected. A web-based consultation facility was established with access to the online feedback forms available on the HITRANS website.

1.2.3 The SEA Environmental Report and a copy of the Draft RTS (the 'relevant documents') were also provided to the SEA Consultation Authorities via the Scottish Government's SEA Gateway for formal consultation on the Strategy and the SEA under the requirements of the Environmental Assessment (Scotland) Act 2005.

1.2.4 The feedback from SEA Consultation Authorities has been received and included in this ER.

Other Related Appraisals

1.2.5 This SEA has been undertaken in parallel with an assessment of the equalities impacts of the RTS, incorporating an Island Communities Impact Assessment (ICIA).

1.2.6 With regards to Habitats Regulations Appraisal (HRA), HITRANS recognises and supports the importance of HRA for any programme or project which may have Likely Significant Effects (LSEs) on European sites. The policies in the RTS are not however location specific (with the exception of proposals to dual the A9 and A96, which are subject to their own Transport Scotland-led consenting process) and it is therefore difficult to undertake meaningful HRA screening at this stage. HITRANS commits to undertake appropriate HRA assessment of programmes and projects emerging from the RTS at the appropriate juncture.

2 Overview of HITRANS Regional Transport Strategy

2.1 Introduction

2.1.1 This section describes the context in which a new RTS is being prepared for the HITRANS region, the principal stages of Strategy development and outlines the form and content of the draft document, all of which require to be assessed through this SEA. The wider policy context and its relationship with the emerging RTS is also briefly outlined.

2.2 Stage of RTS Development

2.2.1 The Draft RTS has been prepared following a staged process of transport planning drawing on extensive baseline analysis and consultation feedback. The key stages of the process are described below:

- The **context** for the RTS was established through a review of key policy drivers, the spatial context for the Strategy and relevant travel behaviours and demand. This work involved identification of a detailed baseline of relevant transport, land use, socio-economic and environmental data.
- **Problems analysis** was then undertaken, drawing on analysis of the region's transport characteristics and trends. This analysis was reported in the RTS 'Case for Change' document (Stantec, 2023).
- **Public and stakeholder consultation** was undertaken on the RTS 'Case for Change' document in spring 2023 (see **Section 2.3**). The feedback from this exercise was reviewed and taken into account in the subsequent work on the Draft RTS and its associated environmental and equalities assessments.
- **Transport options** were then generated to resolve the problems identified in the 'Case for Change' and a Preliminary Options Appraisal was undertaken following the principles of the refreshed STAG to determine those options which best met the RTS Strategy Objectives and STAG criteria. The appraisal incorporated an environmental, equalities and islands assessment for each option. The overall appraisal was used to inform the development of the RTS Themes and RTS Policies (see below) which were subsequently incorporated into the Draft RTS.
- Building on the 'Transport Problems Framework' prepared for the RTS 'Case for Change', the Draft RTS presents an updated set of **RTS Strategy Objectives and a Vision for transport in the HITRANS region**. The document identifies a series of 11 RTS Strategy Themes which provide the structure for the Strategy. The Draft RTS itself sets out the context for each Theme in-turn, along with RTS Policies which set out the 'direction of travel' across a broad range of transport issues affecting the region for the period of the Strategy. Subsequent to the agreement of the Draft RTS, an accompanying Action / Delivery Plan will be developed to set out activities and priorities in relation to these polices and will be updated regularly.

2.2.2 At each stage, the environmental and equalities assessment teams have been involved in the analysis and review of data, the appraisal of key components of the Strategy and the assembly of the document.

2.2.3 The SEA process has been integrated with the development of the RTS. The key stages of the process are set out in Error! Reference source not found. to illustrate the activities from the two strands of work which were undertaken at similar periods and to explain how SEA outputs informed the RTS process.

Table 2-1: RTS and SEA Processes

RTS Process	SEA Process
Development of a detailed baseline of relevant transport, land-use, socio-economic and environmental data	Collation of a detailed environmental baseline including review and identification of relevant key plans and programmes. Analysis of baseline environmental issues and discussions with the RTS transport planning and policy development teams to ensure environment, climate change and sustainability issues were captured in the problems analysis process. Development of an initial SEA framework to provide the basis for environmental assessment of the key emerging components of the RTS. ***Key SEA output*: SEA Scoping Report (Stantec, 2022)**
Identification of transport problems, opportunities, issues and constraints, drawing on the baseline analysis	
Development and drafting of the strategic framework for the Draft RTS including setting out a Draft RTS Vision and RTS Strategy Objectives	Input to the policy development process including initial testing of the compatibility of the RTS strategic framework with the development of the SEA framework and objectives.
'Case for Change' public and stakeholder Consultation	The public and stakeholder consultation process included consultation on the interim findings of the SEA at the 'Case for Change' stage. ***Key SEA output*: 'Case for Change' SEA Environmental Report (Stantec UK, 2022)**
Development of a long-list of transport options to address the identified problems	SEA team input to the specification of options. A strong environmental (and equalities) theme runs through the options list, particularly those addressing active travel and public transport.
Appraisal of the long-list of options in line with the STAG guidance and criteria therein	Environmental assessment of options was carried out in line with STAG to provide environment and climate change analysis of options and inform the understanding of the effectiveness of options in addressing the identified problems. Initial proposals for mitigation were identified from the environmental appraisals and taken forward in this SEA.
Development of transport policies linked with supporting options and compilation of the Draft RTS	Completion of the detailed environmental assessment of the RTS polices against each of the SEA objectives and preparation of the SEA Environmental Report. ***Key SEA output*: Draft RTS SEA Environmental Report (March 2024) (This document)**
Final RTS for submission to Ministers	***Key SEA output*: Final RTS SEA Environmental Report (July 2024) (This document)**

2.3 Form and content of the Draft Regional Transport Strategy

2.3.1 The Draft RTS is a multi-layered document which draws on the findings of the key stages of development set out above. The initial chapters of the document (**Chapters 1 and 2**) set out an introduction and an overview of the transport and local policy context for the Strategy. A summary of the transport problems in the region is summarised in **Chapter 3**, leading into the definition of the RTS Vision and Strategy Objectives in **Chapter 4**.

2.3.2 The RTS Vision states:

Our transport networks and services will act to realise the economic potential of our region through reducing the actual and perceived impacts of distance, poor resilience and low population density. By doing this, they will facilitate economically and socially valuable activities for all, provide equality of opportunity, enable people to live active and healthy lives and allow our region to contribute fully to the national net zero emissions target.

2.3.3 Six RTS Strategy Objectives were developed at the 'Case for Change' stage and reviewed at the Draft RTS stage. These are:

- **Strategy Objective 1:** To make a just transition to a post-carbon and more environmentally sustainable transport network.
- **Strategy Objective 2:** To transform and provide safe and accessible connections between and within our city, towns and villages, to enable walking, wheeling and cycling for all.
- **Strategy Objective 3:** To widen access to public and shared transport and improve connectivity within and from / to the region.
- **Strategy Objective 4:** To improve the quality and integration of public and shared transport within and from / to the region.
- **Strategy Objective 5:** To ensure reliable, resilient, affordable and sustainable connectivity for all from / to our island, peninsular and remote communities.
- **Strategy Objective 6:** To improve the efficiency, safety and resilience of our transport networks for people and freight and adapt to the impacts of climate change.

2.3.4 In the Draft RTS, each RTS Strategy Objective is presented with a clear expression of the transport outcomes and societal impacts that the objective aims to deliver (and by extension, the overall RTS) from the perspective of users (passengers and businesses) of the transport networks in the HITRANS region.

2.3.5 The development of the RTS options followed identification of the key problems and RTS Strategy Objectives. The options aim to tackle the specific problems identified and support achievement of the RTS Strategy Objectives. The options were collated into a set of 11 supporting RTS Themes as shown in Error! Reference source not found.:

Table 2-2: RTS Strategy Themes

	Theme	Description
1	Transforming our communities and reducing the impact of transport upon them	Improving the public realm and mobility within settlements by reducing the dominance of the private car and maximising opportunities for walking, wheeling and cycling.
2	Connecting our communities	Facilitating walking, wheeling and cycling within settlements and improving active travel connections between them.
3	Enhancing public transport connectivity to / from: (i) Inverness; (ii) our sub-regional centres; and (iii) Scotland's other cities and beyond	Distance, topography, geography and low population density currently limit public transport connectivity within much of the region. This Strategy Theme is focused on improving public transport connectivity for journeys within, to and from the region. Widening the network, providing more connections, making journeys quicker
4	Improving the integration, quality of and access to public and shared transport	Addressing the barriers to travel by public transport, including interchange within and between modes, physical barriers for those less able and poor-quality facilities and travel information.
5	Providing connectivity that supports our island and peninsular communities	Improving the connectivity and reducing the peripherality of island and peninsular communities through improved ferry and air services, and potentially fixed links.
6	Improving the efficiency of transport networks and supply-chains and reducing their impact on our communities	Many supply-chains in the region are marginal and face challenges not found elsewhere in Scotland, working around ferry connections for example. This Strategy Theme is focused on enhancing the efficiency of supply-chains and identifying means for improving their environmental sustainability.
7	Improving the safety, reliability and resilience of our road and rail networks	Weather, geological instability and very limited diversion opportunities make resilience a key issue in the region, whilst safety is a primary concern on many of the main road routes. This Strategy Theme is therefore focused on improving the safety, reliability and resilience of transport networks within the region.
8	Facilitating sustainable visitor travel demand	Responding to the challenges arising from the significant seasonal influx of tourists to the region, often in the areas least well-placed to accommodate it.
9	Decarbonising our transport, mitigating the effects of climate change	Supporting the decarbonisation of transport through the adoption of zero emission vehicles, vessels, and aircraft.
10	Embracing new technologies	Capitalising on innovations in new technology.
11	Reducing the cost of travel, particularly for those most in need	Reducing the cost of travel for residents of the region, which is a primary contributor to 'transport poverty'

2.3.6 The RTS Themes provide the basis of the policies, which are presented under the heading of each theme from Chapters **5 to 15** of the Draft RTS. Each thematic chapter sets out the key transport problems, the potential actions which could address these problems and a set of policies which articulate the key focus and intention of the RTS in that context. The policies will be used as the basis of formulating more detailed and specific interventions in future stages of implementation of the Strategy, including through a proposed Action / Delivery Plan.

2.3.7 In **Chapters 16 and 17** of the Draft RTS, proposals for future delivery and monitoring of the Strategy are briefly presented.

2.4 Relationship with other Plans and Programmes

2.4.1 In accordance with SEA statutory requirements, a review of the relationship between the Draft RTS and other relevant plans and programmes (including current legislation, policies and strategies at national and regional levels) has been carried out. This review identified key requirements, objectives and priorities of relevant plans and their implications for both the emerging RTS and for the SEA. A review of these plans and programmes is set out in **Appendix A** of this report and relevant information from the review has been used in developing the RTS and in identifying key issues for the SEA.

Key Relationships

2.4.2 Undoubtedly the most important relationship between the Draft RTS and other plans and strategies is the need for the RTS to provide an appropriate framework within which to implement the **National Transport Strategy 2 (NTS2)** at a regional level. Published in February 2020, the NTS2 sets out a holistic vision for a "*sustainable, inclusive, safe and accessible transport system, helping deliver a healthier, fairer and more prosperous Scotland for communities, businesses and visitors*". To deliver this, the NTS2 outlines a strategic framework underpinned by **four thematic priorities**, which form the basis from which decisions will be evaluated on the success of future transport policies and proposals at national, regional and local levels:

- Reduces inequalities
- Takes climate action
- Helps deliver inclusive economic growth
- Improves our health and wellbeing

2.4.3 For the thematic priority of tackling climate action, the SEA and the Draft RTS have not only addressed climate change, but also biodiversity loss. Both climate change and biodiversity loss are inextricably linked and cannot be addressed alone. They shall be addressed with the consideration of each other, hence, they have been addressed as 'twin crises'.

2.4.4 One of the key priorities identified within NTS2 is the need to better integrate transport planning, land-use / spatial planning and economic development decisions. This highlights the importance of fostering strong bi-directional relationships between the RTS and the respective Local Development Plans in the HITRANS region.

2.4.5 There are several Local Development Plans within the region, each providing the vision for how communities will grow and develop in the future. They provide certainty for communities and investors alike about where development should and should not take place and the infrastructure required to support growth. National Planning Framework 4 (NPF4) was published in 2023 and sits under a National Spatial Strategy. It forms part of the statutory Development Plan. The implementation of the emerging RTS has taken account of the spatial strategy and transport requirements contained within these Development Plans.

2.4.6 From the review of relevant plans and strategies provided in **Appendix A**, a number of key environmental issues and priorities were identified which were considered to be important for the SEA and development of the Draft RTS. These include the following:

- Ensure the avoidance of likely significant environmental effects from the implementation of the plan on sites designated at international and national levels for reasons of biodiversity conservation or ecological importance.
- Follow the mitigation hierarchy, and to always aim to avoid likely significant environmental effects on nature-rich sites both that are designated at the regional and local level and that have no level of protection and aim to protect species.
- Support the reduction in greenhouse gas emissions to 75% of 1990 levels by 2030, 90% by 2040 and net-zero by 2045. To include support for a reduction in the number of kilometres travelled by car by 20% by 2030, the phase out of new petrol and diesel cars and vans, the decarbonisation of the bus fleet and investment in 'Active Freeways'.
- Minimise the environmental impacts of transport provision and infrastructure, including in terms of reducing carbon and greenhouse gas emissions and using natural resources sustainably.
- Underpin the development of a safe, secure, efficient, reliable and integrated transport system across the HITRANS region.
- Support improvements in journey times and connectivity to and from key destinations, including between islands and mainland Scotland.
- Encourage measures that reduce the need to travel and allow communities in different locations to flourish supporting efforts to reduce inequality of outcome in the Highlands and Islands and improve quality of life for all in the region.
- Ensure the conditions are in place to allow a widespread uptake of active and sustainable modes of transport for all demographic groups and communities.
- Improve the accessibility of the transport system (both physical access and access to transport information) and the provision of a range of appropriate transport modes to meet identified needs.
- Ensure that transport and transport information is accessible to all and does not contribute to social exclusion or disadvantage, whether through severance or unaffordability.
- Ensure that the transport network offers convenient and flexible inter-island services that meet the needs of the population in terms of accessing employment (where relevant), education, facilities and services.
- Enable the efficient, effective, affordable and sustainable movement of people and freight to increase economic productivity, competitiveness and opportunities for all, ensuring island and remote rural communities are not unfairly dis-advantaged.
- Secure economic growth and inward investment by supporting the delivery of new and upgraded transport infrastructure to increase connectivity and improve access to high quality employment and economic opportunities.
- Minimise the amenity impacts of transport, including reducing noise and vibration from road traffic.
- Ensure the avoidance of unacceptable health impacts from transport, in particular impacts on air quality and support the delivery of public health benefits through facilitating and encouraging active travel.
- Seek to protect and enhance the health and wellbeing of the resident and working population, including through facilitating access to healthcare (particularly for remote and island communities), safeguarding physical health and providing opportunities to enhance mental health and social wellbeing.

2.4.7 As with the key issues identified in part from analysis of the environmental and socio-economic baseline (see **Chapter 3**), these key policy issues needed to be addressed within the emerging RTS itself to effectively tackle pertinent transport problems and support the implementation of other existing and emerging plans and policies.

3 Environmental Baseline

3.1 Introduction and Approach

3.1.1 This section summarises the approach to developing the environmental baseline within the area likely to be affected by the emerging RTS, in particular the HITRANS region. **Section 3.2** presents a summary of the environmental baseline drawing on information collated on key environmental designations and from a detailed baseline review in **Appendix B**. A commentary on the likely evolution of the environmental baseline in the absence of the proposed policy (the Draft RTS) is then set out in **Section 3.3**.

3.1.2 The SEA Scoping Report presented an initial review of the relevant aspects and characteristics of the environment, including those likely to be significantly affected by the outcome of the RTS. This included the identification of sites designated at international or national levels for reasons of biodiversity conservation, geological importance, heritage or landscape values which have the potential to be affected by the emerging RTS.

3.1.3 This report has both updated and synthesised the environmental baseline in the SEA Scoping Report, taking into account recent publications, and focusing the review on existing problems and issues in the HITRANS region.

3.2 Overview of the Region

3.2.1 As previously noted, the HITRANS region is large, accounting for around half of Scotland's land mass. It includes long indented coastlines as well as mountainous areas. It also has several dozen inhabited islands. These physical features act as barriers to the movement of people and goods. Routes can be slow and / or circuitous, increasing the time and cost of travel.

3.2.2 Despite its size, the region is home to less than 10% of Scotland’s population and the population density is very low. The estimated total population of the HITRANS region in 2021 was 440,750 (8% of the Scottish total), 54% of whom lived in The Highland Council area. Some 11% of the residents live in the island groups of the Outer Hebrides (Na H-Eileanan) and Orkney. Population is heavily concentrated in the Inverness and Elgin travel-to-work areas (TTWAs), which account for over 50% of the total population of the region. All other TTWAs have populations of around 20,000 or less. For context, a map of the region showing the TTWAs and localities populations is provided below:

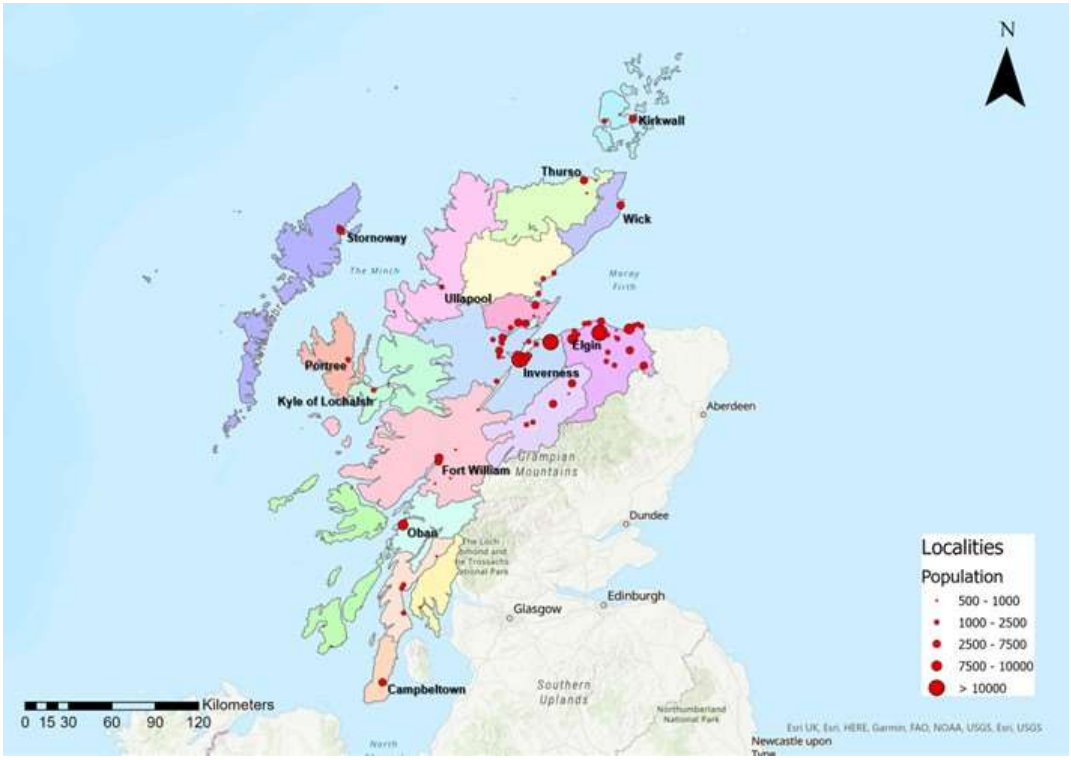

Figure 3-1: HITRANS RTP geographic coverage – TTWAs and localities populations (Source: Office for National Statistics)

3.2.3 As can be seen from the above figure, the region is highly diverse, containing a mixture of islands, remote mainland, rural and urban areas. It includes the fast-growing city of Inverness; other major settlements such as Elgin, Nairn and Oban; island 'capitals' such as Kirkwall and Stornoway; larger islands with their own service centre (e.g., Mull); and remote islands with populations of fewer than 100 people.

3.2.4 The largest settlements are around the Inner Moray Firth and the Cromarty Firth. However, even with this higher overall concentration, the only localities with a population of greater than 10,000 are Inverness (47,290), Elgin (24,760) and Forres (10,100). Indeed, the general remoteness from major population centres of much of the region is one of its defining features.

3.2.5 Inverness is the primary employment, retail and service centre for much of the region, albeit there are several regionally important service centres such as Lochgilphead, Kirkwall and Stornoway

3.2.6 There is one Air Quality Management Area in the region in Inverness City Centre. Otherwise, there are no significant issues with respect to air quality in the HITRANS RTP area, with air quality generally performing well in relation to national air quality objectives.

3.2.7 An overview of the environmental designations in the HITRANS region is provided in **Table B-1** in **Appendix B** and includes: 26 Ramsar Wetland of International Importance; 98 Special Protection Areas (SPAs); 119 Special Areas of Conservation (SACs); 591 Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs); 22 National Nature Reserves; and seven Local Nature Reserves.

3.2.8 Tourism is an important industry in the region, particularly for nature tourism with 169 heritage paths, six of Scotland's Great Trails, three National Cycle Routes, six walking routes and the North Coast 500 scenic route. The region experiences a mass influx of seasonal tourism, which puts significant pressure on transport and other infrastructure. The popular North Coast 500 route provides one of several focuses for tourism in the north of the region.

3.3 Key Environmental Issues

3.3.1 The suite of key environmental issues and policy requirements for the emerging RTS is presented in **Table 3-1**. These issues were originally identified within the HITRANS RTS SEA Scoping Report and have been updated to reflect consultation responses.

3.3.2 The table is structured by environmental topic and, for each theme, a summary of baseline information and key issues is presented including cross-references to the objectives from the SEA framework which has been used to assess the RTS policies.

3.3.3 The information in this table draws on the analysis of environmental baseline information (see **Appendix B**) and information from the review of relevant policies and plans presented in **Section 2.4**.

3.3.4 The key issues and sensitivities identified in this analysis have provided a strategic baseline sufficient to support the prediction and evaluation of potential environmental effects of the developing RTS policies, the findings of which are presented in **Chapter 5** of this Environmental Report. As the policies do not set out specific measures or transport schemes, the assessment and baseline data underpinning it has been collated at a regional level. As the RTS is implemented in future, it is likely that more detailed interventions will emerge through the proposed RTS Action Plan (**see Section 6.2**). It is proposed that the environmental effects of future interventions would be considered in relation to baseline environmental information collated at a transport corridor level (**see Section 6.2**).

Table 3-1 Key topics relevant to the SEA of the Draft HITRANS RTS

Grouped Baseline Topics	SEA Environmental Aspects	Key Issues
Air and climate	Air quality climatic factors	• The need to improve air quality in the main urban areas for the benefit of human health and the environment. • The need to respond to the climate emergency by reducing carbon emissions, including through promoting sustainable land use patterns (drawing on the 20-minute neighbourhood concept) and the decarbonisation of the transport sector. • The need to respond to the climate emergency by adapting to climate change, including ensuring that new development, including transport infrastructure and facilities, is resilient to adverse weather and adaptable to the effects of climate change. • The need to integrate and enhance natural (green/blue) infrastructure for tackling climate change. • The need to protect and enhance forest, woodland and soil resources (including peat) for carbon storage and sequestration. • The need to align with the national Update to the Climate Change Plan 2018-2032 (Scottish Government, 2020) and relevant regional commitments. • A key issue in the HITRANS region is the contribution of transport sector emissions associated with seasonal vehicle kilometres caused by tourists.
Physical environment	Biodiversity, geodiversity, flora and fauna	• The need to conserve and enhance biodiversity interests, including sites designated for their ecological importance, including within the marine environment. • The need to maintain, restore and expand valued habitats and to safeguard protected species and non-designated biodiversity interests. • The need to protect and enhance green infrastructure assets and wildlife corridors, such as through nature-based solutions as part of transport infrastructure projects. • The need to achieve biodiversity / environmental-net gain. • The need to prioritise the redevelopment of previously developed (brownfield) land. • The need to protect sites designated for their geological interest. • The need to recognise the effect of climate change on the vulnerability and condition of habitats and species.
	Soil	• The need to protect and enhance the health of soils, including peatland and other carbon rich soils. • The need to recognise the effect of climate change on vulnerability and condition of soils, and the carbon storage capacity of soils.
	Water	• The need to protect and enhance the availability and quality of water resources and the water environment.

Grouped Baseline Topics	SEA Environmental Aspects	Key Issues
		• The need to locate new development, including transport infrastructure away from areas of flood risk, and for such infrastructure to be resilient to flooding (and adverse weather more widely).
	Cultural Heritage	• The need to protect and enhance cultural heritage assets and their settings. • Protection and enhancement of important designated areas including internationally important areas of archaeology, gardens and designed landscapes and their settings. • Recognition of the connections between the historic environment and transport, including elements of the transport infrastructure which have historic significance and which often support current active travel networks.
	Landscape	• The need to conserve and enhance landscape character and to protect visual amenity. • The need to protect and enhance regional character, customs and traditions including in areas recognised for their importance, such as areas of wild land and designated landscapes, including areas of the Cairngorms National Park and National Scenic Areas (NSAs). • The need to protect and enhance the seascape character.
Social and economic	Population (including relevant socio-economic issues), human health, material assets	• The need to align with and support the implementation of adopted and emerging relevant national policies and legislation, including the Climate (Emissions Reduction Targets) (Scotland) Act 2019, NTS2 (Scottish Government, 2020), The National Islands Plan (Scottish Government 2019), the emerging Strategic Transport Projects Review 2 (STPR2) and National Planning Framework 4 (NPF4). • The need to align with and support the implementation of current and emerging statutory Local Development Plans and other relevant regional and local policies applicable to the HITRANS region. • The need to develop an integrated and efficient transport system which meets identified needs and supports population growth and enables in-migration and island / remote rural area population retention. • The need to develop an affordable and accessible transport system which provides connections between the region's islands and the Scottish mainland. • The need to support the growth and diversification of key economic sectors and to deliver sustainable and inclusive economic growth. • The need to tackle deprivation and transport severance and to improve access to key amenities, the natural environment and economic opportunities for all demographic groups and communities. • The need to ensure transport services are demand responsive and provide convenient travel options. • The need to provide transport services appropriate to meet the needs of the projected ageing population. • The need to support sustainable transport modes for seasonal visitors. • The need to provide transport services that enable participation and reduce rural isolation.

Grouped Baseline Topics	SEA Environmental Aspects	Key Issues
		• The need to provide transport infrastructure and services that support the large seasonal influx of visitors to the region.

3.3.5 Whilst all of the key environmental issues covered in the baseline and policy review should be addressed in the new RTS, the following must be afforded particular importance given their significance at national and international levels and their local relevance:

- Responding to the climate emergency (both in terms of the causes of climate change and adaptation to climate change) and the interrelated biodiversity loss
- Supporting nature recovery, such as through nature-based solutions
- Contributing to the delivery of sustainable and inclusive economic growth

3.3.6 It is recognised that the response to the climate emergency is closely related to other environmental topic areas, including air quality, biodiversity, soils (both in terms of their carbon storage and the effect of climate change on soils), water, human health and socio-economics. As transport is Scotland's biggest contributor to climate change, emitting over a quarter of all greenhouse gas emissions, the RTS provides an opportunity to contribute to net zero targets, thus also indirectly supporting these wider topic areas.

3.4 Evolution of the baseline in the absence of the emerging RTS

3.4.1 The current RTS was first published in 2008 and was refreshed in 2017, although the refresh was never formally adopted due to changes in the wider policy environment. The Transport (Scotland) Act 2005 states that RTPs should keep their RTS under review and modify or create a new one as necessary. Moreover, several factors have combined to make it the right time to produce a new RTS – these include:

- The publication of the new National Transport Strategy 2 (see **Chapter 2**) in 2020 has refocused transport policy at the national level, and the emerging RTS must align with this.
- Alongside this, the Climate Change (Emissions Reduction Targets) (Scotland) Act 2019 has committed to the delivery of net zero emissions by 2045. In particular, the Climate Change Plan Update published in December 2020 outlined that, by 2030: (i) our roads will contain no new petrol or diesel cars or vans; and (ii) car kilometres will have reduced by 20%. In the HITRANS region, where travel distances are long and public transport connectivity limited, it is necessary for the emerging RTS to set out how HITRANS can respond to these ambitious targets.
- Whilst the region is particularly vulnerable to climate change, climate mitigation measures also present an important economic opportunity. The region is rich in both established and emerging renewable energy, including offshore and onshore wind, pumped storage hydro and green hydrogen amongst others. It is essential that the transport network supports the construction of renewable energy infrastructure in a manner that does not negatively impact the communities, whilst also connecting labour to the employment generated in both construction and operation.
- The emergence of new technology is fundamentally changing the way that we live and work. This will have consequential impacts on travel both in terms of the journeys that we make (e.g., the emergence of remote working has led to a steep reduction in business travel) and how these journeys are made.
- The region has also changed significantly since the publication of the previous RTS. Technological improvements, a major increase in remote working (particularly post-COVID-19) and the evolution of policy have created new business opportunities and promoted in-migration, whilst tourism has grown hugely over this period. Whilst beneficial overall, these trends have created new problems such as, for example, a shortage of labour in certain areas and the seasonal overwhelming of some communities by visitors.
- Whilst much has changed, the region has continued to wrestle with many of the long-term challenges that it faces, including a declining and ageing population and the difficulties

and costs associated with delivering services (particularly health, social care and education) to such a geographically dispersed population.

3.4.2 Recognising both the new and long-term transport challenges in the region, the emerging RTS aims to deliver a transport system that reduces inequalities, takes climate action, helps deliver inclusive economic growth, and improves health and wellbeing.

3.4.3 In the absence of the emerging RTS, it is predicted that transport infrastructure and provision in the region would face challenges in meeting changing transport demands, including the need to support emissions reductions, accessible public transport as well as the delivery of inclusive economic growth.

3.4.4 In relation to the environmental topics prescribed in Schedule 2 of the SEA Act, it should be noted that environmental impacts from individual transport infrastructure projects would depend on their location, design and operational characteristics, and these would be assessed through the consenting of each project rather than through the emerging RTS. However, in the absence of the new RTS, the following changes to the environmental / SEA baseline might be predicted:

- **Population**: If not carefully co-ordinated, there will be limited ability to shape the transport system to meet the needs of island residents, support population retention and underpin sustainable and inclusive economic growth. In addition, this could impede the delivery of inclusive growth and stifle economic productivity, as well as resulting in physical environmental and health impacts (see below).
- **Human health**: Opportunities to encourage transport modal shift to active travel and public transport could be lost. Additionally, if significant switch to active modes of transport was not achieved, physical and mental health issues, including obesity, inactivity and social exclusion may adversely affect the resident population of the region. Health may therefore deteriorate which could impact on life expectancy.
- **Biodiversity, flora and fauna**: If not carefully co-ordinated through the emerging RTS, the need for new major transport infrastructure to cope with issues unique to the region could put pressure on biodiversity and geodiversity, including the loss and fragmentation of habitats. Unchecked increases in traffic and noise could also result in habitat degradation and species disturbance.
- **Soil**: If not carefully co-ordinated, the need for new major transport infrastructure to cope with issues unique to the region could lead to the loss of important soil resources (including peatland), soil erosion and land contamination.
- **Water**: If not carefully co-ordinated, the need for new major transport infrastructure to cope with issues unique to the region could result in increased risk of flooding and the pollution of the water environment. The provision of new and upgraded ferry infrastructure also needs to be co-ordinated to avoid adverse marine environmental impacts, including potentially on the integrity, qualifying features and conservation objectives of statutorily designated sites.
- **Air quality and climatic factors**: In the absence of better integration between transport planning and land-use / spatial planning, and substantial modal shifts towards sustainable modes of travel, an increase in road traffic associated with a decline in public transport use would increase fossil fuel combustion, carbon emissions and local atmospheric pollution, in particular greater release of particulate matter. This would lead to reduced air quality and act against wider policy efforts to decarbonise key economic sectors, including transport, to mitigate climate change.
- **Material assets**: The absence of the emerging RTS could result in reduced attraction of public and private sector funding needed to maintain existing transport infrastructure, better integrate transport modes and to deliver the new or upgraded infrastructure required to meet the needs of the population. This would jeopardise the ability of

HITRANS, as the statutory RTP for the region, to support the delivery of sustainable and inclusive economic growth.

- **Cultural heritage**: If not carefully co-ordinated, the need for new major transport infrastructure to cope with issues unique to the region could increase development pressures in areas of historical or archaeological interest and could undermine the integrity and setting of sensitive heritage assets.
- **Landscape**: If not carefully co-ordinated, the need for new major transport infrastructure to cope with issues unique to the region could adversely impact on landscape character and key landscape features, as well as adversely affecting visual amenity.

4 Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) Process

4.1 Introduction

4.1.1 This section provides an overview of the SEA process which has been undertaken to assess the likely significant environmental effects of the Draft RTS.

- **Section 4.2** outlines the statutory requirements.
- The overall purpose of the assessment and the framework of SEA Objectives is set out in **Section 4.3**
- **Section 4.4** provides the assessment methodology, including details of how the SEA is integrated with the development of the RTS, sets out the SEA Framework and the approach to consultation
- Consideration of alternatives within the RTS is presented in **Section 4.5**
- **Section 4.6** provides an overview of how the SEA process has informed the development of the RTS

4.2 Addressing Statutory Requirements

4.2.1 The Environmental Assessment (Scotland) Act 2005 ('the 2005 Act') requires Responsible Authorities, including RTPs such as HITRANS, to assess the likely significant effects on the environment of implementing relevant and qualifying plans and programmes, as defined within the Act. This assessment must also examine the likely significant effects of implementing reasonable alternatives to the plan or programme under consideration. The assessment is carried out by following a staged process of reporting known as Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA).

4.2.2 Under the 2005 Act, once the need for SEA has been established, a three-stage process is usually followed:

- **SEA Scoping**: Responsible authorities must provide the SEA Consultation Authorities with sufficient information to enable them to consider the proposed scope, level of detail and consultation period for an Environmental Report to accompany the emerging plan or programme under consideration. This requirement was fulfilled through the submission of a SEA Scoping Report to the Consultation Authorities on 30th June 2022 for a 35-day period. Details of how these scoping consultation responses have been addressed in this SEA are provided in **Section 4.3.**
- **Preparation of and Consultation regarding an Environmental Report**: The relevant Responsible Authority must prepare an Environmental Report (ER) to "*identify, describe and evaluate the likely significant effects on the environment of implementing*" the emerging plan and its reasonable alternatives. The ER also needs to provide a "*description of the measures envisaged concerning monitoring*" of likely significant environmental effects from implementing the plan. Both the ER and associated emerging strategy must be consulted on in tandem prior to the final approval of the strategy. The scope, level of detail and consultation period of the SEA align with the approach agreed through SEA Scoping.
- **Preparation of a Post Adoption SEA Statement**: Following modifications as necessary to respond to comments submitted regarding the Draft RTS and associated ER, HITRANS will update the Draft RTS and then submit the proposed finalised RTS to the Scottish Ministers for approval. Following approval of the final RTS, a statement must then be prepared to set out, amongst other matters, how environmental considerations have been

taken into account and how any likely significant effects of the RTS on the environment (as predicted through this SEA process) will be monitored. This is known as a Post Adoption Statement.

4.2.3 To satisfy statutory requirement,s it is necessary for this ER to provide certain information. The approach to addressing relevant requirements is shown in **Table 4-1** below.

Table 4-1 How Requirements of the 2005 Act are met in this SEA ER

SEA Requirement	ER Section
a) An outline of the contents, main objectives of the plan or programme and relationships with other relevant plans and programmes	▪ Chapter 2
b) The relevant aspects of the current state of the environment and the likely evolution thereof without implementation of the plan or programme	▪ Chapter 3 ▪ Appendix B
c) The environmental characteristics of areas likely to be significantly affected	
d) Any existing environmental problems which are relevant to the plan or programme	
e) The environmental protection objectives, established at international, community or national level which are relevant to the plan or programme and the way those objectives and any environmental consideration have been taken into account during its preparation	▪ Section 2.4 ▪ Appendix A
f) The likely significant effects of the plan or programme on the environment	▪ Chapter 5 ▪ Appendix D
g) The measures envisaged to prevent, reduce and, as fully as possible, offset any significant adverse effects on the environment of implementing the plan or programme	▪ Chapter 6
h) An outline of the reasons for selecting the alternatives dealt with and a description of how the assessment was undertaken, including any difficulties encountered in compiling the required information	▪ Chapter 4
i) A description of measures envisaged concerning monitoring	▪ Chapter 6
j) A non-technical summary of the information provided under the above headings	▪ Refer to separate Non-Technical Summary Report
k) Taking the environmental report and the results of the consultations into account in decision-making	▪ Chapters 3, 4, 5, 6

4.3 SEA Purpose and Objectives

4.3.1 This report has been prepared to assess the extent to which the Draft RTS addresses relevant environmental issues. In doing so, it responds to relevant statutory requirements, considers the development of the emerging RTS to date and presents an initial assessment of likely significant effects from the proposed RTS Objectives.

4.3.2 The framework for the SEA has been established through early formulation of a set of ten objectives which reflect the key priorities for the environmental assessment. These objectives were drafted at the Scoping Stage of the process and subsequently consulted on with the SEA Consultation Authorities. They are set out in **Table 4-2**.

Table 4-2 SEA Objectives

SEA Objective	Objective Wording
1. Climate change	Respond to the climate emergency by decarbonising infrastructure assets, protecting, promoting and enhancing natural infrastructure, facilitating a low carbon economy and adapting to accommodate the effects of climate change.
2. Air quality and amenity	To maintain and improve air quality and, reduce concentrations of harmful atmospheric pollutants and minimise exposure to noise and vibration.
3. Biodiversity, geodiversity and soil	Conserve, protect, restore and enhance biodiversity and geodiversity interests, including through safeguarding designated and non-designated sites, species, soil resources and habitats and by protecting, promoting and enhancing green infrastructure.
4. Water, flood risk and resilience	Conserve, protect and enhance water environments, coastal environments, water quality and water resources, whilst adapting to climate change and reducing exposure to flood risks.
5. Cultural heritage	Conserve, protect and enhance the historic environment, designated and non-designated cultural assets and promote the Highlands and Islands distinct culture.
6. Landscape	Protect and enhance the landscape character, townscape character, seascape character and visual amenity.
7. Accessibility and connectivity	Facilitate appropriate connectivity and affordable access for all to employment, education, facilities and services, and social and leisure opportunities, including tourism.
8. Inclusive growth	Improve social and economic prosperity for all by enhancing productivity and competitiveness and through reducing socio-economic inequalities.
9. Human health	Improve the health of the resident and workplace population, including with respect to physical and mental health and social wellbeing.
10. Material assets	Manage, maintain and where possible regenerate the efficient and effective use of natural resources, ecosystem services, land and infrastructure to meet identified needs.

4.4 Approach to SEA

4.4.1 This section describes the approach to SEA, identifies the key stages and the assessment methods used. Consultation on the SEA to date is discussed and the final sub-section sets out the assumptions and limitations in undertaking the environmental assessment.

SEA Project Team

4.4.2 Stantec has provided drafting and technical support to HITRANS to support the preparation of the Draft RTS and regular discussions have been held with Officers at HITRANS throughout the process of preparing the Draft RTS. This has allowed informal and early feedback of key issues identified by the SEA project team, resulting in iterative amendments to strengthen the RTS as it developed. Further details of how the SEA process has informed the preparation of the Draft RTS are provided in **Section 5**.

Key Stages of the SEA

4.4.3 The SEA has been undertaken iteratively and in step with the development of the emerging RTS. The key stages of RTS development and parallel SEA activities are set out in Error! Reference source not found..

4.4.4 The approach to environmental assessment at this stage when developing components of the Draft RTS has focused on three key groups of Strategy elements as follows:

- Compatibility appraisals of the preliminary elements (or 'strategic framework') of the Draft RTS including the RTS Vision and RTS Strategy Objectives
- Environmental appraisal of the long-list of transport options generated in the 'Case for Change'
- Environmental assessment of the subsequent Draft RTS themes and associated Policies (as presented in the Draft Strategy).

Assessment Methods

4.4.5 The early stages of the SEA process included development of an assessment methodology which was set out in the SEA Scoping Report. This included the identification of the SEA framework (including SEA objectives – see **Section 4.2**) to provide the basis for comprehensive environmental assessment of the RTS components and a consistency of approach. This has been updated slightly in response to feedback from the SEA Consultation Authorities (see the sub-section below on 'consultation') and as the RTS drafting and assessment process has developed. The SEA framework is presented in **Appendix C**.

4.4.6 The framework is based around ten SEA Objectives, with the potential effects of each RTS element assessed against these SEA Objectives. The framework includes a series of guide questions and supporting criteria to inform the consideration in a consistent and objective manner. Due to the high-level nature of the Strategy, the SEA team has applied professional judgement drawing from experience of assessing similar plans and programmes to determine the likelihood of significant environmental effects and to identify mitigation where appropriate.

4.4.7 The approach to environmental assessment at each of the above key RTS stages has required a flexible method adapted to each RTS component. The methods used are explained in the following paragraphs.

4.4.8 The compatibility assessment of the preliminary elements (or 'strategic framework') of the Draft RTS followed a qualitative assessment method where the potential for environmental effects from the key emerging RTS elements at that stage (the Transport Planning Objectives and RTS Strategy Objectives) was considered by the SEA team with respect to each SEA Objective, and with reference to the guide questions in the SEA Framework. The findings of the initial compatibility appraisals were presented using simple tables with indicative environmental 'compatibility scores' and a supporting narrative. These appraisals were undertaken initially at the 'Case for Change' stage and the findings presented in the 'Case for Change' SEA ER. The appraisals have been reviewed and updated to reflect changes to the RTS elements (e.g., through changes to the wording of the RTS Objectives) following the consultation on the Case for Change in 2023. The updated appraisals based on the finalised wording of the RTS Strategy Objectives are presented in **Section 5.2**.

4.4.9 The generation and appraisal of the long-list of transport options for the Strategy was undertaken in accordance with Scottish Transport Appraisal Guidance (STAG) methods. The SEA team inputted into this process, providing an overarching check that all reasonable alternative options had been identified and providing an appraisal of the environmental and climate change criteria required by STAG based on a seven-point scale[1] of impact criteria to assign an indication of significance of the predicted impact alongside the impact commentaries. These appraisal inputs then informed the sifting of options to refine the list to those which offered the best performance against the RTS Strategy Objectives and the STAG criteria. The findings of the environmental appraisal of the transport options are captured both in the STAG Preliminary Options Appraisal Report and in **Section 5.3** of this report.

[1] The scale provides a range of predicted impact categories from major through moderate and minor beneficial or adverse and one for neutral/no effect.

4.4.10 Following the options appraisal, the RTS process involved the development of 11 Themes, each containing an associated set of Policies. The final key stage of the SEA environmental assessment involved the application of the SEA framework to assess the predicted environmental effects of these Policies. These also drew on the findings of the appraisals of the relevant options (as linked to each theme) from the STAG-based work.

4.4.11 For each element of the RTS, the SEA topic / objective was considered in turn by the assessment team and environmental effects were predicted with reference to the guiding questions and criteria in the SEA Framework and drawing on the judgement and professional experience of the assessment team. The predicted environmental effects of the RTS elements were then evaluated with reference to a set of impact criteria as shown in **Table 4-3** to determine their likely significance.

Table 4-3 Significance criteria for assessing environmental effects of the Draft RTS Policies

Score	Description	Symbol
Significant (major) positive effect	The proposed policy contributes significantly to the achievement of the SEA Objective	++
Minor positive effect	The proposed policy contributes to the achievement of the SEA Objective but not significantly	+
Neutral effect	The proposed policy is related to but does not have any effect on the achievement of the SEA Objective	0
Minor negative effect	The proposed policy detracts from the achievement of the SEA Objective but not significantly	-
Significant (major) negative effect	The proposed policy detracts significantly from the achievement of the SEA Objective. Mitigation is therefore required	--
Uncertain effect	The proposed policy has an uncertain relationship to the SEA Objective or the relationship would be dependent on the way in which the aspect is managed	?
No clear relationship	There is no clear relationship between the proposed policy and the achievement of the SEA Objective, or the relationship is negligible	~

4.4.12 It should be noted that the biodiversity and climate change crises are inextricably linked (i.e., they are twin crises), and one cannot be addressed fully without addressing the other. The SEA has addressed the biodiversity loss along with tackling climate change as part of the twin crises.

4.4.13 The predicted effects and their significance were recorded in a series of assessment frameworks (tables) to capture information on the nature of the predicted effects, their likely significance, and proposed mitigation (and enhancement) measures to be taken forward when a delivery plan is developed subsequent the RTS. These frameworks are presented in **Appendix D** and the key findings of this environmental assessment are presented in **Section 5.4** of this report.

4.4.14 A high-level commentary on potential cumulative effects of the Draft RTS has also been included in **Section 5.4** to recognise in particular the opportunity for synergies from enhanced active travel and public transport across the region to reduce emissions and other environmental effects.

Consultation

4.4.15 Statutory consultation with the SEA Consultation Authorities was undertaken at both the Scoping and 'Case for Change' stages of the RTS and SEA.

4.4.16 At the Scoping Report stage, SEA Consultation Authorities were issued with a copy of the SEA Scoping Report and requested to provide comments regarding the proposed scope and approach to undertaking the SEA of the emerging RTS. It was requested that comments were

provided within five weeks of receiving the report. The following consultees responded at this stage:

- NatureScot
- Scottish Environment Protection Agency (SEPA)
- Historic Environment Scotland (HES)

4.4.17 The Consultation Authorities were generally satisfied with the scope, level of detail and approach to the SEA presented in the Scoping Report including the SEA objectives and assessment framework. However, the scope of the SEA Framework was refined in response to comments provided by the SEA Consultation Authorities, with greater focus on:

- The twin crises of the climate change emergency and biodiversity loss, addressing these crises together
- The use of nature-based solutions for challenges, especially as part of transport infrastructure projects
- Improving opportunities for people to have access to and engage with nature through better transport provision – especially for those who do not have access to a car
- Enhancing nature as part of the proposals through delivering positive effects for biodiversity at both a Strategy and project level

4.4.18 An online survey was carried out at the 'Case for Change' stage. This was issued to both members of the public and stakeholders. The views of the SEA consultation authorities were also sought through the SEA Gateway. The consultation authorities were in general agreement with the assessment undertaken, with no substantive comments.

4.4.19 The draft ER and an associated Non-Technical Summary has been submitted to the SEA Consultation Authorities for consultation for a period of eight weeks. The feedback from this consultation process has been included in this ER, which has been updated as necessary.

4.4.20 A schedule of the comments received from the SEA Consultation Authorities, and responses from the SEA team on how the issues raised have been addressed is included in **Appendix E**.

Assumptions and Limitations

4.4.21 The identification of any assumptions and uncertainties is an important element of the SEA process, as the emerging RTS will need to be unambiguous to ensure the plan can be implemented as intended.

4.4.22 The SEA has been undertaken alongside a relatively high-level and strategic document in the RTS which is intended to cover a significant timespan of up to approximately 20 years. There are some inherent uncertainties therefore in the accuracy of predictions made for the environmental assessment of long-term policies where the detail of implementation is still to be worked-up. Whilst the Strategy does not include any detail on specific spatial transport interventions, the process of identifying and appraising options and the subsequent linking of options with policies in the Draft Strategy has allowed the environmental assessment team to better judge the types of intervention which could potentially be associated with each policy.

4.4.23 This has reduced the uncertainties inherent in the assessment of a strategy of this nature and it is considered that the environmental assessment has been founded on sufficient prescription in the policies to allow for a competent strategic level assessment of potential significant effects. To address potential uncertainty in the degree of effectiveness of the RTS policies, the SEA team has also taken account of the typical measures which the options set provides, and the assessment assumes that policies and their subsequent delivery measures would be implemented broadly and comprehensively across the HITRANS region in order to

better understand and project their likely environmental and sustainability consequences. The reliability of these assessments has been improved through close working between the SEA and transport planning teams through the whole RTS process so that the types of options and their potential impacts were better understood.

4.4.24 The SEA assessment and reporting matrices (see **Appendix D**) have been designed to allow uncertainties and assumptions affecting the implementation of the emerging RTS to be identified early and effectively within the RTS preparation process.

4.4.25 The iterative nature of the SEA process has enabled mitigation and enhancement recommendations to be devised and incorporated into the emerging RTS to address any identified issues, in particular to avoid likely significant adverse effects from occurring. Finally, the commitment to continued environmental assessment at an appropriate level through the future stages of RTS delivery and incorporation of mitigation principles from this SEA (see **Section 6.2**) will help to ensure that any uncertainties at this stage in how policies may be taken forward can be proactively addressed through later delivery.

4.4.26 No significant difficulties or limitations have been encountered in preparing this SEA Environmental Report.

4.5 Consideration of Reasonable Alternatives

4.5.1 The SEA legislation requires that the likely significant environmental effects of implementing the Strategy and reasonable alternatives to it are identified, described and evaluated. The reasons for selecting the alternatives considered should also be outlined.

4.5.2 Alternatives and options have been considered in the RTS development process from the outset. The overall direction of the Strategy, as expressed through its Vision and Strategy Objectives, inherently considered alternatives through refinement of their wording to reflect and address priorities for transport in the HITRANS region and in taking account of consultee feedback and suggestions on their amendment. This process included consideration of a wide range of policy drivers, spatial characteristics and key transport problems and opportunities as set out in the 'Case for Change' Report. The SEA process contributed to this refinement and direction through consideration of the compatibility of developing themes and wording for the RTS Vision and Strategy Objectives with environmental priorities expressed through the developing SEA objectives and framework.

4.5.3 The consideration of alternatives was an integral part of the identification and development of the 'delivery' elements of the RTS, principally in the form of the transport options which were generated and appraised through integrated working between the client, transport planning and SEA and equalities assessment teams. These options included a wide range of responses including policies, interventions, fiscal measures and generic indications of physical transport schemes which were broadly grouped into a series of aggregated options and then themes. The HITRANS RTS Preliminary Appraisal report (Stantec UK, 2023) sets out the initial option generation process, the packaging of those options and their appraisal using the STAG criteria.

4.5.4 By generating, packaging, developing and appraising a long-list of potential options to address transport problems in the region, a broad view of the alternatives available for the new RTS was adopted. An initial phase of option sifting was undertaken, and it was determined that several options should not be taken forward for subsequent appraisal. The table on page 5 of the HITRANS RTS Preliminary Appraisal report (Stantec UK, 2023) sets out the options that were sifted at this stage.

4.5.5 This initial sifting process resulted in around 90 option packages being taken forward for appraisal. The transport planning, STAG and SEA processes ensured that there was full consideration of the potential for adverse and beneficial effects with these options which

helped to refine and sift the most suitable (and therefore, reasonable) alternatives for further consideration. These alternative courses of action were therefore subject to environmental assessment by integrating the SEA and RTS workstreams. The findings of the STAG process are presented in the Preliminary Options Appraisal Report (Stantec UK, 2023).

4.5.6 As the RTS is a strategic document, there remains considerable flexibility in the identification and consideration of alternatives for implementation of transport solutions during later stages of implementation. This process will facilitate ongoing appraisal of the interventions which emerge and the SEA provides a framework to underpin and support required further environmental design and assessment input to the future RTS Action Plan.

4.6 How the SEA informed the RTS

4.6.1 Integration of the SEA process and team with the RTS and transport planning workstreams has allowed for an iterative approach to RTS development whereby feedback from the SEA team at key stages of Strategy development has informed subsequent RTS updates. This is considered to have improved the environmental context and contribution to better environmental outcomes. The key stages of this integrated approach have included:

- A review of the coverage of environmental issues in the draft RTS 'Case for Change' (CfC) report which identified that the report generally provided a strong and evidence-based platform on which to develop the RTS and underpin action to tackle key environmental issues. The draft RTS Strategy Objectives were reviewed against the SEA objectives and considered to be compatible with them.
- This review, and a supporting 'compatibility appraisal' of the RTS Strategy Objectives, also made recommendations on how those objectives should be further developed to set out clearer outcomes, more explicit coverage of some environmental issues (including climate change mitigation and adaptation) and hence improve the environmental performance of the proposed RTS. The Strategy has therefore been developed following the 'Case for Change' with very clear and explicit integration of environment related issues.
- The CfC ER recommended that at the next stage of RTS development, a set of clear outcomes was developed to support and underpin the achievement of each RTS objective; this has been addressed in the RTS. The ER also recommended an overarching RTS Vision, which was also included in the Draft RTS.
- The SEA at the 'Case for Change' stage also identified a series of emerging environmental issues from a synthesis of baseline information which was fed back to be taken into account in the development of the Draft RTS, broadening the scope from problems identified by users of the transport system to include context such as the policy horizon and opportunities.
- The Draft RTS for consultation incorporates text on the input of the SEA (and equalities) assessments into development of the Strategy and many of the principal themes running through the document's various chapters are inherently of an environmental nature.
- An initial SEA 'coverage' assessment was also undertaken on the initial draft of the long list of options. This analysis identified that the options provided good coverage of relevant strategies and policy commitments. An initial review of the compatibility of these options with the SEA objectives was also undertaken, providing feedback on how options could be developed to improve compatibility with all SEA objectives (noting however the challenges of predicting environmental effects / outcomes when the options are necessarily high level and not location specific). The development, specification and appraisal of the emerging options is set out in further detail in the Preliminary Options Appraisal Report (Stantec UK, 2023)..
- The STAG appraisal of the options and the subsequent SEA framework-based assessment of RTS Policies has provided a mechanism to identify predicted beneficial

and adverse effects of the RTS and to develop mitigation measures which, provided they are committed through the implementation phases of the Strategy, will secure minimal adverse environmental effects and provide enhancement opportunities. A key role of the SEA process is therefore to develop appropriate mitigation and enhancement which can help address uncertainties in future Strategy delivery and strengthen the sustainability performance of the RTS. The suite of mitigation principles identified from the detailed environmental assessment of the RTS policies is set out in **Section 6.2**.

4.6.2 Through this approach, it is considered that the iterations of the RTS at each key stage have taken better account of environmental issues than they would have done without the SEA and has contributed to formulation of a Draft Strategy which optimises beneficial environmental effects, minimises adverse effects and identifies opportunities for environmental and social enhancement. The Draft RTS has very strong themes around climate change and social justice, for example and the proposed transport measures and interventions are well aligned with the objective to achieve emissions reductions, climate resilience and other environmental and health outcomes.

4.6.3 In taking the RTS forward to implementation stages, it will be important to maintain the focus on achieving these beneficial outcomes for people and the environment. Further details on proposed methods for monitoring the process and embedding mitigation are set out in **Section 6.3** of this report.

5 Findings of the Environmental Assessment

5.1 Introduction

5.1.1 This section sets out the findings of the environmental assessment of each key component of the Draft RTS. **Section 5.2** presents the assessment of compatibility of the RTS and SEA vision and objectives. **Section 5.3** sets out a summary of the key findings of the environmental appraisal of the RTS options and the assessment of the likely significant effects of the RTS policies is set out in **Section 5.4**.

5.2 Assessment of Vision and Strategy Objectives

5.2.1 An assessment of the compatibility of the RTS Strategy Objectives was undertaken at the 'Case for Change' stage and the RTS Vision at the Draft RTS stage. The Vision and Strategy Objectives were appraised against the SEA Objectives to inform identification of any clear inconsistencies between the two sets of objectives and to identify any potentially significant environmental effects. The findings of the assessment have been updated to reflect subsequent amendments to the RTS Strategy Objectives and are set out in **Table 5-1**.

5.2.2 The RTS Vision states that:

Our transport networks and services will act to realise the economic potential of our region through reducing the actual and perceived impacts of distance, poor resilience and low population density. By doing this, they will facilitate economically and socially valuable activities for all, provide equality of opportunity, enable people to live active and healthy lives and allow our region to contribute fully to the national net zero emissions target.

5.2.3 Six RTS Objectives were developed at the 'Case for Change' stage in response to the identified transport problems. Considering the commentary contained within the SEA 'Case for Change' and other consultation, the Objectives were updated. As such, the RTS Objectives are:

- **Strategy Objective 1:** To make a just transition to a post-carbon and more environmentally sustainable transport network.
- **Strategy Objective 2:** To transform and provide safe and accessible connections between and within our city, towns and villages, to enable walking, wheeling and cycling for all.
- **Strategy Objective 3:** To widen access to public and shared transport and improve connectivity within and from / to the region.
- **Strategy Objective 4:** To improve the quality and integration of public and shared transport within and from / to the region.
- **Strategy Objective 5:** To ensure reliable, resilient, affordable and sustainable connectivity for all from / to our island, peninsular and remote communities.
- **Strategy Objective 6:** To improve the efficiency, safety and resilience of our transport networks for people and freight and adapt to the impacts of climate change.

5.2.4 The table below considers the compatibility of the RTS Vision and Strategy Objectives with the SEA Framework. In the table, reference is made to Draft RTS Strategy Objective numbers which can be read from the full list above.

5.2.5 In overall terms, **the Vision and RTS Strategy Objectives have evolved in response to previous SEA reviews and clearly identify the role of the transport system in**

'facilitating' positive environmental and health outcomes, as well as referencing the need for the transport system to be developed and operated sustainably. This provides an appropriate high-level platform from which to develop specific policies and proposals to address a range of key environmental (as well as socio-economic and wider) issues.

RTS Strategy Objectives

5.2.6 An assessment of the compatibility of the proposed RTS Vision and Strategy Objectives with the SEA Objectives defined within the RTS SEA Framework **(Appendix C)** is presented in **Table 5-1** below.

Table 5-1 Compatibility of RTS Objectives with SEA Framework (refer to full wording of RTS objectives above)

SEA Objectives	RTS Strategy Objectives								
	RTS Vision	1. Transition to post carbon, more sustainable transport network	2.Transform and provide safe connections for walking and wheeling	3. Widen access to public and shared transport within and to the region		4. Improve the quality of and integration between public/shared modes of transport	5. Ensure reliable, resilient, affordable, and sustainable connectivity to island, peninsular and remote communities		6. Improve the efficiency, safety and resilience of transport networks for people and freight and adapt to the impacts of climate change	Commentary
1. Climate Change: Respond to the climate emergency by decarbonising infrastructure assets, protecting, promoting and enhancing natural infrastructure, facilitating a low carbon economy and adapting to accommodate the effects of climate change.	++	++	++	-	+	+	-	+	++	The RTS Vision directly references supporting a proportionate contribution to net zero emission targets. All of the proposed RTS Objectives match well with SEA Objective 1 relating to climate change. Through improving the quality, reliability and connectivity of public transport, these Objectives will encourage a shift towards less carbon intensive travel options. However, addressing barriers to travel could increase the amount people travel and thus (without intervention), carbon emissions. This conflicts with the targets to achieve net zero although this issue is somewhat balanced by the support of the decarbonisation of the transport system within RTS Strategy Objective 1. RTS Strategy Objective 1 supports the transition to a post-carbon transport network. RTS Strategy Objective 2 supports active travel which will reduce the reliance on carbon intensive travel options.

SEA Objectives	RTS Strategy Objectives							
	RTS Vision	1. Transition to post carbon, more sustainable transport network	2.Transform and provide safe connections for walking and wheeling	3. Widen access to public and shared transport within and to the region	4. Improve the quality of and integration between public/shared modes of transport	5. Ensure reliable, resilient, affordable, and sustainable connectivity to island, peninsular and remote communities	6. Improve the efficiency, safety and resilience of transport networks for people and freight and adapt to the impacts of climate change	Commentary
								RTS Strategy Objective 6 highlights the need for network resilience to extreme weather and adaptation to climate change which aligns well to the SEA Objective. However, there is also a natural conflict between Objectives 3 and 5 as improved transport connectivity may increase use of roads and traffic levels, ferry services and flights. However, it is recognised that road-based travel will remain important in this highly rural region, and flights / ferries a necessity given the geography. This issue is somewhat balanced through the support of the decarbonisation of the transport system within RTS Strategy Objective 1.
2. Air Quality and Amenity: To maintain and improve air quality and, reduce concentrations of harmful atmospheric pollutants and minimise exposure to noise and vibration.	+	++	++	+	+	?	+	The RTS Vision seeks to enable people to live healthy and active lives and contribute to net zero emission targets. Whilst not engaging specifically with air quality issues, this indirectly helps to address air quality and amenity issues. RTS Strategy Objectives 1 and 2 both strongly support SEA Objective 2 by supporting the transition to a post-carbon and more environmentally

SEA Objectives	RTS Strategy Objectives							
	RTS Vision	1. Transition to post carbon, more sustainable transport network	2.Transform and provide safe connections for walking and wheeling	3. Widen access to public and shared transport within and to the region	4. Improve the quality of and integration between public/shared modes of transport	5. Ensure reliable, resilient, affordable, and sustainable connectivity to island, peninsular and remote communities	6. Improve the efficiency, safety and resilience of transport networks for people and freight and adapt to the impacts of climate change	Commentary
								sustainable transport network (with subsequent benefits for air quality and amenity) and supporting active travel. These objectives will help to reduce the amount of traffic and congestion leading to better air quality and minimising human exposure to noise and vibration. RTS Strategy Objectives 3 and 4 support SEA Objective 2 by encouraging a shift towards better public transportation and thus reducing the number of vehicles on the road. Any increase in emissions to air through increased provision of public transport, may be offset by a reduction in private vehicle kilometres associated with a modal shift to public transport and the support for decarbonising the transport network, as supported by RTS Strategy Objective 1. RTS Strategy Objective 5 aims to provide reliable, resilient, affordable and sustainable connectivity for all to island, peninsular and remote communities. As such, there is a natural conflict with the SEA Objective. However, it is recognised that road-based travel will remain important to this rural area, and flights/ferries a necessity given the geography. This issue is somewhat balanced through the support of

SEA Objectives	RTS Strategy Objectives							
	RTS Vision	1. Transition to post carbon, more sustainable transport network	2.Transform and provide safe connections for walking and wheeling	3. Widen access to public and shared transport within and to the region	4. Improve the quality of and integration between public/shared modes of transport	5. Ensure reliable, resilient, affordable, and sustainable connectivity to island, peninsular and remote communities	6. Improve the efficiency, safety and resilience of transport networks for people and freight and adapt to the impacts of climate change	Commentary
								the decarbonisation of the transport system and reduced impact on communities within RTS Strategy Objective 1.
3. Biodiversity, Geodiversity and Soil: Conserve, protect, restore and enhance biodiversity and geodiversity interests, including through safeguarding designated and non-designated sites, species and soil resources and by protecting, promoting and enhancing green infrastructure.	+	++	+?	+?	+?	?	+	The RTS Vision seeks to facilitate economically and socially valuable activities, provide equality of opportunity, enable people to live healthy and active lives, reduce the actual and perceived impacts of distance and reduce poor resilience. Whilst not engaging specifically with biodiversity, geodiversity and soils, this provides a suitable platform to address physical environmental issues. Whilst there is no explicit consideration of impact on biodiversity, geodiversity and soils in the RTS Strategy Objectives, they are covered in the broader sense by RTS Strategy Objective 1 (to transition to a more environmentally sustainable transport network). Further, Strategy Objective 1 indirectly supports biodiversity and soils through tackling the causes of climate change. Where the RTS Strategy Objectives support measures to reduce emissions of pollutants to the atmosphere, there is potential for subsequent benefits to biodiversity. This includes the support of

SEA Objectives	RTS Strategy Objectives							
	RTS Vision	1. Transition to post carbon, more sustainable transport network	2.Transform and provide safe connections for walking and wheeling	3. Widen access to public and shared transport within and to the region	4. Improve the quality of and integration between public/shared modes of transport	5. Ensure reliable, resilient, affordable, and sustainable connectivity to island, peninsular and remote communities	6. Improve the efficiency, safety and resilience of transport networks for people and freight and adapt to the impacts of climate change	Commentary
								active travel through RTS Strategy Objective 2 and public transport through RTS Strategy Objectives 3 and 4. As such these RTS Strategy Objectives have the potential to support this SEA Objective, depending on the way in which they are implemented as the RTS is developed. Further, active travel infrastructure could be taken forward in a manner which supports green infrastructure. Where relevant the subsequent policies and proposals to implement these objectives should include appropriate consideration and safeguards with respect to biodiversity, geodiversity and soils. RTS Strategy Objective 5 aims to provide improved, connectivity for remote areas, and as such, there is some natural conflict with the SEA Objective. However, it is recognised that road-based travel will remain important to this rural area, and flights/ferries a necessity given the geography. This issue is somewhat balanced through the support of the decarbonisation of the transport system and reduced impact on communities within RTS Strategy Objective 1.

SEA Objectives	RTS Strategy Objectives							
	RTS Vision	1. Transition to post carbon, more sustainable transport network	2.Transform and provide safe connections for walking and wheeling	3. Widen access to public and shared transport within and to the region	4. Improve the quality of and integration between public/shared modes of transport	5. Ensure reliable, resilient, affordable, and sustainable connectivity to island, peninsular and remote communities	6. Improve the efficiency, safety and resilience of transport networks for people and freight and adapt to the impacts of climate change	Commentary
4. Water, Flood Risk and Resilience: Conserve, protect and enhance water environments, coastal environments, water quality and water resources, whilst adapting to climate change and reducing exposure to flood risks.	+	+	?	?	?	?	+	The RTS Vision seeks to facilitate economically and socially valuable activities, provide equality of opportunity, enable people to live healthy and active lives, reduce the actual and perceived impacts of distance and reduce poor resilience, and contributes to net zero emission targets. Whilst not engaging specifically with water, flood risk and resilience, this provides a suitable platform to address physical environmental issues. Whilst there is no explicit consideration of impact on water quality and flood risk in the RTS Strategy Objectives, they are covered in the broader sense by RTS Strategy Objective 1 (to transition to a more environmentally sustainable transport network). RTS Strategy Objectives 2, 3 and 4 support active travel and more sustainable travel options. As such, they have the potential to support this SEA Objective, depending on the way in which the aspect is managed as the RTS develops. RTS Strategy Objective 6 is compatible with the resilience element of this SEA Objective, through

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	RTS Vision	1. Transition to post carbon, more sustainable transport network	2.Transform and provide safe connections for walking and wheeling	3. Widen access to public and shared transport within and to the region	4. Improve the quality of and integration between public/shared modes of transport	5. Ensure reliable, resilient, affordable, and sustainable connectivity to island, peninsular and remote communities	6. Improve the efficiency, safety and resilience of transport networks for people and freight and adapt to the impacts of climate change	Commentary
								supporting travel networks resilience and ability to adapt to the threat posed by climate change. There is an element of uncertainty in the relationship between RTS Strategy Objectives 2, 3, 4 and 5 with this SEA Objective as potential impacts (beneficial or adverse) would depend on their implementation. Where relevant the subsequent policies and proposals to implement these objectives should include appropriate consideration and safeguards in respect of the water environment and flood risk e.g., through appropriately locating and designing infrastructure and use of green/blue infrastructure in drainage designs.
5. Cultural Heritage: Conserve, protect and enhance the historic environment, designated and non-designated cultural assets and promote the Highlands and Islands distinct cultures.	+	+	?	?	?	?	?	The RTS Vision seeks to facilitate economically and socially valuable activities, provide equality of opportunity, enable people to live healthy and active lives, reduce the actual and perceived impacts of distance, reduce poor resilience, and contributes to net zero emission targets. Whilst not engaging specifically with cultural heritage, this provides a suitable platform to address physical environmental issues.

SEA Objectives	RTS Strategy Objectives							
	RTS Vision	1. Transition to post carbon, more sustainable transport network	2.Transform and provide safe connections for walking and wheeling	3. Widen access to public and shared transport within and to the region	4. Improve the quality of and integration between public/shared modes of transport	5. Ensure reliable, resilient, affordable, and sustainable connectivity to island, peninsular and remote communities	6. Improve the efficiency, safety and resilience of transport networks for people and freight and adapt to the impacts of climate change	Commentary
								Whilst there is no explicit consideration of impact on cultural heritage in the RTS Strategy Objectives, they are covered in the broader sense by RTS Strategy Objective 1 (to transition to a more environmentally sustainable transport network). RTS Strategy Objectives 2, 3, 4 and 5 have the greatest potential to align with Cultural Heritage as they could make heritage assets more accessible to residents and tourists alike. However, increased visitor numbers should be supported by any required infrastructure to cope with larger volumes of people. There is an element of uncertainty in the relationship between the RTS Strategy Objectives and this SEA Objective as potential impacts (beneficial or adverse) would depend on their implementation. Where relevant, policies and proposals to implement these Objectives should include appropriate safeguards in respect of cultural heritage to conserve, protect and enhance the historic environment and cultural assets.
6. Landscape: Protect and enhance the landscape character, townscape character, seascape	+	+	?	?	?	?	?	The RTS Vision seeks to facilitate economically and socially valuable activities, provide equality of opportunity, enable people to live healthy and active lives, reduce the actual and perceived impacts of

SEA Objectives	RTS Strategy Objectives							
	RTS Vision	1. Transition to post carbon, more sustainable transport network	2.Transform and provide safe connections for walking and wheeling	3. Widen access to public and shared transport within and to the region	4. Improve the quality of and integration between public/shared modes of transport	5. Ensure reliable, resilient, affordable, and sustainable connectivity to island, peninsular and remote communities	6. Improve the efficiency, safety and resilience of transport networks for people and freight and adapt to the impacts of climate change	Commentary
character and visual amenity.								distance, reduce poor resilience, and contributes to net zero emission targets. Whilst not engaging specifically with landscape, this provides a suitable platform to address landscape issues. Whilst there is no explicit consideration of impact on landscape in the RTS Strategy Objectives, they are covered in the broader sense by RTS Strategy Objective 1 (to transition to a more environmentally sustainable transport network). There is an element of uncertainty in the relationship between the RTS Strategy Objectives and this SEA Objective as potential impacts (beneficial or adverse) would depend on their implementation. Where relevant, policies and proposals to implement these Objectives should include appropriate consideration and safeguards in respect of landscape character and visual amenity.
7. Accessibility and Connectivity: Facilitate appropriate connectivity and affordable access for all to employment, education, facilities and	++	+	++	++	++	++	+	The RTS Vision will reduce the actual and perceived impacts of distance, which will help on the accessibility and connectively.

SEA Objectives	RTS Strategy Objectives							
	RTS Vision	1. Transition to post carbon, more sustainable transport network	2.Transform and provide safe connections for walking and wheeling	3. Widen access to public and shared transport within and to the region	4. Improve the quality of and integration between public/shared modes of transport	5. Ensure reliable, resilient, affordable, and sustainable connectivity to island, peninsular and remote communities	6. Improve the efficiency, safety and resilience of transport networks for people and freight and adapt to the impacts of climate change	Commentary
services, and social and leisure opportunities, including tourism.								The Accessibility SEA Objective receives good coverage across the RTS Strategy Objectives by supporting improvements to the transport network. RTS Strategy Objective 2 aims to facilitate active travel for everyone. RTS Strategy Objectives 3 and 4 look to improve the quality, sustainability, access to, and connectivity of public transport within the region; and improve integration between all modes of travel within the region. RTS Strategy Objective 5 looks to improve connectivity for all island, peninsular and remote communities to overcome pronounced difficulties. RTS Strategy Objective 6 focuses on the efficiency, safety and resilience of the transport networks.
8. Inclusive Growth: Improve social and economic prosperity for all by enhancing productivity and competitiveness and through reducing socio-economic inequalities.	++	+	+	+	+	+	+	The RTS Vision seeks to facilitate economically and socially valuable activities and provide equality of opportunities, which help on the economy growth. All of the RTS Strategy Objectives align with this SEA Objective through seeking to enhance the efficiency and performance of the transport system for all groups whilst increasing accessibility enabling economic growth and prosperity.

SEA Objectives	RTS Strategy Objectives							
	RTS Vision	1. Transition to post carbon, more sustainable transport network	2.Transform and provide safe connections for walking and wheeling	3. Widen access to public and shared transport within and to the region	4. Improve the quality of and integration between public/shared modes of transport	5. Ensure reliable, resilient, affordable, and sustainable connectivity to island, peninsular and remote communities	6. Improve the efficiency, safety and resilience of transport networks for people and freight and adapt to the impacts of climate change	Commentary
								RTS Strategy Objective 2 supports active travel for all users supporting economic prosperity through improved access to employment and education; as well as potentially providing opportunities for tourism. RTS Strategy Objective 6 directly supports the movement of freight / people / goods, supporting growth.
9. Human health: Improve the health of the resident and workplace population, including with respect to physical and mental health and social wellbeing.	++	+	+	+	+	+	+	The RTS Vision seeks to facilitate economically and socially valuable activities, provide equality of opportunity, enable people to live healthy and active lives, reduce the actual and perceived impacts of distance, reduce poor resilience, and contributes to net zero emission targets. Whilst not engaging specifically with landscape, this provides a suitable platform to address human health issues. Overall, the Health SEA Objective is well represented throughout all of the RTS Strategy Objectives. RTS Strategy Objectives 1 to 4 reduce the reliance on carbon-based transport, thus reducing emissions to air and potentially subsequently improving human health.

SEA Objectives	RTS Strategy Objectives							
	RTS Vision	1. Transition to post carbon, more sustainable transport network	2.Transform and provide safe connections for walking and wheeling	3. Widen access to public and shared transport within and to the region	4. Improve the quality of and integration between public/shared modes of transport	5. Ensure reliable, resilient, affordable, and sustainable connectivity to island, peninsular and remote communities	6. Improve the efficiency, safety and resilience of transport networks for people and freight and adapt to the impacts of climate change	Commentary
								RTS Strategy Objective 2 supports active travel, has clear links to the Human Health SEA Objective as it provides the opportunity to improve health (both physical and mental) and wellbeing and improved road safety. By supporting the safety of the transport network, RTS Strategy Objective 6 relates well to this SEA Objective. RTS Strategy Objective 6 seeks to reduce the impact of transport on the people of the region including through decarbonising the transport network, reduced traffic and reduced effects on communities affected by traffic.
10. Material Assets: Manage, maintain and where possible improve the efficient and effective use of natural resources, ecosystem services, land and infrastructure to meet identified needs.	++	+	?	?	?	?	?	The RTS Vision seeks to facilitate economically and socially valuable activities, provide equality of opportunity, enable people to live healthy and active lives, reduce the actual and perceived impacts of distance, reduce poor resilience, and contributes to net zero emission targets. Whilst not engaging specifically with landscape, this provides a suitable platform to deliver efficient use of resources and delivery of infrastructure to meet identified needs.

SEA Objectives	RTS Strategy Objectives							
	RTS Vision	1. Transition to post carbon, more sustainable transport network	2.Transform and provide safe connections for walking and wheeling	3. Widen access to public and shared transport within and to the region	4. Improve the quality of and integration between public/shared modes of transport	5. Ensure reliable, resilient, affordable, and sustainable connectivity to island, peninsular and remote communities	6. Improve the efficiency, safety and resilience of transport networks for people and freight and adapt to the impacts of climate change	Commentary
								RTS Strategy Objective 1 seeks to transition to a more environmentally sustainable transport network. There is no explicit consideration of the efficient and effective use of natural resources, land and infrastructure to meet identified needs in the RTS Objectives. RTS Strategy Objective 2 supports active travel; RTS Strategy Objectives 3 and 4 support more sustainable travel options. As such, they have the potential to support this SEA Objective, depending on the way in which the aspect is managed as the RTS develops. Where relevant the subsequent policies and proposals to implement these objectives should include appropriate safeguards in respect of the efficient and effective use of natural resources, ecosystem services, land and infrastructure to meet identified needs.

KEY:					
		++	Strong compatibility	-	Incompatible
		+	Compatible	~	No clear relationship

SEA Objectives		RTS Strategy Objectives							
		RTS Vision	1. Transition to post carbon, more sustainable transport network	2.Transform and provide safe connections for walking and wheeling	3. Widen access to public and shared transport within and to the region	4. Improve the quality of and integration between public/shared modes of transport	5. Ensure reliable, resilient, affordable, and sustainable connectivity to island, peninsular and remote communities	6. Improve the efficiency, safety and resilience of transport networks for people and freight and adapt to the impacts of climate change	Commentary
			0	Neutral	?	Uncertain			

5.2.7 The assessment provided in **Table 5-1** demonstrates that, in general, the RTS Strategy Objectives provide an appropriate high-level platform from which to develop specific interventions to address a range of key environmental (as well as socio-economic and wider) issues. RTS Strategy Objective 1 provides an overarching direction to the RTS to transition to a post-carbon and more environmentally sustainable transport network. Although this is not specific to some aspects of the environment (such as the water environment, heritage, landscape, or material assets), these issues have been considered within the appraisal of the options and policies.

5.2.8 The assessment has identified some areas of potential conflict between objectives to promote connectivity with requirements to meet emissions reductions targets. This is in part due to the rural nature of the region because of which it is recognised that road-based travel is an important as part of an integrated transport system, and the need to connect via sea and air to island and peninsular communities. The potential conflict between these objectives is however partly offset by the objective to decarbonise transport and therefore reduce emissions while also providing improved connectivity.

5.3 Assessment of Transport Options

5.3.1 This section summarises the findings of the appraisal of the long-list of transport options considered during the RTS development process. These options were systematically developed in response to the analysis of transport problems and opportunities across the HITRANS region.

5.3.2 The options were classified into a series of themed groups (11 in total) reflecting their focus and likely impact. A summary of the findings of the environmental appraisal of the options within each theme is presented in **Table 5-2Error! Reference source not found.**. Further information on the process of transport option development and STAG appraisal is set out in a stand-alone HITRANS Regional Transport Strategy Preliminary Appraisal Report (Stantec UK, 2023)..

Table 5-2 Environmental appraisal of transport options

Option Group and Summary of Options	Key Environmental Impacts	Mitigation and Recommendations
1. Transforming our communities and reducing the impact of transport upon them *A group of four options (options 1A to 1D) to:* • *Reallocate road space to active travel* • *Implement measures to reduce traffic levels and the impact of that traffic* • *Manage parking demand through parking restrictions and enforcement* • *Land-use planning measures*	The options perform well in relation to environmental issues. Land-use planning measures, such as embedded in the 20-minute neighbourhood model, would reduce the need to travel and provide opportunities to integrate active travel within site layouts. Reduced car-based travel would see benefits in terms of climate change, air quality, noise and resource use (material assets SEA objective) Measures to slow traffic and reduce illegal and indiscriminate parking can also encourage active travel, which would also help reduce emissions where walking and cycling trips replace car journeys. These options, along with reallocating road space to active travel routes, perform particularly well in relation to the health and accessibility and connectivity SEA objectives. Nevertheless, there is a risk that the reduction in vehicle speeds / congestion may increase the emission of carbon dioxides (CO_2) and nitrogen oxides (NO_x), which would lead to a reduction in air quality, although air quality is not a major issue overall in the region.	Success of the options and their contribution to the environment and health would depend on the scale of implementation (e.g., broad adoption in planning and development would be required to achieve significant changes) and their integration with other options (e.g., implementing parking charges is unlikely to reduce car use without alternative means of transport becoming a more attractive option). Land-use change is a long-term process therefore measures would need to be introduced rapidly and at scale to achieve realisable benefits before the long-term. All new infrastructure would need to be suitably located to avoid significant effects on locally sensitive areas and communities. Environmental impact assessment of development proposals may be required with appropriate mitigation and enhancement measures, dependent on their scale, local sensitivities and receptors. Journey planning information would need to be provided and delivered in formats accessible to all in order to reach relevant groups. There are opportunities for enhancing green networks, which also helps to improve biodiversity as part of reallocating road space to active travel for example. Further positive environmental effects include connecting people with nature and improving health and wellbeing.
	Overall, minor adverse to moderate beneficial environmental impacts are predicted (prior to mitigation):	
	Scoring: × - ✓✓	
2: Connecting our communities *A group of five options (options 2A to 2E) to:* • *Improve to existing walking and wheeling routes,*	Where these options reduce car-based travel, they perform well in relation to the climate change and air quality and amenity SEA objectives. An improved standard of walking and wheeling routes could also result in positive health, safety, and wellbeing outcomes through enhanced personal security and improved health	Success of the options and their contribution to the environment and health would depend on the scale of implementation and their integration as part of the wider transport system. New greenfield active travel routes would require careful siting and design to prevent and minimise negative environmental impacts during construction, including on peat and other carbon

Option Group and Summary of Options	Key Environmental Impacts	Mitigation and Recommendations
• *Improve to existing cycling routes,* • *Invest in new 'greenfield' active travel routes,* • *Widen the availability of cycling through reducing cost and improving bicycle availability* • *Promote walking, wheeling and cycling as a means of travel*	outcomes associated with higher levels of active travel. There would also be equality and accessibility benefits as a result of opening up opportunities for certain equality groups as above. Where new 'greenfield' active travel routes are implemented at scale, there is a risk of negative environmental impacts associated with the construction (and any lighting) of these routes, particularly in environmentally sensitive areas such as the Cairngorms National Park. Measures to improve travel information and encourage mode shift to active travel have the potential to enhance opportunities for protected characteristics groups and people.	rich soils, biodiversity and archaeology, light pollution and opportunities to enhance the physical environment (such as peatland restoration). Journey planning information would need to be provided and delivered in formats accessible to all in order to reach relevant groups. Similar to Strategy Theme 1, there are opportunities for enhancing green networks, enhancing biodiversity through planting measures and connecting people with nature which would also help to improve health and wellbeing. It is noted the need for careful siting and design of new active travel routes to prevent and minimise adverse effects on biodiversity.
	Overall, minor adverse to minor beneficial environmental impacts are predicted (prior to mitigation):	
	Scoring: × - ✓	
3. Extending public transport connectivity *A group of nine options (options 3A to 3I) to:* • *Reduce bus and rail journey times* • *Additional timetabled bus services* • *Implement DRT or EDRT to enhance / replace fixed routes* • *Deliver new railway stations* • *Deliver new heavy rail routes* • *Increased rail service frequency* • *Provide Discounted / quota taxi journeys*	These measures would reduce bus and rail journey times, which would facilitate mode shift from the private car, and would benefit the climate change and environment. However, reducing bus journey times may increase CO2 and NOx emissions (from increased speeds and the requirement for more services to call at intermediate stops), which could reduce the benefit of mode shift if a hydrocarbon fuelled bus was used. Increased bus and DRT services (including to provide multi-modal options) could result in a negative or positive impact with respect to climate change and the environment (air quality). On the one hand, they could lead to reduced emissions if there is modal shift to public transport. On the other hand, they may lead to an increase in emissions where it results in more vehicle kilometres and modal shift does not occur. It is noted that tailpipe emissions associated with increased vehicle kilometres would not be an issue if zero emission vehicles were introduced in combination with this option. Discounted / quota taxi provision may increase vehicle kilometres and thus tailpipe emissions; however, there would be a moderate benefit in terms of equality and accessibility as the	Success of these options and their contribution to the environment and health would depend on the location and scale of implementation along with their integration as part of the wider transport system. Where new vehicles are introduced, the opportunity should be sought for them to be zero or ultra-low emission and fully accessible for all users. The RTS provides an opportunity to undertake a holistic review of public transport connectivity to ensure that changes to services support an appropriate modal shift, whilst supporting accessibility. Consideration should be given to combining any increases in public transport provision with options to decarbonise the fleet and increase accessibility. Mitigation measures should be implemented in line with the mitigation hierarchy during the construction of any new railway line or railway stations. An EIA and an HRA should be

Option Group and Summary of Options	Key Environmental Impacts	Mitigation and Recommendations
	taxi-based options would enhance access for those in isolated locations where public transport connectivity is particularly poor resulting in high transport costs and affordability issues. This would result in enhanced access to employment, education, healthcare, and social opportunities. There would be health, safety and wellbeing benefits in the form of improved access to health and wellbeing infrastructure and better health outcomes. With these measures, access to health and wellbeing infrastructure would be improved (and accidents could be reduced through mode shift) providing health, safety and wellbeing benefits. There would be improved public transport network coverage cross the day leading to equality and accessibility benefits. Whilst a railway line could have highly positive climate change and environmental benefits and new rail stations could support mode shift, it would also involve physical works which would be environmentally intrusive. This would increase to a major disbenefit if such a scheme impacted on e.g., the Cairngorms National Park or the many protected sites around the region. Any new line and stations would also include embodied carbon and would generate construction related vehicle kilometres.	conducted to avoid the environmental impact during the planning stage.
	Overall, moderate adverse to moderate beneficial environmental impacts are predicted (prior to mitigation):	
	Scoring: ×× - ✓✓	

Option Group and Summary of Options	Key Environmental Impacts	Mitigation and Recommendations
4. Improving the integration, quality of and access to public and shared transport *A group of 20 options (options 4A to 4T) to:* • *Introduce a single and easily recognisable brand for transport and travel in the HITRANS region* • *Improve access to public transport for those travelling with a bicycle* • *Improve bus-to-bus; bus / rail; bus / ferry; rail / ferry ; bus / air service, ferry-to-ferry and ferry-to-air integration* • *Improve the quality of facilities at bus stations and bus stops* • *Improve access to and the quality of the onboard experience on existing buses and on-train* • *Improve the quality of facilities at railway stations* • *Improve access to and the quality of ferry services* • *Improve physical access to inter-island air services* • *Improve the customer experience for those less able* • *Improve public transport information* • *Improve digital coverage in the region* • *Increase the number of disabled parking bays* • *Improve the quality and safety of taxi travel*	Promoting the bicycle as a means of access to bus, rail, ferry and air services would have positive climate change, environment and human health impacts if it reduced the number of short journeys or drop-offs / pick-ups at transport interchange points. Integration of transport would open-up a wider range of travel choices for those in the region through reducing wait times between connecting services and addressing the cost barrier of switching among transport modes. Increased public transport usage would also record a climate change and environment benefit through mode shift and would support the economy of the areas affected. Those improvements to the quality and access to public transport could support a modal shift away from the car with subsequent benefits to the environment and climate change. Whilst they could also encourage an increase in journeys that may not otherwise have been made, this group of options does not increase the provision of public transport, just its quality and access to it. Increased travel could result in economic, social and accessibility benefits. Improving the experience of bus users is unlikely to have a material effect with respect to climate change or the environment although there could be impacts associated with any new construction, including localised visual impact of new shelters. Increased assistance for those less able could enable them to make journeys / more journeys thus improving both economic and social participation. Mobility hubs bring together shared transport with public transport and active travel in spaces designed to improve the public realm for all. They make the use of active travel and public transport more attractive and thus can contribute towards reducing vehicle kilometres.	Success of these options and their contribution to the environment and health would depend on the location and scale of implementation along with their integration as part of the wider transport system. It is likely that the potential benefits of the options in this group would be more effective when delivered in combination with other complementary measures. Improved accessibility to transport would need to be integrated and consistent across the region to offer a realistic alternative to the car. New and enhanced bus waiting facilities should be located and designed to prevent and minimise localised negative environmental impacts, seeking opportunities for enhancement, such as reduced visual impact.
	Overall, negligible to moderate environmental beneficial impacts are predicted (prior to mitigation):	

Option Group and Summary of Options	Key Environmental Impacts	Mitigation and Recommendations
• *Implement Mobility hubs*	Scoring: ◯ - ✓✓	
5. Providing connectivity that supports our island and peninsular communities *A group of 15 options (options 5A to 5O) to:* • *Convert Lo-Lo routes to Ro-Ro* • *Reduce ferry journey times* • *Improve ferry booking and ticketing arrangements* • *Demand management measures – fares-based* • *Make the most efficient use of existing vessels* • *Additional sailings with existing vessels or additional vessels* • *Introduce New vessels (excluding harbour works)* • *Introduce 7-day a week ferry and / or inter-island air services* • *Work towards a 'meaningful day' on-mainland and on-island* • *Improve ferry service reliability (assuming no harbour works)* • *Provide additional seat capacity on PSO air services* • *Work with commercial airlines to provide additional flights* • *Develop new air routes* • *Improve the reliability of inter-island air services*	**Ferry** The upgrade or expansion of ferry could require extensive harbour works Environmental impacts during construction of such upgrades are likely. Options leading to additional ferry sailings would improve access to island and peninsular communities, providing positive benefits for access and connectivity, and potentially further opportunities for economic activity. However, this would increase the emission of greenhouse gases both directly and potentially indirectly (e.g., where it indirectly results in increased onward travel). Options leading to reductions in ferry journey times would in some cases be delivered by the introduction of new vessels with marginally higher design speeds or through vessel cascades. In the event that vessels were operated at higher speeds or additional vessels added to the fleet, this would record a minor negative with respect climate change, associated with an increase in emissions (at least as long as vessels are hydrocarbon fuelled). Any harbour works required to develop shorter routes could have a negative environmental impact associated with the development of a new site and associated construction works. Making the most efficient use of existing vessels would have a minor benefit in relation to the climate change and environment criteria if some journeys which would previously have been made by car switch to being made as a foot passenger. Any decrease in vehicle-kilometres would also improve health, safety and wellbeing. New vessels and the modernisation of the fleet would make a highly positive contribution to environment. A consequence of having an aging fleet is that almost all vessels operate on hyrdrocarbon fuels and also do not benefit from modern design standards that reduce fuel burn. New vessels would therefore	The environmental impact of replacement vessels (both passenger and freight) should be viewed as an opportunity to achieve zero carbon aspirations and improve air quality. Further detailed review is recommended in terms of embodied and operational carbon. Environmental impacts during harbour modification works would require further, more detailed consideration to prevent, reduce and mitigate effects. An EIA would be required in most, if not all, cases. Fixed links merit a comprehensive study in their own right, covering costs, deliverability, environmental and climate change effects and social and economic impacts. The balance of embodied carbon versus ferry fleet emissions reductions would need to be determined on a case-by-case basis. Environmental impact assessment of development proposals are likely to be required with appropriate mitigation and enhancement measures, dependent on local sensitivities and receptors. Habitat Regulations Appraisal screening would be required, both in relation to construction (such as loss of habitat) and operation (such an increase in vehicles, air pollution and people within sensitive habitats).

Option Group and Summary of Options	Key Environmental Impacts	Mitigation and Recommendations
• *Island and peninsular fixed links*	offer a major benefit in terms of the climate change and environment criteria. The decrease in emissions due to the new vessels would also improve health. The requirement for larger vessels therefore drives a need for harbour works, which can generate short-term environmental disbenefits and a longer-term change in the landscape and visual amenity. **Air** Options leading to an increase in the number of flights to, from and within the region would record a disbenefit with regards to the climate change and environment criteria through increases in e.g., emissions, noise etc. These flights are however essential to the social and economic viability of remote and island communities. **Fixed links** Island and peninsular fixed links option could involve the construction of fixed links from island to mainland, island to island and intra-mainland. A fixed link would clearly be an environmentally intrusive construction project, would incorporate significant embodied carbon and would generate additional vehicle kilometres. It would though in many cases offset the emissions from the ferry operations that they would replace, although the adoption of green propulsion systems in future rounds of ferry replacement should ensure this is less of an issue for future vessels.	
	Overall, major adverse to major beneficial environmental impacts are predicted (prior to mitigation):	
	Scoring: ××× - ✓✓✓	
6. Improving the efficiency of transport networks and supply-chains and reducing their impact on our communities *A group of six options (options 6A to 6F) relating to:* • *Reduced ferry freight fares*	The provision of additional freight capacity through new vessels / dedicated freight sailings would support the economy of island communities but would generate emissions from additional sailings. Supporting the growth in rail and waterborne freight would make a positive contribution to communities. Transferring freight from road to rail / water (and indeed growing rail / waterborne freight more generally) would support the climate	The environmental impact of replacement vessels (both passenger and freight) should be viewed as an opportunity to achieve zero carbon aspirations and improve air quality. Further detailed review is recommended in terms of embodied and operational carbon. The operation of additional freight sailings should be considered in the context of the additional emissions generated.

Option Group and Summary of Options	Key Environmental Impacts	Mitigation and Recommendations
• *New freight-only vessels / new vessels with an increased freight capacity* • *Prioritise ferry capacity for freight / demand management to provide additional freight capacity* • *Dedicated freight sailings* • *Support the growth in rail freight* • *Support the growth in waterborne freight*	change and environment criteria and deliver reduced road accidents (health, safety and wellbeing).	
	Overall, minor adverse to moderate beneficial environmental impacts are predicted (prior to mitigation):	
	Scoring: × - ✓✓	
7. Improving the safety, reliability and resilience of our road and rail networks *A group of seven options (options 7A to 7G) relating to:* • *Improve road maintenance* • *Improve the resilience of the road network* • *Introduce measures to improve road safety* • *Improve rail service reliability* • *Improve rail network resilience* • *Improve travel information for motorists and ferry passengers* • *Reduce road-based journey times to / from: (i) Inverness; (ii) our sub-regional centres; and (iii) Scotland's other cities and beyond*	Some of the road-based resilience problems in the region will require major engineering works, the A83 Rest and Be Thankful for example. These measures would have a negative environment impact associated at least with the construction work. Road safety improvements would improve the efficiency, safety and resilience of our transport networks. They would also improve journey time reliability through fewer accident-related delays. Poor road safety also imposes inequalities on communities within the region and thus investment in improving this would have positive equality and accessibility impacts. It is important to note that any physical road improvements would have negative environmental impacts, particularly for larger schemes such as the A9 and A96 dualling. Improved roads would also generate additional vehicle kilometres and thus would have a negative climate change impact. Options leading to reduced road-based journey times would be beneficial for communities in the region. However, any capital improvements to the road network such as new stretches of dual carriageway or targeted town bypasses would evidently have negative environmental impacts, potentially including on landscape, visual amenity and biodiversity and habitats. The trade-off in this respect would be the improved economic performance associated with reduced journey times. Increased	Environmental impacts on road improvement works would require further, more detailed consideration to prevent, reduce and mitigate effects. The Environmental Impact Assessment process would be an obvious mitigating measure. Along with the requirement for an EIA, an HRA would also need to be considered.

Option Group and Summary of Options	Key Environmental Impacts	Mitigation and Recommendations
	emissions and vehicle speed would have negative impacts on health, safety and wellbeing.	
	Overall, moderate adverse to minor beneficial environmental impact are predicted (prior to mitigation):	
	Scoring: × × - ✓	
8. Facilitating sustainable visitor travel demand *A group of six options (options 8A to 8F) to:* • *Improve active travel options for those travelling to / from tourist destinations* • *Improve public transport interchange experience for visitors* • *Provide additional rail service capacity in peak season* • *Improve parking provision, management and enforcement at key tourism destinations* • *Targeted road improvements where there is high seasonal demand* • *Bus-based Park &Ride to 'honeypot' tourist sites*	Improving active travel options for those travelling to / from tourist destinations would have positive environmental benefits through reducing car-based travel. Providing additional rail service capacity would encourage mode shift from the private car, which would benefit the climate change and environment. Bus-based Park & Ride to 'honeypot' tourist sites would benefit the climate change and environment criteria through delivering mode shift, depending on network design. Improved parking provision, management and enforcement at key tourism destinations would have negative environment, climate change and health impacts if it led to increased vehicle kilometres. Targeted road improvements would have minor negative environmental and climate change impacts, except where larger scale improvements were made, or significant additional vehicle kilometres generated.	Environmental impacts of road improvement works would require further, more detailed consideration to prevent, reduce and mitigate effects. The Environmental Impact Assessment process would be an obvious mitigating measure. Along with the requirement for an EIA, an HRA will also need to be considered. There are opportunities for biodiversity enhancement as part of improving green networks to help improve active travel options. Further benefits include connecting people with nature and helping to improve health and wellbeing.
	Overall, minor adverse to moderate beneficial environmental impacts are predicted (prior to mitigation):	
	Scoring: × - ✓✓	

Option Group and Summary of Options	Key Environmental Impacts	Mitigation and Recommendations
9. Decarbonising our transport *A group of five options (options 9A to 9E) to reduce carbon emission through:* • *Zero emission buses* • *Decarbonisation of the railway network* • *Decarbonisation of the aviation network within the HITRANS region* • *Vehicle pooling or vehicle sharing* • *Encourage zero emission vehicle uptake and use*	New zero emission, accessible, buses (replacing the aging fleet) would benefit both the environment (air quality, climate change) as well as improve accessibility whilst providing improved on-board facilities. Such measures would likely promote some modal shift towards public transport. Rolling stock used in the HITRANS region operates exclusively on diesel, which generates emissions and can have local air quality impacts. With the Class 15x and HST fleet approaching the end of their operating life, there is an opportunity to decarbonise the railway network in the region. New internal aircraft with low carbon (or zero carbon (e.g. fuels could become proven technology within the HITRANS region's environment within the medium term. This would allow a step change reduction in carbon emissions, whilst retaining and improving the current lifeline services. Vehicle-pooling and vehicle sharing would deliver positive climate change, environment and health, safety and wellbeing benefits due to reduced vehicle kilometres. However, there could also be a negative impact where vehicle sharing or pooling leads to people making trips by ICE vehicles that they either previously did not make or made by other more sustainable modes. Encouraging uptake of electric vehicles (EVs) requires support for both the higher vehicle purchasing costs, and improvements to the charging network (including rapid chargers and electrical grid capacity). Such measures may help overcome inequality issues relating to the higher purchase costs. This option would deliver a positive impact with respect to the climate change, environment and health, safety and wellbeing through lower tailpipe emissions (although the net carbon impact when the whole vehicle lifecycle is considered is more complex).	Further consideration is required of the refuelling infrastructure requirements of the alternative fuels, and their associated environmental impacts. Success of the measures and their contribution to the environment and health criteria would depend on the scale of option implementation. To maximise benefits, the transition of fleets to low emission vehicles should be co-ordinated and widely adopted across sectors. Introduction of low emissions public transport vehicles should incorporate other measures to facilitate uptake of public transport use such as bike buses and incorporate fully accessible designs for all user groups.

Option Group and Summary of Options	Key Environmental Impacts	Mitigation and Recommendations
	However, it is possible that this option would encourage people to purchase a vehicle which they otherwise would not with a resultant shift from public transport and active travel to car use. This would have a negative impact in terms of reducing overall car kilometres. There is also the potential for indirect negative environmental impacts through the provision of the infrastructure required for EV charging, particularly where large-scale grid improvements are necessary, or other fuel types.	
	Overall, minor adverse to major beneficial environmental impacts are predicted (prior to mitigation):	
	Scoring: × - ✓✓✓	
10. Embracing new technologies *A group of four options (options 10A to 10D) embracing new technologies including* , ▪ Micromobility ▪ Mobility-as-a-Service, ▪ Connected and autonomous vehicles ▪ Autonomous buses	Micromobility (such as bikes, e-bikes, electric scooters and electric skateboards) encourage mobility for all and encourage a modal shift helping to reduce car kilometres and the associated emissions. Accessibility benefits extend to green tourism. Mobility as a Service (MaaS) allows collective booking of transport services (e.g., public transport, car clubs, taxis, DRT etc) to support the move away from personal owned transport, supporting more sustainable modes and reduced emissions. Connected and autonomous vehicles (CAV) operate without human intervention. Partially automated vehicles are currently available, with 'driverless' vehicles under development. The environmental effects of such measures would depend on the fuel type used and the extent of efficiency improvements versus any increase in vehicle kilometres travelled. Autonomous buses may, in the future, overcome the expected shortage of bus drivers in HITRANS region. The environmental effects would depend on the fuel type used and the extent of efficiency improvements versus any increase in vehicle kilometres travelled.	Success of these options and their contribution to the environment and health would depend on the location and scale of implementation along with their integration as part of the wider transport system. It is likely that the potential benefits of the options in this group would be more effective when delivered in combination with other complementary measures. Uptake of electric powered micromobility (e-bikes, e-scooters, e-skateboards) may require measures to ensure safety of other active travel users due to potentially higher speeds of these new forms of transport.
	Overall, minor adverse to minor beneficial environmental impacts are predicted (prior to mitigation):	
	Scoring: ×/✓ - ✓	

Option Group and Summary of Options	Key Environmental Impacts	Mitigation and Recommendations
11. Reducing the cost of travel, particular *A group of nine options (options 11A to 11I) reducing the cost of travel, particular for those most in need through:* ▪ *Reduce bus fare, rail fare, ferry foot passenger fare, ferry car fares, ferry accommodation fares (Northern Isles Ferry Services)* ▪ *Reduce or remove the cost penalty for interchange between operators and modes* ▪ *Extend the scope and / or geographic coverage of national fares and funding policies* ▪ *Reduce the cost of air travel on PSO routes* ▪ *Reduce the cost of air travel on commercially operated routes*	Reduced fares / fares caps help to make routes more sustainable (at least in terms of passenger numbers, if not revenue) and could provide a more stable bus network encouraging modal shift from the car. This would contribute to the climate change and environment criteria. However, a reduction in ferry car fares would lead to increased car travel. This option would therefore impact negatively on the climate change, environment and health, safety and wellbeing criteria as a result of the generation of additional vehicle kilometres. Reducing or removing the cost penalty for interchange between operators and modes would seek to address this issue through cross-operator ticket acceptance and reduced end-to-end fares for journeys entailing more than one leg, e.g., through 'Rail and Sail' tickets. This option would encourage mode shift from the car to public transport, supporting the climate change and environment criteria.	Reduced bus fares, rail fares, ferry foot passenger fares and ferry accommodation fares should be considered within the context of onward sustainable travel options. Need to find a means of reducing ferry car fares that supports essential journeys whilst mitigating the impact of additional vehicle kilometres on ferry services and communities more generally.
	Overall, minor adverse to minor beneficial environmental impacts are predicted (prior to mitigation):	
	Scoring: × - ✓	

Note: Impact on Health, Safety and Wellbeing, Economy, and Equality and Accessibility refer to HITRANS Regional Transport Strategy Preliminary Options Appraisal Report (2023)

Assessment key:

Major positive	+ + +	Moderate positive	+ +	Minor positive	+	Neutral	0
Major negative	- - -	Moderate negative	- -	Minor negative	-	No relationship	

5.4 Assessment of Policies

5.4.1 To deliver the proposed RTS Strategy Objectives, a set of RTS Policies has been developed, grouped into 11 overarching RTS Themes and forming the basis of future implementation of the Strategy. This section summarises the findings of the environmental assessment of the RTS Policies within each of the 11 RTS Themes. The SEA scoring of each individual Policy is set out in the environmental assessment tables in **Appendix D.**

5.4.2 The assessment shown within this section is two-fold. An overall summary of the environmental assessment of each RTS Theme is presented in **Table 5-3** drawing on the consideration of the predicted environmental effects of the RTS Policies within each Theme. Following this, a text-based summary of the assessment of the combined environmental effects of the RTS Policies is presented for each of the SEA Objectives in turn. This approach has allowed for understanding and presentation of the predicted environmental effects of the Draft RTS from both the perspective of each RTS Theme, and from the perspective of each SEA topic.

Table 5-3 Summary of Environmental Assessment by RTS Theme

RTS Theme	Overall Score	Commentary
Strategy Theme 1 Transforming our communities and reducing the impact of transport upon them: Focused on transforming the communities and reducing the impact of transport upon them. This can be achieved through improving the public realm and mobility within the settlements, reducing the dominance of the private car in particular and maximising opportunities for walking, wheeling and cycling. Polices: ▪ ST1a: The RTS supports the principle of reallocating road space, including parking, from general traffic. This should support placemaking to shape improved walking, wheeling and cycling opportunities in our communities as a means to promote safe active travel and encourage use of active travel modes. Reallocation of road space should avoid any negative impacts on bus services. ▪ ST1b: Where traffic in settlements is reduced by investment in road infrastructure, road space reallocation should be undertaken as an integral component of that investment. ▪ ST1c: The RTS supports the principle of traffic calming and speed limit reductions and enforcement where this is the wish of our communities, including on the Trunk Road network. ▪ ST1d: The RTS supports measures to reduce road-based severance in our communities ▪ ST1e: The RTS recognises the challenges presented by the impacts of increasing abnormal load movements across the region. It calls for a coordinated approach to be taken to ensure that appropriate planning and mitigation is put in place as part of the planning process for new developments that will generate such movements. ▪ ST1f: The RTS supports greater consistency (in 'like-for-like' locations) of parking management across our region, including payment mechanisms, parking information and enforcement. ▪ ST1g: The RTS supports the principle of improving the management and enforcement of traffic and parking around schools, including School Streets (a road outside a school with temporary restriction on motorised traffic at school drop-off and pick-up times).	++	The majority of the policies are clearly compatible with the SEA Objectives and would have beneficial effects on climate change, air quality and amenity, access and connectivity, growth, human health and material assets. Significant benefits are predicted for access and connectivity and human health as most polices support opportunities for certain equalities groups and improved road safety. The policies also involve reallocating road space to active travel, which may offer opportunities to enhance local biodiversity through the creation and connectivity of new linear habitats (designing schemes with nature-based solutions which have the potential to offer positive effects for biodiversity); enhanced use of nature-based solutions for (new and upgraded) transport networks (including sustainable drainage systems, re-naturalisation of watercourses and establishment of wetlands); enhanced setting and appreciation of heritage assets; and increased accessibility to green spaces, open areas and new landscapes. The policies involve the integration of active travel, public transport and shared mobility into the planning of all new developments, which may give rise to some beneficial changes for people accessing and enjoying facilities, services and the wider environment, whilst reducing emissions through lower levels of car travel. The uptake of active travel is strongly influenced by distance - compact neighbourhoods with diverse and connected land-uses support its uptake. Some individual policies (such as ST1a, ST1b and ST1c) may have minor negative impacts on the economy associated with an increase in journey times and increased driver frustration. For the policy supporting the principle of traffic calming and speed limit reductions and enforcement, it could increase the emission of carbon dioxides (CO_2) and nitrogen oxides (NO_x), due to the reduction in vehicle speeds.

RTS Theme	Overall Score	Commentary
▪ ST1h: The RTS supports the prioritisation of new development in locations that are in proximity to key services and already well-served by active travel and public transport. ▪ 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. ▪ ST1j: The RTS supports the integration of active travel, public transport and shared mobility into the planning of all new developments. New development proposals should be required to outline how they will connect into the local active travel and public transport networks. ▪ ST1k: The RTS supports the concept of 'infrastructure first' in relation to major developments across our region. ▪ ST1l: The RTS recognises the centrality of environmental considerations, particularly biodiversity enhancements and nature networks, within the planning and decision-making process.		

RTS Theme	Overall Score	Commentary
Strategy Theme 2 Connecting our communities: Focused on improving and expanding opportunities for walking, wheeling and cycling within and between our communities. Polices: ▪ ST2a: The RTS supports transformational investment in the improvement of our existing active travel networks to make these accessible to all. ▪ ST2b:The RTS supports the reinstatement and expansion of a network of strategic and local traffic free / quiet walking, wheeling and cycling routes to connect communities across and beyond our region. ▪ ST2c:The RTS supports the expansion of the National Cycle Network to all parts of the region. ▪ ST2d:Our active travel infrastructure should be designed to a high standard in accordance with the most up-to-date best practice and regionally appropriate design standards (as this evolves) to meet the needs of all users. ▪ ST2e:The RTS supports the integration of active travel and public transport connections within our communities. ▪ ST2f:The RTS promotes the adoption of measures outlined in the Sustainable Travel to Stations Strategy with respect to access to railway stations. ▪ ST2g:The RTS seeks the implementation of initiatives which widen access to bicycles and e-bicycles, including e.g., promoting ownership, expansion of bicycle share and hire and provision of new 'first mile, last mile' cycling opportunities. ▪ ST2h:The RTS supports the upgrade and new provision of bicycle parking and facilities at all public buildings, transport interchanges and key on-street locations within the region	++	These policies are clearly compatible with the SEA Objectives and beneficial effects are predicted for climate change, air quality and amenity, access and connectivity, growth, human health and materials assets. Improving active travel infrastructure, and integration of active travel and public transport connections within communities, may give rise to beneficial changes for people accessing and enjoying facilities, services and the wider environment, whilst reducing emissions through reduced vehicle-based travel. The uptake of active travel is strongly influenced by distance - compact neighbourhoods with diverse and connected land uses, support its uptake. In addition, policies leading to an improved standard of walking and wheeling routes could result in positive health, safety and wellbeing outcomes through enhanced personal security and improved health outcomes associated with higher levels of physical exercise. There would also be equality and accessibility benefits as a result of opening up opportunities for certain equality groups, particularly for those without access to a car or who would prefer not to drive one. Where delivered at scale, the policies could contribute significantly to achievement of regional and national net zero targets and would support other policies to reduce road traffic and its environmental, accessibility, health and safety impacts. Policies that support the widening access of bicycles and e-bicycles, upgrading and new provision of bicycle parking and facilities, and development of the active travel network in a more coherent, recognisable and integrated way would have a moderate economic benefit as a result of opening up tourism opportunities, including green / eco-friendly tourism which has been identified as a potential growth area for the region. It would also help people to access employment opportunities that they could not otherwise access. Policies that support transformational investment in the improvement of existing active travel networks and development of new active travel connections could

RTS Theme	Overall Score	Commentary
▪ ST2i:Our active travel network should be developed, presented and promoted in a more coherent, recognisable and integrated way for regular, occasional and new users of the network, including visitors	To --?	also help to reduce car kilometres resulting in benefit with respect to the climate change and air quality and amenity criteria. It may also offer opportunities to enhance local biodiversity through the creation and connectivity of new linear habitats (designing schemes with nature-based solutions which have the potential to offer positive effects for biodiversity); enhanced use of nature-based solutions for (new and upgraded) transport networks (including sustainable drainage systems, re-naturalisation of watercourses and establishment of wetlands); enhanced setting and appreciation of heritage assets; and increased accessibility to green spaces, open areas and new landscapes. There is a risk of negative environmental impacts associated with the construction (and any lighting) of these routes and during the expansion of the National Cycle Network. In particular, if the expansion of the National Cycle Network is within or has connectivity to sensitive habitats / species including protected areas such as European sites. It may lead to likely significant effects on biodiversity. It is anticipated that EIA and HRA would be conducted in the planning stage. Mitigation measures would also be implemented during construction to reduce the environmental impact.

RTS Theme	Overall Score	Commentary
Strategy Theme 3 Enhancing public transport connectivity: Focuses on Network coverage, Timetables / connections and Journey times and journey time reliability. Polices: ▪ ST3a: The RTS supports measures to reduce social exclusion for those without access to a car ▪ ST3b:The RTS recognises that the decline in bus passenger numbers in the region needs to be reversed and supports measures to extend service coverage, improve frequencies, lengthen the operating day and make the network more integrated. ▪ ST3c:The RTS supports measures to reduce bus journey times between and within settlements in the region, including through the provision of bus priority measures. ▪ ST3d:The RTS supports innovative alternatives to fixed route bus services where these can be affordably provided. ▪ ST3e:The RTS recognises the role which community transport and Demand Responsive Transport plays in our most rural communities and supports its expansion and integration with timetabled services. ▪ ST3f:The RTS supports measures to widen the awareness and use of community transport, DRT and EDRT amongst all members of society.	From ++	The majority of the policies are compatible with the SEA Objectives, with beneficial effects predicted, including for climate change, air quality and amenity, access and connectivity, growth, human health and material assets. In general, policies leading to additional bus services (including DRT / EDRT) and reduced bus journey time would facilitate mode shift from the private car, which would benefit the climate change and environment criteria. However, additional bus services and reducing bus journey times may increase CO_2 and NO_x emissions (from increased speeds and the requirement for more services to call at intermediate stops), which could reduce the benefit of mode shift if a hydrocarbon fuelled bus was used. The primary benefit of these policies is that they would reduce the peripherality (actual and perceived) of some of the most remote communities in the region. This would in-principle have a positive equality and accessibility impact. By bringing settlements within the region 'closer' together, these policies would have a minor economy benefit. However, they would also have a positive wider economic impact through better connecting jobs and labour. Given a significant proportion of bus travel from the most remote areas is also for health purposes, these policies could be expected to have a positive health and wellbeing impact. The policy supporting reduced rail journey times also offers an opportunity to reduce emissions and the harmful effects of road transport through mode switch, thus contributing to the climate change and air quality and human health criteria. This is particularly the case for long-distance travel to Aberdeen, the Central Belt and beyond, where rail does not currently enjoy the journey

RTS Theme	Overall Score	Commentary
▪ ST3g:The RTS recognises the role of taxis as a key element of transport provision in the region where community transport, DRT and EDRT services are not provided. ▪ ST3h:The RTS recognises that rail journey times to, from and within the region are typically longer than elsewhere in Scotland, and therefore supports measures to reduce these journey times. ▪ ST3i:The RTS supports the commitment to electrify the Highland Mainline as an opportunity to reduce rail journey times and improve reliability as part of the overall decarbonisation of the network ▪ ST3j:The RTS recognises that very low rail service frequency often makes rail uncompetitive with the car and therefore supports measures which would facilitate increased rail service frequency, particularly between Inverness and Aberdeen, Edinburgh and Glasgow. ▪ ST3k:The RTS promotes and supports the development of additional local rail services focused on our regional centres. ▪ ST3l:The RTS supports infrastructure measures which would enable increased service frequency, such as the electrification of the Highland Mainline, Aberdeen to Inverness and improvements to the signalling system. ▪ ST3m:The RTS supports the planning and delivery of new railway stations, including innovative solutions proportionate to the location, subject to the development of an appropriate business case.	To -?	time advantage that it does over road elsewhere in the country. Reduced rail journey times would contribute to both the accessibility and economy. This policy would also improve access to employment, education and business opportunities, as happened with the development of the 'Internet'. The policy that supports the building of new railway stations could facilitate mode shift, improvement of equality of access to services and economy benefits associated with reduced journey times, providing new journey opportunities and development. However, a new station could be an environmentally intrusive construction project and would incorporate significant embodied carbon, whilst also generating additional construction vehicle kilometres. The balance of embodied carbon versus vehicle emissions reductions would need to be determined on a case-by-case basis when implementing this policy.

RTS Theme	Overall Score	Commentary
Strategy Theme 4 Improving the integration, quality of and access to public and shared transport: Focused on addressing the impediments to travel by public transport, including interchange within and between modes, physical and other barriers for those less able and poor-quality facilities and travel information. Polices: ▪ ST4a:The RTS supports measures that will improve integration within and between modes of transport at key locations and transport interchanges in order to provide new travel options and alternatives to the private car, recognising the constraints within which this is possible (e.g., delivering school bus services). ▪ ST4b:The RTS supports integrated ticketing measures to simplify travel and improve the passenger experience. ▪ ST4c:The RTS supports the adoption of contract conditions for tendered and supported services that encourage operators to work in partnership to improve integration, timetable planning and coordination. ▪ ST4d:The RTS supports the provision and enhancement of mobility hubs across the region, in line with a hierarchy reflecting local requirements. ▪ ST4e:The RTS supports measures which will enable people to leave their bicycle in a secure environment at a bus stop / station, railway station, ferry terminal or airfield. ▪ ST4f:The RTS supports, where practical, the provision of increased bicycle capacity on public transport services within the region ▪ ST4g:The RTS supports the simplification of the process of taking a bicycle both to and onto a bus or train. ▪ ST4h:The RTS supports more widespread journeys which combine bicycle and public transport ▪ ST4i:The RTS supports the provision of consistent standards of facilities at bus stations and bus stops reflecting location and usage. ▪ ST4j:Our bus network should be safe secure and fully accessible to all. ▪ ST4k:Our bus network should provide a high-quality and consistent onboard experience. ▪ ST4l:Travel on buses to, from and within the region should, where possible, enable meaningful working time ▪ ST4m:The RTS supports the provision of more consistent standards of facilities at railway stations, reflecting station usage. ▪ ST4n:Our railway network should be safe, secure and fully accessible to all.	+	These policies relate to improving the integration, quality of and access to public and shared transport (incl. buses, rail, ferries) incorporating journey planning, increased accessibility, integration and the onboard experience and whilst waiting. Collectively, they support the attractiveness of the public transport network, which will support modal shift. The policies are compatible with the SEA Objectives, with beneficial effects predicted, including for climate change, air quality and amenity, access and connectivity, growth, human health and material assets. Where delivered at scale, and integrated with the wider transport system, they could contribute to achievement of regional and national net zero targets (particularly if implemented in conjunction with the decarbonisation of public transport, RTS Theme 9) and would support other policies to reduce road traffic and its environmental, accessibility, health and safety impacts. Improvements to public transport integration would open-up a wider range of travel choices for those in the region through reducing wait times between connecting services and addressing the barriers to switching within and between modes. For those polices focused on improvement of access to and the quality of the onboard experience, they would have an accessibility and connectivity benefit as they would enhance access for those in society who may otherwise have been excluded from using public transport / travel more generally. This would also result in enhanced access to employment, education, healthcare, and social opportunities, which would support the economy of the areas affected. The use of mobility hubs would contribute strongly to the SEA Objectives. Firstly, they make the use of active travel and public transport more attractive and thus can contribute towards reducing vehicle kilometres. There would therefore be positive impacts on the climate change criterion. By co-locating transport services, mobility hubs also improve quality, choice, convenience, safety and accessibility. They therefore contribute to improved human health, accessibility and connectivity.

RTS Theme	Overall Score	Commentary
▪ ST4o:The RTS supports the continuation and expansion of the Scotland's Railway Adoption Programme and other measures to enhance the station environment. ▪ ST4p:Our ferry network should be safe, secure and fully and easily access to all. This includes both shore-to-vessel access and movement around the vessel itself ▪ ST4q:The RTS recognises that there is not a short-term solution to the accessibility issues with the Argyll and Bute and Orkney inter-island air services. We will keep abreast of developments in technology and new aircraft types and, in the meantime, continue to work with partners to support alternative options such as the Scottish Ambulance Service. ▪ ST4r:The RTS supports sufficient provision and better enforcement of Blue Badge parking across the region. ▪ ST4s:The RTS recognises the important role of taxis as part of the overall transport mix in the region. It supports partnership working with licencing authorities and taxi providers to raise standards of provision where required and to facilitate the expansion of the network ▪ ST4t:The RTS supports the provision of taxi services which are fully accessible in terms of booking and vehicle access. ▪ ST4u:A key component of making travel accessible to all, the RTS supports measures to remove barriers to travel, including increased staff training, passenger chaperones and the provision of physical and online travel information in accessible formats. ▪ ST4v:The RTS supports the maintenance and expansion of at-stop / at-station multi-modal real-time information. ▪ ST4w:The RTS promotes the simplification and consolidation of travel planning and in-journey information to make travel easier for less frequent users. ▪ ST4x:The RTS supports the further development of the GO-HI travel app. ▪ ST4y:The RTS supports the provision of up-to-date physical travel information at bus stops, and the removal of out-of-date information. ▪ ST4z:The RTS Calls for improved cross-provider digital connectivity across the region to facilitate access to travel information for all (including in-car information), enable meaningful working time when travelling by public transport and to help reduce the need to travel where possible.		

RTS Theme	Overall Score	Commentary
RTS Theme 5 Enhancing our external connections and supply chain: Focused on improving the connectivity and reducing the peripherality of island and peninsular communities through improved ferry and air services, and potentially fixed links. Policies: ▪ ST5a: The RTS supports the provision of longer daily time on-mainland and on-island where this is required for the long-term sustainability of a community. ▪ ST5b:The RTS supports the provision of services which minimise the requirement for one or more overnight stays. ▪ ST5c:Where practicable, the RTS supports the operation of additional sailings on the supported ferry networks within the region. ▪ ST5d:The RTS supports year-round seven-day connections for island and peninsular communities where this is required for the long-term sustainability of a community and enjoys public support. ▪ ST5e:The booking and ticketing arrangements for ferry services in the region should support the convenience and efficiency of travel for all. ▪ ST5f:The RTS calls for the earlier opening of ferry booking systems and increased transparency around the release and management of vehicle deck space. ▪ ST5g:The RTS supports the principle of Road Equivalent Tariff (RET) but, where service frequency permits, controlled use of peak / surge pricing could be used to help manage demand at busy times, recognising that this would need to be at no net detriment to island and peninsular community accessibility. ▪ measures to reduce prices on off-peak sailings at busy times, recognising that this would need to be at no net detriment to operators. ▪ ST5h:The RTS supports operational measures which maximise the efficient management of vehicle deck space on sailings ▪ ST5i:The RTS supports measures to improve door-to-door journeys through enhancing active travel, public transport and shared mobility connections to and from ferry terminals, combined with other measures to reduce the need to take a car onboard.	From ++ To --?	It is recognised that ferry and air connections provide vital links to maintain the sustainability of island and peninsular communities; they provide access to services, facilities, education and employment opportunities, support tourism, transport goods, etc, and thus provide vital social and economic services. Policies relating to reducing or removing the capacity and connectivity barriers faced by islands or increasing the provision of ferry and air services would provide positive benefits for access and connectivity, and potentially further opportunities for economic activity. However, this would increase emissions of greenhouse gases both directly and potentially indirectly (e.g., where it indirectly results in increased onwards travel), albeit this would be offset at least in part when implemented in conjunction with the decarbonisation of the sector such as through Strategy Theme 9. One of the policies supports the principle of fixed links. Some considerations are summarised below: If free, a fixed link would almost entirely remove the constraints for cars, public transport and freight travelling to and from the relevant communities. Unless active travel links are incorporated within a fixed link, they would increase the dominance of motorised transport in communities (potentially leading to severance for those making active travel journeys). A fixed link would clearly be an environmentally intrusive construction project, would incorporate significant embodied carbon and would generate additional vehicle kilometres. It would though offset the emissions from the current diesel ferry fleet, although the adoption of zero or low carbon propulsion systems in future rounds of ferry replacement should ensure this is less of an issue for future vessels. Dependent on location, the construction and operation of fixed links has the potential to significantly impact important habitats such as marine and terrestrial SPAs and SACs. However, providing fixed connections to the communities would offer significant economic benefits in terms of providing unfettered access to mainland employment, business, service and leisure opportunities. This could assist in stemming population out migration and attract new residents to communities. It

RTS Theme	Overall Score	Commentary
▪ ST5j: The RTS recognises the long-term underfunding of vessels and infrastructure in the region and strongly calls for fleet and infrastructure modernisation to address issues of reliability and resilience. ▪ ST5k:The RTS calls for the development of a regularly maintained Vessels and Infrastructure Planning Pipeline across all publicly supported ferry networks in Scotland. ▪ ST5l:The RTS supports an increase in the overall fleet size and the inter-operability of that fleet and supporting infrastructure to strengthen resilience ▪ ST5m:The RTS supports the principle of increasing capacity through frequency rather than larger vessels. ▪ ST5n:The RTS calls for an objective consideration of the design characteristics of future vessels for all routes, including hull form and the provision of crew accommodation. ▪ ST5o:The RTS supports the introduction of new low or zero emissions vessels to replace life-expired tonnage. This should be done in line with the NTS2 Sustainable Investment Hierarchy. ▪ ST5p: With the vessel and infrastructure replacement cycle, the RTS supports measures to reduce journey times for our island communities. This includes providing direct sailings rather than via another island (where this is the preference of the local community) and consideration of new ferry terminal locations that reduce crossing distances. ▪ ST5q: The RTS supports harbour infrastructure improvements ahead of life expiry where this could contribute to a material improvement in reliability ▪ ST5r: The RTS supports the conversion of the remaining Lo-Lo routes in the region to Ro-Ro where there is community support. ▪ ST5s: The RTS supports the further development of the Highlands and Islands' air network. ▪ ST5t: The RTS supports the further development of commercial external routes, particularly to London Heathrow and other international hub airports, that support the economic competitiveness of the region. ▪ ST5u: The RTS supports the retention of the PSO air network within the region and, where alternative travel choices are inadequate, its further expansion.		does though have to be acknowledged that effectively making the island communities part of the mainland could lead to a need to consider different service delivery models for e.g., health, education etc. and would also expose island businesses such as local shops to increased competition (although in-turn potentially providing island residents with lower prices). A fixed link would generate significant wider economic benefits. The feasibility of fixed links should include consideration of the potential for significant effects on European sites. At the current stage of RTS development, the potential for fixed links is not location specific, such that meaningful screening for any Habitats Regulations Appraisals (HRAs) cannot currently be undertaken. However, this will be kept under review as specific proposals emerge and may be a key determining factor in the viability of fixed links.

RTS Theme	Overall Score	Commentary
'Adequate' in this context refers to the ability to achieve an affordable daily return to / from a national centre. ▪ ST5v: The RTS supports the operation of additional connections and flights on the PSO air networks within the region, whether delivered by existing, additional or new aircraft. ▪ ST5w: The RTS supports more direct flights rather than via another island. ▪ ST5x: The RTS supports the adoption of technological and infrastructure solutions which would improve the reliability and frequency of inter-island air services. ▪ ST5y: The RTS supports the principle of fixed links where they represent value for money and are supported by the island or peninsular community. Any fixed link should be implemented in conjunction with improved public transport connectivity and incorporate provision for active travel offer which incorporates provision for cyclists. ▪ ST5z: The RTS supports the consideration of tolling where this would assist in making the case for a fixed link. The use of vehicle number plate recognition technology could allow local residents to travel for free.		
Strategy Theme 6 Improving the efficiency of transport networks and supply-chains and reducing their impact on our communities: Focused on enhancing the efficiency of supply-chains and identifying means for reducing the impact which they have on our communities by on ferry, other waterborne transport and rail-based supply-chains. Polices: ▪ ST6a: The RTS supports the principle of new dedicated or high-capacity freight vessels on freight intensive routes. ▪ ST6b: The RTS supports the formalisation and extension of the carriage of unaccompanied trailers to a wider range of routes.	**From ++**	Policies relating to transferring freight from road to rail / water (and indeed growing rail / waterborne freight more generally) would support the climate change, air quality and amenity objectives (by reducing vehicle per kilometres); human health (by reducing road accidents); and growth (by improving supply-chain efficiency). Nevertheless, there is a risk of negative environmental impacts associated with the construction of new rail freight terminals and new connections to emerging industrial sites. It is anticipated that environmental assessment would be conducted in planning stage. Mitigation measures would also be implemented during construction to reduce the environmental impact. At this stage, it is assumed that, with appropriate design, assessment, mitigation and enhancement, these works could be delivered without significant adverse environmental effects.

RTS Theme	Overall Score	Commentary
▪ ST6c: The RTS supports the operation of dedicated freight sailings, either by contracted or commercial operators where there is demand and it is operationally deliverable. ▪ ST6d: The RTS supports moves towards greater simplification and consistency in the setting of ferry freight fares across the region, recognising that this would be achieved over the medium-term. ▪ ST6e: The RTS supports infrastructure measures which will enable the growth of rail freight to and from the region. ▪ ST6f: The RTS supports infrastructure investment and funding initiative which will enable the growth of waterborne freight to, from and within the region.	To -?	Policies relating to increased ferry freight capacity through new dedicated / high capacity freight vessels, simplification of freight fares and dedicated freight sailings would support the economy of island communities. However, any additional sailings would increase the emission of greenhouse gases, albeit this would be offset at least in-part when implemented in conjunction with the decarbonisation of the sector such as through **Strategy Theme 9**.

RTS Theme	Overall Score	Commentary
RTS Theme 7 Improving the safety, reliability and resilience of our road and rail networks: Focused on improving the safety, reliability and resilience of transport networks within the region**.** Polices: ▪ ST7a: The RTS restates our support for the full dualling of the A9 and A96, with early prioritisation of the Elgin and Keith bypasses to dual carriageway standards, following the already committed Inverness to Wester Hardmuir scheme. ▪ ST7b: The RTS calls for incremental improvements to our road network where there are safety, efficiency and environmental benefits, including in relation to single track roads. ▪ ST7c: The RTS supports the expansion of 50mph HGV speed limits across the Trunk Road network in the region ▪ ST7d: The RTS supports the provision of improved overtaking opportunities on our roads, especially where there are known problems with vehicle platooning which can cause driver frustration. ▪ ST7e: The RTS calls for investment in our regional road network where there are regular and sustained periods of disruption due to weather and / or geological instability. ▪ ST7f: The RTS recognises the increasing vulnerability of our region's road network to severe weather events linked to climate change and supports capital and revenue measures to mitigate this. ▪ ST7g: The RTS recognises the increasing vulnerability of the railway network to severe weather events linked to climate change and supports capital and revenue measures to mitigate this.	**From ++**	Most of the policies would improve the efficiency, safety and resilience of the region's transport networks for people and freight and adapt to the impacts of climate change. The policies would thus make a highly positive contribution to the economy, accessibility and human health. It is important to acknowledge that the solutions to some of the road-based resilience problems in the region would require major engineering works, which would also have negative construction environmental impact. Nevertheless, the network resilience improvement work would reduce vulnerability to the effects of climate change. Polices to reduce road-based journey times have potential for beneficial equalities impacts where connectivity to key services and facilities is enhanced or the negative impacts imposed by current roads is addressed. There is potential to tackle socio-economic disadvantage where employment opportunities are improved and through reduced differential impacts compared with other locations. The policies will likely lead to an increase in emissions and other harmful effects associated with motorised travel. Any capital improvements to the road network such as new stretches of dual carriageway or targeted town bypasses would evidently have negative environmental impacts, potentially including on landscape, visual amenity and biodiversity and habitats. The trade-off in this respect would be the improved economic performance associated with reduced journey times. It should be noted that some road improvement measures, such as those that reduce stopping and starting on single track roads, could have positive impacts. It is anticipated that an Environmental Impact Assessment and HRA would be undertaken for any proposed road schemes at the planning stage. Mitigation measures would also be implemented during construction to reduce the

RTS Theme	Overall Score	Commentary
▪ ST7h: The RTS supports the continued provision and expansion of real-time travel information for motorists and public transport users through existing and emerging platforms. ▪ ST7i: The RTS recognises that many parts of our region's road network are in poor condition. It calls for enhanced preventative and remedial road maintenance to ensure the safe, reliable and efficient movement of people and goods and the delivery of services across our region. ▪ ST7j: Investment in our road network should continue to have an overarching focus on safety with a view to reducing road traffic casualties in accordance with Scotland's Road Safety Framework to 2030. ▪ ST7k: To address risks which are particular to roads in our region, the RTS supports: enhanced advisory signage; ongoing public information campaigns around the use of single-track roads; provision of additional safe motorist services and HGV rest areas; and information campaigns for visitors driving left-hand drive vehicles. ▪ ST7l: The RTS specifically supports the improvement or removal of priority junctions on higher speed trunk roads, especially for right-turning traffic. ▪ ST7m: The RTS calls for increased provision of level boarding at stations across the region, which will reduce station dwell times. ▪ S17n: The RTS supports the provision of additional sections of double track (or static or dynamic passing loops where double track does not represent value for money) to improve punctuality. ▪ ST7o: The RTS supports infrastructure and timetable improvements external to the region which will improve the reliability of services to / from Inverness, Fort William, Oban and Mallaig.	To -	environmental impact. At this stage it is assumed that, with appropriate design, assessment, mitigation and enhancement, these works could be delivered without significant adverse environmental effects.

RTS Theme	Overall Score	Commentary
RTS Theme 8 Facilitating sustainable visitor travel demand: Focused on facilitating sustainable visitor travel demand across the region. Policies: ▪ ST8a: The RTS supports the further development of long-distance walking, wheeling and cycling routes (including the National Cycle Network), recognising the visitor, economic and local benefits offered. ▪ ST8b: The RTS supports the development of active travel connections to our ports, airports and regionally important railway stations. ▪ ST8c: The RTS supports the development of active travel connections to our key tourism destinations where this would be a realistic option for some visitors. ▪ ST8d: Where there are concentrations of international tourists, including cruise passengers, the RTS supports the provision of enhanced local travel information and coordination to improve visitor experience and reduce impacts on local networks. ▪ ST8e: The RTS supports the operation and promotion of additional local rail services to key tourism destinations. ▪ ST8f: The RTS supports the provision of additional carriages on existing services in peak season, where feasible. ▪ ST8g: The RTS supports the principle of flexible timetabling where this can co-exist with regular services for local residents. ▪ ST8h: The RTS supports the principle of expanded open access rail services where these can be accommodated at no disadvantage to scheduled services.	From ++	These policies would contribute towards addressing tourism pressures in the region, albeit this is a much wider issue than transport alone and will require a coordinated approach across a range of organisations and policy areas. The polices would have significant economy benefits associated with both better management of and (potentially) increased visitor numbers. Policies that support the improvement of active travel for those visiting the HITRANS region would have the potential to enhance opportunities for protected characteristics groups and people. These policies would make a positive contribution to human health and accessibility in terms of better connecting settlements to tourist sites. They would also contribute to climate change and air quality by providing active options for accessing tourist sites, increase the accessibility of green spaces, open areas and new landscape and enhance the setting and appreciation of heritage assets. Policies on providing additional rail service capacity in peak season would contribute to accessibility. The policies would have climate change, air quality, and human health through encouraging mode shift from the private car. Policies on parking provision, management and enforcement at tourist destinations would have safety benefits through reducing the extent to which indiscriminate and illegal parking impact negatively on walking, wheeling and cycling in settlements amongst both residents and visitors. In addition, current parking problems also impact negatively on the economy and accessibility of areas. The policies would assist in alleviating this problem and would thus record benefits with respect to these categories. It should be noted that any expansion of car parking provision would have negative environment, climate change and health impacts if it led to increased vehicle kilometres. Policies relating to road improvements to improve traffic flow and safety would have a positive economy impact in terms of reduced journey times and

RTS Theme	Overall Score	Commentary
▪ ST8i: The RTS supports the principle of sustainably accommodating visitor demand whilst maintaining or increasing visitor numbers. ▪ ST8j: The RTS supports the introduction of additional parking restrictions and greater enforcement of existing traffic orders at tourist honeypots as a tool to encourage improved access to these locations by public transport or active modes and to address indiscriminate and dangerous parking ▪ ST8k: Where new or increased parking charges are introduced, this should be done in combination with improved visitor facilities, including e.g., parking provision, public toilets etc. ▪ ST8l: Whilst recognising the benefits of motorhome and campervan-based tourism in our region, the RTS acknowledges that it can impact negatively on our communities at certain times of the year. The RTS therefore supports measures to ensure that this demand is sustainably accommodated. ▪ ST8m: Whilst recognising the benefits of cruise tourism in our region, the RTS recognises that catering for this demand can negatively impact on our communities. The RTS therefore supports measures to ensure that this demand is more sustainably accommodated. ▪ ST8n: The RTS supports measures which would allow the benefits of cruise tourism to be more evenly distributed around the region. ▪ ST8o: The RTS supports the principle of bespoke bus services aimed at tourists to address excessive car-based demand at honeypot locations. ▪ ST8p: The RTS recognises that high volumes of tourist traffic are impacting the condition of some roads in our region and that increased central government funding is required that reflects this increased pressure on local transport infrastructure to supports an enhanced repair and maintenance programme.		improved journey time reliability. There would also be human health benefits associated with these policies through the reduction in driver frustration, particularly when trying to catch a ferry. A regular complaint in island and deep rural areas is that tourists do not allow users familiar with the road to pass on occasions preventing e.g., doctors attending emergency calls. The policies would help to address this issue and have benefit to human health. Nevertheless, cycling works, road improvement works and expanding parking provision would have negative construction environmental impacts. If construction is within or has connectivity to protected sites, it may lead to likely significant effects on biodiversity. It is anticipated that environmental assessment on these works would be conducted in the planning stage. Mitigation measures would also be implemented during construction to reduce the environmental impact. At this stage it is assumed that, with appropriate design, assessment, mitigation and enhancement, these works could be delivered without significant adverse environmental effects. There is also potential for negative environmental effects through increased tourism on sensitive natural heritage areas.

RTS Theme	Overall Score	Commentary
▪ ST8q: The RTS recognises that high volumes of tourist traffic can lead to slow and inefficient journeys and therefore supports measures to address this.	To --?	

RTS Theme	Overall Score	Commentary
Strategy Theme 9 Decarbonising our transport, mitigating the effects of climate change: Focused on supporting the decarbonisation of transport through the adoption of zero emission vehicles, vessels and aircraft: Policies: ▪ ST9a: The RTS supports the implementation of measures which facilitate the decarbonisation of the public transport vehicle fleet within the region, including commercial vehicles, buses and community transport, rail rolling stock, aircraft and ferries. ▪ ST9b: The RTS recognises the opportunities brought about by the availability of renewable energy in our region, including locally produced green hydrogen. The transport fleet mix and associated infrastructure should reflect this. ▪ ST9c: The RTS supports the development of vehicle pooling and vehicle sharing services across the region to reduce the need for personal car ownership. ▪ ST9d: The RTS calls for the expansion of EV charging infrastructure to support the decarbonisation of all vehicle based travel in our region. ▪ ST9e: The RTS recognises the challenges of distance, topography, climate and short winter daylight hours to the rollout of battery electric powered commercial vehicles and seeks low or zero emission solutions appropriate to our region, and which capitalise on the surplus energy production within our region.	++	Decarbonising of the vehicle fleet in the HITRANS region, including cars, buses, commercial vehicles, aircraft and ferries, would have significant beneficial effects on climate change mitigation, offering the potential for a step-change reduction in emissions in the transport sector. Such measures offer the potential to be industry leading, influencing others. Further benefits would also result in relation to the SEA topics of climate, air quality, access and connectivity, growth, and human health. The Policies are generally not predicted to have a significant effect on the other SEA Objectives. Policies on bus vehicle replacement would be predicted to significantly enhance accessibility for people with protected characteristics, including older people, those with disabilities, and those travelling with children. Policies on air / rail network decarbonisation would not in itself have equalities impacts, but the introduction of new aircraft and new rolling stock would provide an opportunity to deliver improved physical accessibility. For the policies on vehicle pooling or vehicle sharing, the increased levels of vehicle-pooling would deliver positive climate change, environment and health, safety and wellbeing benefits due to reduced vehicle kilometres. There is potential for beneficial equality and accessibility impacts where the policy offers affordable and enhanced accessibility for disadvantaged groups, such as non-car owners and communities with poor public transport connectivity. In addition, there would be economic benefits including positive Transport Economic

RTS Theme	Overall Score	Commentary
▪ ST9f: The RTS supports the roll-out of other alternative fuels to promote the decarbonisation of our transport networks, ports, ferry terminals, airports and airfields	To -?	Efficiency benefits and wider impacts as a result of enhanced access to employment. The delivery of a formal vehicle sharing scheme may also open-up tourism opportunities generating further benefit. However, there could also be a negative impact where vehicle sharing or pooling leads to people making trips by ICE vehicles that they either previously did not make or made by other more sustainable modes. Polices relating to improvement of transport infrastructure such as alternative refuelling facilities and material use to support manufacture of electrical and electronic components would have potential adverse effects on natural and cultural heritage receptors. At this stage it is assumed that, with appropriate design, assessment, mitigation and enhancement, any new works could be delivered without significant adverse environmental effects.

RTS Theme	Overall Score	Commentary
Strategy Theme 10 Embracing new technologies: Focused on embracing new technologies: Capitalising on innovations and new technology. Policies: ▪ ST10a: The RTS embraces the opportunities provided by new technologies to improve the provision of transport infrastructure and services across the region. ▪ ST10b: The RTS supports consideration of the provision of future innovative personal transport within the design of our active travel network and mobility hubs. ▪ ST10c: The RTS supports the principle and further development of Mobility-as-a-Service as the technology evolves, particularly through our Go-HI app. ▪ ST10d: The RTS supports opportunities for the more widespread adoption of Connected and Autonomous Vehicles and autonomous buses, whilst recognising the challenges posed in our region.	+	These policies realise the new opportunities associated with emerging technologies and are generally compatible with the SEA Objectives, with beneficial effects predicted for climate change, air quality and amenity, access and connectivity, inclusive growth and material assets. Enhanced innovative personal transport may give rise to some beneficial changes for people accessing and enjoying facilities, services and the wider environment. Where delivered at scale, the lower carbon policies (such as car sharing), could contribute significantly to the achievement of regional and national net zero targets and would support other policies to reduce road traffic and its environmental, accessibility, health and safety impacts.
Strategy Theme 11 Reducing the cost of travel, particularly for those most in need: Focused on policies that reduce the cost of travel, particularly for those most in need. Polices:	+	These policies are clearly compatible with the SEA Objectives and beneficial effects are predicted for climate change, air quality and amenity, access and connectivity, growth, human health and materials. Where reduced fares / fares caps helped to make routes more sustainable (at least in terms of passenger numbers, if not revenue), it could provide a more

RTS Theme	Overall Score	Commentary
▪ ST11a: Transport poverty is a complex, dispersed and often hidden problem in our region. The RTS commits to define and evidence this problem and identify appropriate actions to be delivered by HITRANS and our partners. ▪ ST11b: Recognising that, for many in our region (and especially those living in our island communities), transport costs account for a high proportion of household income, the RTS supports a reduction in public transport fares and the introduction of payment plans for multi-journey tickets. ▪ ST11c: The comparative costs of public transport mean that residents and visitors to the region often choose to travel by car. The RTS therefore supports a reduction in the cost differential between travelling by public transport and car ▪ ST11d: The RTS supports in principle the roll-out of Road Equivalent Tariff to any ferry routes on which it does not currently apply, including local authority services. ▪ ST11e: The RTS calls for greater cross-industry partnership working and regulatory reform to reduce the cost penalty for interchange within or between modes of transport. ▪ ST11f: The RTS calls for the extension of the National Concessionary Travel Scheme and Under-22s Concessionary Travel Scheme to rail, ferry and air services where these are the main or only mode of public transport in an area. ▪ ST11g: The RTS calls for the retention and expansion of the Air Discount Scheme, including to businesses in the region. ▪ ST11h: National road pricing proposals may emerge in response to the reduction in fuel duty and Value Added Tax as a result of the mass adoption of electric vehicles. If this eventuality materialises, the RTS calls for a road pricing system that recognises the unique characteristics of our region		stable transport network encouraging modal shift from the car. This would contribute benefits to the climate change and environment criteria. Whilst there would be economy (e.g., reduced cost access to employment) and health benefits (e.g., reduced cost access to health facilities), the critical benefit would be in relation to equality and accessibility. Transport poverty has been highlighted as a major problem in the region and reducing transport fares would contribute towards addressing this, particularly for groups with a protected characteristic.

5.4.3 A number of RTS Themes and Policies are predicted to have significant beneficial effects where implementation of supporting measures would deliver positive impacts and in particular for the RTS Themes which have the potential to achieve a step change in active travel and public transport uptake. These include:

- **Strategy Theme 1** (Transforming our communities and reducing the impact of transport upon them) and **Strategy Theme 9** (Decarbonising our transport, mitigating the effects of climate change) are overall predicted to have significant beneficial effects on the SEA Objectives for climate change, air quality and amenity, access and connectivity, human health and material assets. Individual priorities relating to decarbonisation within **Strategy Theme 5** (Enhancing our external connections and supply chain) also offer these significant beneficial effects for these SEA Objectives.
- The following RTS Themes are predicted to have significant beneficial effects on access and connectivity and / or inclusive growth, through their support for improved connections in HITRANS region.
  - **Strategy Theme 2:** Connecting our communities.
  - **Strategy Theme 3:** Enhancing public transport connectivity to / from: (i) Inverness; (ii) our sub-regional centres; and (iii) Scotland's other cities and beyond.
  - **Strategic Theme 11:** Reducing the cost of travel, particularly for those most in need.
- The following policies are also predicted to have significant beneficial effects on inclusive growth:
  - **Strategy Theme 3:** Enhancing public transport connectivity to / from: (i) Inverness; (ii) our sub-regional centres; and (iii) Scotland's other cities and beyond.
  - **Strategy Theme 5:** Providing connectivity that supports our island and peninsular communities.
  - **Strategy Theme 6:** Improving the efficiency of transport networks and supply-chains and reducing their impact on our communities.
  - **Strategy Theme 7:** Improving the safety, reliability and resilience of our road and rail networks
  - **Strategy Theme 8:** Facilitating sustainable visitor travel demand.

5.4.4 There are potential for significant adverse environmental effects through the following policies:

- ST2c: Expansion of the National Cycle Network (within Strategy Theme 2)
- ST5s and ST5t: Development of air network (within Strategy Theme 5)
- ST5y: Progressing the feasibility and case for fixed-links (within Strategy Theme 5).
- ST7a and ST7b: Full dualling of the A9 and A96 and incremental improvements of road network (within Strategy 7)
- ST8a - c: Development of active travel connections (within Strategy Theme 8)

ST5s and ST5t may have significant adverse environmental effects in relation to the SEA Objective for air and climate as result of an increase in emissions. However, with the implementation of Strategy Theme 9 on decarbonising the transport, this will alleviate the impact.

ST2c, ST5y, ST7a and b, and ST8a - c may have the greatest potential for significant adverse environmental effects in relation to the SEA Objective for biodiversity as a result of the risk to important features, including designated areas such as European sites. ST2c, ST5y, and ST7a and b could also affect sensitive heritage, landscape and water receptors in the HITRANS region if not properly planned. There is uncertainty on the likely effects at this strategic level as the nature (e.g., causeway, bridge or tunnel), location, extent and design of

any future works is currently unknown. The high-level nature of the Draft RTS does not allow for specific prediction of effects of these measures on the SEA topics. With a clear commitment (see Error! Reference source not found.) to consideration of environmental effects within future feasibility assessments, through to project level assessments and controls in the delivery of measures at future stages of RTS implementation, it is not predicted that significant adverse effects would necessarily result. However, this would need to be closely considered during development of future delivery and business case work.

5.4.5 The other RTS Policies are generally not predicted to have significant environmental effects, whether beneficial or adverse. However, the assessment has identified the potential for environmental enhancement to be achieved in combination with the delivery of RTS Policies which seek to deliver enhanced networks for active travel.

5.4.6 There is some uncertainty associated with the effects of improved connectivity between islands and with Scotland's mainland in relation to climate change and air quality within **RTS Strategy Themes 3** (Strategy Theme 3: Enhancing public transport connectivity to / from: (i) Inverness; (ii) our sub-regional centres; and (iii) Scotland's other cities and beyond), **5** (Providing connectivity that supports our island and peninsular communities.), **6** (Improving the efficiency of transport networks and supply-chains and reducing their impact on our communities) and **8** (Facilitating sustainable visitor travel demand). Where implemented together with **RTS Theme 9** (Decarbonising our transport), these adverse effects may be avoided or reduced.

SEA Objective 1: Climate Change

5.4.7 The Draft RTS Policies are predicted to have a range of beneficial and some negative effects on the Climate Change SEA Objective.

5.4.8 **Strategy Theme 1** (Transforming our communities and reducing the impact of transport upon them) and its associated policies would provide opportunities for active travel, which would enhance biodiversity through the creation and connectivity of linear habitats as well as the use of nature-based solutions including sustainable urban drainage systems, re-naturalisation of water courses and establishment of wetlands. These will have positive effects in mitigating climate change. **Strategy Theme 9** (Decarbonising our transport, mitigating the effects of climate change) and its associated polices involve the decarbonising of the transport system. These two strategy themes are predicted to have significant beneficial effects on climate change mitigation. **Strategy Theme 4** (Improving the integration, quality of and access to public and shared transport) would also have benefits on climate change. These themes collectively provide support for modal shift to active travel; support decarbonisation of vehicles, ports, ferry terminals, airports and airfields; and support opportunities for offshore renewable energy generation. Similarly, a policy within **Strategy Theme 5** (Providing connectivity that supports our island and peninsular communities) supports the introduction of new low or zero emissions vessels to replace life-expired tonnage, which is in line with the NTS2 *Sustainable Investment Hierarchy*. Policies within **Strategy Theme 6** (Improving the efficiency of transport networks and supply-chains and reducing their impact on our communities) support infrastructure measures which will enable the growth of rail freight and waterborne freight to and from the region. These offer the potential for a step-change in addressing the challenges of achieving net zero targets within the HITRANS region.

5.4.9 Adaptation to climate change is supported through a policy within **Strategy Theme 6** (Improving the efficiency of transport networks and supply-chains and reducing their impact on our communities), which recognises the need to consider how climate change may affect the transport networks and services and the associated risks that this brings.

5.4.10 There is potential for adverse effects due to increased carbon emissions through improved connectivity and increased capacity / fleet size within **Strategy Themes 5** (Providing connectivity that supports our island and peninsular communities), **7** (Improving the safety, reliability and resilience of our road and rail networks) and **8** (Facilitating sustainable visitor

travel demand). However, where such measures are implemented together with **Strategy Theme 9** (Decarbonising our transport), these adverse effects may be avoided or reduced.

5.4.11 When considered collectively, **the RTS Policies are predicted to have the potential for significant beneficial effects on climate change mitigation and adaptation.**

SEA Objective 2: Air Quality and Amenity

5.4.12 The Draft RTS Policies are predicted to have a range of beneficial effects on the Air Quality and Amenity SEA Objective and some uncertain / potentially negative effects. The effects mirror those of the climate change criterion, where emissions to air, and to an extent noise and vibration issues, are closely linked to the use of hydrocarbons within transport.

5.4.13 When considered collectively, **the RTS Policies are predicted to have the potential for significant beneficial effects on air quality and amenity.**

SEA Objective 3: Biodiversity, Geodiversity and Soil

5.4.14 The predicted effects of the RTS on the Biodiversity, Geodiversity and Soil SEA Objective are mixed with some predicted beneficial effects and potential for adverse effects, including significant adverse effects. Uncertainties exist due to the absence of scheme and location-specific details at the Strategy stage. It should be noted that there are links between this objective and the **SEA Objective 1**: Climate Change, where improvements to biodiversity along with nature-based solutions could help to tackle climate change.

5.4.15 The predicted beneficial effects have been identified for the RTS Policies which would work to deliver a transport network that is less reliant on private car journeys (through uptake of active travel and buses) and decarbonisation of the transport (**Strategy Theme 9**), resulting in a reduction in air pollutant emissions which can be harmful to biodiversity, geodiversity and soils (and indirectly by avoiding the need for extensive road improvements). These indirect beneficial effects are not predicted to be significant at the regional scale.

5.4.16 There is some uncertainty around the implementation of new or upgraded transport infrastructure (such as **ST2c**- the expansion of the National Cycle Network, **ST7b**-incremental minor improvements to the road network, **ST8a** - long-distance walking, wheeling and cycling routes, **ST8b** – active travel connections to ports, airports, and regionally important railway stations, and **ST8c** – the development of active travel connections to tourism destinations). These have the potential for some adverse effects on biodiversity, geodiversity and soil dependent on the location of the schemes, the baseline sensitivity of the areas affected (such as where long-distance routes may be constructed through peatland habitats) and the proximity to the protected sites which may lead to likely significant effects. At this stage, specific improvement proposals have not been identified and a commitment has been made in this SEA to key mitigation principles to ensure that new works are delivered sensitively, avoid significant adverse effects and are developed together with enhancement of blue / green habitats wherever possible.

5.4.17 Policy **ST1j** (the integration of active travel, public transport and shared mobility into the planning of all new developments) of **Strategy Theme 1** and Policy **ST2a** (transformational investment in the improvement of our existing active travel networks to make these accessible) and **ST2i** (active travel network to be developed, presented and promoted in a more coherent, recognisable and integrated way for regular, occasional and new users of the network) of **Strategy Theme 2** provide opportunities for enhancing biodiversity through the integration of active travel within new developments as well as improvements to existing active travel networks for example, and that along with Climate and Air, there is potential for positive effects on the SEA Objective Biodiversity. Provision and upgrading of transport infrastructure, such as the reallocation of road space for active travel, also provides opportunities to enhance local biodiversity through the creation and connectivity of new linear habitats, designing schemes with nature-based solutions which have the potential to offer positive effects for

biodiversity. These also provide enhanced transport facilities for people to benefit from accessing greenspaces and natural areas as part of active travel journeys.

5.4.18 There are potential opportunities to undertake restoration of important peatland habitat when progressing transport schemes.

5.4.19 As previously explained, there is potential for significant adverse environmental effects to biodiversity through progressing the feasibility and case for fixed-links and acting on the conclusions **(Strategy Theme 5)** as a result of the potential impacts on important features, including designations such as SPAs and SACs. The feasibility of fixed links should include consideration of the potential for significant effects on European sites. At the current stage of RTS development, the potential for fixed links is not location specific, such that meaningful screening for any Habitats Regulations Appraisals (HRAs) cannot be currently undertaken. However, this will be kept under review as part of the feasibility assessment and may be a key determining factor in the viability of fixed links.

5.4.20 The Draft RTS is predicted to have some beneficial and some adverse effects (potentially significant), dependent on the detail of future implementing measures. The uncertainty in predicting environmental effects on these receptors has been reduced through identification of important mitigation principles which the assessment has assumed would be committed to in the later stages of RTS delivery. There are opportunities for local biodiversity enhancement in delivering new transport measures, particularly through the adoption of nature-based solutions as part of transport and active travel networks.

SEA Objective 4: Water, Flood Risk and Resilience

5.4.21 Generally, the RTS Policies are predicted to have minor (and non-significant) effects on the SEA Objective for Water, Flood Risk and Resilience.

5.4.22 Policies that may result in significant new transport infrastructure, such as fixed links, have potential for adverse effects on the water environment both during their construction and operation. However, assuming the appropriate level of environmental assessment is undertaken and key avoidance and mitigation measures implemented, these effects are not predicted to be significantly adverse at this stage.

5.4.23 Adaptation to climate change is supported through some policies within **Strategy Theme 7** (Improving the safety, reliability and resilience of our road and rail networks), which recognises the need to consider how climate change may affect the transport networks and services, which includes increased flood risk.

5.4.24 There are opportunities for enhanced use of nature-based solutions for (new and upgraded) transport networks, including sustainable drainage systems, re-naturalisation of watercourses and establishment of wetlands.

5.4.25 When considered collectively, the policies of the Draft RTS are not predicted to have significant effects on water resources and flooding.

SEA Objective 5: Cultural Heritage

5.4.26 Overall, it is predicted that the impact of the RTS Policies would be generally neutral with regards to the Cultural Heritage SEA Objective.

5.4.27 Where new and extended infrastructure is developed on greenfield or previously undeveloped land, the potential for impacts on archaeological resources would need to be considered further as proposals were located, designed and assessed. Similarly, new, reinstated, extended and improved infrastructure has the potential to impact on built heritage, both within the infrastructure itself (where the infrastructure is a heritage asset), and in proximity to the infrastructure. It should be noted that many of the heritage assets within the HITRANS region

are not designated, hence consideration should include non-designated heritage assets. It has been assumed in this SEA that mitigation principles to avoid, reduce and mitigate such adverse effects would be committed to in the later stages of delivery.

5.4.28 Providing an enhanced public transport service and improved active travel facilities are predicted to make accessing historic and cultural sites easier for people and there would be potential for a resultant increase in visitor numbers and increased awareness and appreciation of the region's historic and cultural assets. Similarly, reallocating road space to active travel may offer opportunities to enhance the setting and appreciation of heritage assets.

5.4.29 None of the RTS Policies have been predicted to have significant effects on cultural heritage and, when taken together, the Strategy is not predicted to have significant effects. Overall, the Strategy is predicted to have potential for some minor beneficial and adverse (non-significant) effects on cultural heritage and archaeology. There are opportunities for transport improvements to contribute to enhanced understanding and interpretation of the region's history and cultural heritage for all people through better access to sites and areas of interest and importance.

SEA Objective 6: Landscape

5.4.30 Overall, the RTS Policies are predicted to have neutral effects on the Landscape SEA Objective. Policies encouraging bus and active travel are predicted to have some beneficial effects in terms of improving townscape and amenity in urban and built-up areas through helping to reduce traffic congestion. This would contribute to improved air quality, reduced noise and lower visual intrusion, which would make spending time in these environments more pleasant.

5.4.31 Implementation of policies to substantially enhance active travel networks would have the potential to increase the accessibility of green spaces, open areas and new landscapes. Similarly, the delivery of improved public transport (access, capacity and affordability) would increase opportunities for all people to access areas of high-quality landscape.

5.4.32 Any new infrastructure to enhance transport connections and improve connectivity has the potential for adverse effects if not located and designed sympathetically with the local landscape or townscape character. Siting of transport infrastructure will be a key consideration as the RTS is implemented, given the presence of National Scenic Areas, 'wild land', and the general tranquillity of the region. Specific transport interventions have not been identified at this stage. However, the assessment has adopted a number of key mitigation principles which have reduced the uncertainty of the assessment and, provided these are implemented at future stages of delivery, then significant adverse landscape and visual effects would not be predicted.

5.4.33 None of the policies in the RTS has been predicted to have significant effects on landscape and, when considered collectively, the RTS Policies are not predicted to have significant effects on landscape and townscape. The Strategy is predicted to have potential for some beneficial and some adverse non-significant effects. There are opportunities for transport development in the region to contribute to enhanced enjoyment of landscape and townscape through enhanced accessibility of open spaces and civic areas by active travel and public transport. Where designed and delivered sensitively, projects supporting active travel also provide new opportunities for the enhancement of attractive and healthy communities.

SEA Objective 7: Accessibility and Connectivity

5.4.34 The Accessibility and Connectivity Objective receives good coverage across all RTS Themes, which are predicted to have a beneficial effect on accessibility for all groups. This is set against a background of a dispersed rural population, coupled with high transport costs.

5.4.35 **Strategy Themes 3, 5 and 11** support increased connectivity in the HITRANS region, including through increased capacity, improved integration, better accessibility and cheaper travel. Should fixed links come forward, they would offer a step change in the access to the relevant communities.

5.4.36 When considered collectively, **the RTS Policies are predicted to have the potential for significant beneficial effects on accessibility and connectivity.**

SEA Objective 8: Inclusive Growth

5.4.37 Overall, the Inclusive Growth SEA Objective is covered well by the RTS Themes and their associated Policies. **Strategy Themes 3 and 5** support enhanced connectivity across the region, offering both improved access to services, including employment opportunities for residents, improved access for tourists, and improvements to the supply-chain to support economic activity. These offer the potential to overcome some of the current constraints to economic activity experienced in the HITRANS region.

5.4.38 **Strategy Theme 9**, which promotes the decarbonisation of the transport system, may promote investment and demand in low carbon industries and energy generation which may have beneficial effects on inclusive growth.

5.4.39 **Strategy Theme 11** would support inclusive growth through reducing the cost-based barrier to accessing employment.

5.4.40 When considered collectively, **the RTS Policies are predicted to have the potential for significant beneficial effects on inclusive growth.**

SEA Objective 9 – Human Health

5.4.41 The majority of the RTS Themes assessed are predicted to have a beneficial effect on this objective. A large proportion of the RTS Policies are designed to enhance opportunities for access to services, including healthcare facilities and open spaces, which would be predicted to have beneficial effects on human health. Additionally, a number of the RTS Policies aim to increase the proportion of trips undertaken by active travel allowing people to incorporate exercise into their daily trips and increasing levels of physical activity. Exercise is known to have beneficial effects on both mental health / wellbeing and physical health.

5.4.42 **Strategy Theme 9** (Decarbonising our transport) is predicted to improve air quality through reductions in transport emissions which in turn will have beneficial effects on health, particularly respiratory health and for groups such as children and older people who are typically most sensitive to the adverse effects of air pollution.

5.4.43 There are some predicted significant beneficial effects to human health from reducing transport-related road accidents and improving the resilience of the road network.

5.4.44 When considered collectively, **the RTS Policies have the potential for beneficial effects on human health.**

SEA Objective 10 – Material Assets

5.4.45 The majority of RTS Themes assessed are predicted to have some beneficial effects on the Material Assets SEA Objective through encouraging more efficient forms of transport and protecting and enhancing critical infrastructure. Where the RTS Policies are implemented at scale across all forms of transport in HITRANS region, the effects have the potential to be significant.

5.4.46 **Strategy Theme 1** (Transforming our communities and reducing the impact of transport upon them) is predicted to have a significant beneficial effect on this objective through reduced resource use.

5.4.47 RTS Policies which deliver improvements to public transport (bus, train, ferry and air) to make it more attractive and accessible are likely to result in greater uptake of public transport, along with wider DRT and active travel options where they form part of an integrated transport system. Where such measures support modal shift towards more sustainable modes of transport, increased resource efficiency is likely to result. However, improvements (including increased capacity) to ferry and air services (internal and external) could result in increased resource use, where they are undertaken without efficiency improvements.

5.4.48 There is some predicted uncertainly around the effects of the implementation of the RTS Policies which could promote new or upgraded infrastructure (such as fixed links or upgraded ferry terminals) from the resultant demand on new materials. Promotion of a circular economy in the HITRANS region would be key to efficient materials management and reducing the indirect environmental effects associated with resource extraction, processing and end of life / waste management. Transport system improvements should always be developed wherever possible through re-use and reallocation of existing assets to avoid and reduce the need for new materials and non-renewable resources.

5.4.49 When considered collectively, the RTS Policies are not predicted to have significant effects on material assets. Overall, the Strategy is predicted to have mainly beneficial non-significant effects provided implementation takes account of the potential for environmental effects from non-renewable resource use.

5.5 Cumulative Effects

5.5.1 The preceding discussion of predicted effects of the Strategy on the individual SEA Objectives has identified that the Draft HITRANS RTS, when implemented, is likely to have a range of predominantly beneficial environmental effects, in some cases significant. The analysis in **Section 5.4** also identifies the key RTS Policies which are considered to particularly contribute to significant effects for each environmental theme captured by the relevant SEA Objective. This approach has allowed for consideration of the total contribution of the RTS Policies to the environmental themes in the SEA, which supports further consideration of the potential cumulative effects of the Strategy.

5.5.2 Whilst the high-level nature of the Draft RTS precludes a detailed appraisal of cumulative effects, some strategic-level commentary on cumulative effects of the Strategy is set out here. These are addressed first for the potential for different predicted effects of the Strategy to combine and result in effects on sensitive receptors that are different from those when single theme environmental effects are considered (termed here as in-combination effects). The potential for implementation of the Strategy to cumulatively affect receptors when considered with the effects of other key policies and plans in HITRANS region is also briefly addressed (and referred to as cumulative effects).

In-Combination Effects of the RTS

5.5.3 Across the HITRANS region, receptors sensitive to in-combination effects can be considered in terms of all the communities and areas of population and the supporting civic, community and transport infrastructure that serves them. Key natural heritage sites include those designated for their high quality and sensitivity (such as the National Scenic Areas), important habitats including those supporting internationally important assemblages of birds and other species, the coastal and inter-tidal zone, and the region's rich and varied cultural heritage.

5.5.4 At the strategic level of the RTS, only broad consideration of in-combination effects and receptors is possible. The SEA has identified the potential for significant adverse environmental effects to biodiversity in the event that fixed links are taken forward. Given that

more than one fixed link is being considered at this early stage, the potential for in-combination effects of fixed links will require further consideration as part of their feasibility assessment.

5.5.5 No other significant adverse environmental effects in relation to the eleven topic-based themes and objectives (provided adverse effects are avoided or effectively mitigated) have been identified, which lowers the potential for impacts to combine and have additive or synergistic effects on key receptors which may be significant.

5.5.6 It is recommended that as the Strategy is implemented, a framework for continued consideration of environmental impacts is taken forward commensurate with the detail and location-specific nature of the delivery stages. To ensure that environmental and sustainability effects are considered holistically (and in relation to cumulative effects) it may be appropriate to develop a framework based on a natural-capital approach. This would characterise the range and scale of natural (and man-made) assets and services in the region from which a more informed understanding of the potential impacts of sub-programmes and key transport interventions could be identified.

5.5.7 The main potential for the RTS to have in-combination effects is on residents, through the potential for increased geographic access to services and reduced transport costs. Whilst officially recorded deprivation is generally low in the HITRANS region, access to services is also low, coupled with high transport costs, leading to transport poverty in many cases. Transport is increasingly being defined by policy makers as a human right and the potential benefits of the RTS, where it can be implemented and sustained at scale, would support significant beneficial environmental and health effects to these communities.

5.5.8 The potential for significant beneficial in-combination effects of the Draft RTS is therefore predicted in areas where a step-change in accessibility and mobility is delivered from its implementation contributing to improved health, amenity, accessibility to key services and improved socio-economic prospects (including productivity).

Cumulative Effects of the RTS

5.5.9 There are many policies, plans and programmes relating to land-use and transport development in the HITRANS region, including some of those identified in **Appendix A**. A proportionate approach to consider potential cumulative effects with other strategies has been followed reflecting the strategic nature of the RTS, its predominantly beneficial predicted effects, and the inherent complexity and uncertainty in forecasting cumulative effects.

5.5.10 The key plans which are considered to have potential for significant cumulative effects with the RTS are those likely to have a 'reinforcing' impact on its predicted beneficial effects. These include the Scottish Government's National Transport Strategy 2 (and associated delivery plans), the Scottish Climate Change Plan Update, and the 'road-map' proposals to achieve a 20% reduction in road vehicle kilometres by 2030. These policies, and their relevant subordinate and related action plans in areas such as electric vehicles, cycling, road safety and micromobility, set out high level proposals and commitments in complementary themes to the RTS including:

- Emissions reductions (relevant to SEA Objectives for climate change mitigation and air quality and amenity)
- Uptake of active travel (relevant to SEA Objectives for health and accessibility)
- Step changes in public transport services and integration (relevant to SEA Objectives for accessibility and connectivity, material assets and inclusive growth).

5.5.11 Taken together with these strategies, and with other complementary regional level programmes and interventions, it is predicted that the RTS would have significant beneficial cumulative environmental effects on climate, air quality, human health, accessibility and

productivity. The extent of the beneficial outcomes and when they might be achieved would depend on the effectiveness and timescales of the delivery measures taken forward by HITRANS and its partner organisations.

5.5.12 The potential for significant adverse cumulative effects has also been considered. The predicted adverse environmental effects of the Draft RTS are limited in number and scope.

5.5.13 To ensure that significant adverse cumulative effects with other similar or linked transport plans and programmes are avoided in future, the implementation of future projects should be taken forward in collaboration with other key delivery agencies including local councils, transport operators, Transport Scotland and HITRANS. Delivery of new transport projects would therefore be complementary with, and supportive of, national level interventions which may come forward in the region from programmes such as the National Planning Framework (NPF4). Engagement with the key environmental authorities including SEPA, NatureScot and Historic Environment Scotland (HES) will also ensure that relevant connected initiatives and programmes are integrated with transport development, including for example SEPA's strategic infrastructure sector plans, NatureScot's programmes on biodiversity, climate change, nature recovery, access and placemaking and HES's programme of work on climate adaptation and resilience.

5.5.14 This would ensure that new and upgraded transport infrastructure and facilities were planned and delivered to maximise beneficial outcomes and take account of all relevant environmental and sustainability constraints and opportunities. It is considered that an integrated approach together with implementation of the other environmental mitigation principles set out in this SEA (see **Section 6.2**) would avoid the potential for significant adverse cumulative environmental effects with other key plans and programmes in the region.

6 Mitigation and Monitoring

6.1 SEA Mitigation

6.1.1 A series of environmental mitigation measures in the form of high-level principles have been defined through the SEA process, particularly following initial options appraisal and in the assessment of the RTS Policies. Mitigation in this SEA is presented in the form of principles and general commitments as it reflects the level of detail of the Draft RTS as evidenced in the RTS Policies and their supporting narratives. The key mitigation identified at this stage is set out in **Table 6-1**.

Table 6-1 SEA Mitigation Measures

Group	Mitigation Commitment
General Mitigation Principles	
▪ The mitigation principles outlined in this report will be developed and applied through the RTS delivery stages including through continued application of an appropriate level of environmental assessment as the details of interventions are progressed. ▪ These environmental assessments will be supported, where appropriate, through the development of environmental baseline information specific to the key transport corridor(s) where transport measures are being considered. ▪ The implementation of future RTS interventions will be taken forward in collaboration with other key delivery agencies including the local authorities, bus operators and HITRANS. Engagement with the key environmental authorities including SEPA, NatureScot and Historic Environment Scotland will be maintained to ensure that relevant connected initiatives and programmes are integrated with RTS delivery.	
Policy Specific Mitigation Measures	
Vehicles, fleet and Decarbonisation	▪ Increased provision of public transport capacity (bus, train, ferry and air) and services should deploy zero or ultra-low emission vehicles as soon as is practicable. ▪ Public transport operators should be supported to achieve decarbonisation of existing vehicle fleets where practicable. ▪ Where new electric vehicle (EV) charging infrastructure is developed, opportunities should be taken to provide as wide as possible access for local communities and other users. ▪ Transition to electric vehicles should be supported with circular economy activities and initiatives to support the re-use, re-manufacture and recycling of key materials such as battery components.
Relevant RTS Themes: ▪ *1. Transforming our communities and reducing the impact of transport upon them.* ▪ *5. Providing connectivity that supports our island and peninsular communities* ▪ *6: Improving the efficiency of transport networks and supply-chains and reducing their impact on our communities.* ▪ *9. Decarbonising our transport, mitigating the effects of climate change* *10. Embracing new technologies*	
Transport Infrastructure	▪ New transport infrastructure should be developed wherever possible through re-use and reallocation of existing transport assets / road space (in accordance with the Scottish Government's Investment Hierarchy2) and where new facilities or infrastructure are required these should be designed and constructed following circular economy principles to minimise use of primary resources. ▪ Any new or upgraded transport infrastructure would be subject to appropriate levels of environmental assessment and consenting. Feasibility assessments will consider environmental effects from the outset to ensure constraints and

[2] As set out in the 2021 Infrastructure Investment Plan: https://www.gov.scot/publications/analysis-responses-consultation-draft-infrastructure-investment-plan-2021-22-2025-26/

Group	Mitigation Commitment
	opportunities inform the strategic decision-making process (such as further SEA); with the subsequent project level environmental assessment (such as Environmental Impact Assessment through the planning system) and controls to inform the development of designs, mitigation measures and sensitive construction environmental management. Integration of environmental issues from feasibility through to construction would aim to avoid and reduce possible significant adverse environmental effects across all SEA topic areas. ▪ Screening for Habitats Regulations Appraisal will be undertaken as part of the feasibility assessment of fixed links, where required. ▪ Where materials are required to develop transport infrastructure priority should be given to the use of secondary, recycled and remanufactured materials and products before use of non-renewable resources.
Relevant RTS Themes: ▪ *1. Transforming our communities and reducing the impact of transport upon them.* ▪ *2: Connecting our communities* ▪ *3: Enhancing public transport connectivity to / from: (i) Inverness; (ii) our sub-regional centres; and (iii) Scotland's other cities and beyond.* ▪ *4: Improving the integration, quality of and access to public and shared transport.* ▪ *5. Providing connectivity that supports our island and peninsular communities* ▪ *6: Improving the efficiency of transport networks and supply-chains and reducing their impact on our communities.* ▪ *7. Improving the safety, reliability and resilience of our road and rail networks* ▪ *8: Facilitating sustainable visitor travel demand* ▪ *9: Decarbonising our transport, mitigating the effects of climate change* ▪ *10. Embracing new technologies*	
Transport Networks and Enhancement	▪ Support should be provided to reducing the need to travel (such as improved broadband connections and development of 20-minute neighbourhoods). ▪ Development of 20-minute neighbourhoods and other land-use and transport integration measures should identify and implement opportunities for related environmental improvements to the public realm including for example green / blue infrastructure, local habitat enhancement and where relevant interpretation of cultural heritage. ▪ Development of active travel network infrastructure should identify and implement opportunities for related environmental improvements including for example green / blue infrastructure, local habitat enhancement and where relevant interpretation of areas cultural heritage interest/importance. ▪ New active travel infrastructure should be designed, constructed and maintained in accordance with environmental best practice to avoid or reduce the potential for adverse effects from changes in land use. ▪ Measures to protect and enhance the natural and built environment should seek to work with nature and adopt approaches based on green / blue infrastructure. Opportunities for enhancement of local environments and habitats (including through delivery of positive effects for biodiversity) should be taken in the delivery of new schemes. ▪ Measures to adapt the transport system to climate change should take account of the embodied carbon in designs and materials and wherever possible solutions should seek to work with nature and adopt approaches based on green / blue infrastructure. Opportunities for enhancement of local environments and habitats should be taken in the delivery of new schemes. ▪ Collaborative working with relevant flood risk agencies and local authorities should be pursued in integrating transport resilience works with flood prevention activities, wherever possible working at a watercourse catchment scale.
Relevant RTS Themes: ▪ *1. Transforming our communities and reducing the impact of transport upon them.* ▪ *2: Connecting our communities* ▪ *3: Enhancing public transport connectivity to / from: (i) Inverness; (ii) our sub-regional centres; and (iii) Scotland's other cities and beyond.* ▪ *4: Improving the integration, quality of and access to public and shared transport.* ▪ *5. Providing connectivity that supports our island and peninsular communities*	

Group	Mitigation Commitment
▪ *6: Improving the efficiency of transport networks and supply-chains and reducing their impact on our communities.* ▪ *7. Improving the safety, reliability and resilience of our road and rail networks* ▪ *8: Facilitating sustainable visitor travel demand* ▪ *9: Decarbonising our transport, mitigating the effects of climate change* ▪ *10. Embracing new technologies*	
Access and Fairness	▪ Measures using pricing to reduce demand for car travel should be designed equitably to ensure that they do not have unintended consequences for people with socio-economic disadvantage, in line with national and regional commitments to a Just Transition to Net Zero. ▪ The implementation of active travel infrastructure should be fully accessible for all users and integrated across the region to realise full benefits. ▪ Enhancement to bus, ferry, train and air services and facilities should be designed and operated to ensure that the needs of all users and disabilities groups are accommodated. ▪ Enhancement to bus, ferry, train and air services and facilities should be designed and operated to ensure that the needs of all users and disabilities groups are accommodated.
Relevant RTS Themes: ▪ *1. Transforming our communities and reducing the impact of transport upon them.* ▪ *2: Connecting our communities* ▪ *3: Enhancing public transport connectivity to / from: (i) Inverness; (ii) our sub-regional centres; and (iii) Scotland's other cities and beyond.* ▪ *4: Improving the integration, quality of and access to public and shared transport.* ▪ *5. Providing connectivity that supports our island and peninsular communities* ▪ *6: Improving the efficiency of transport networks and supply-chains and reducing their impact on our communities.* ▪ *7. Improving the safety, reliability and resilience of our road and rail networks* ▪ *8: Facilitating sustainable visitor travel demand* ▪ *9: Decarbonising our transport, mitigating the effects of climate change* ▪ *10. Embracing new technologies* ▪ *11. Reducing the cost of travel, particularly for those most in need.*	

6.1.2 These mitigation commitments provide a framework for the development of specific interventions in more detail alongside the articulation of the RTS Action Plan. Future elaboration of this framework will include identification of specific lead responsibilities for HITRANS and other partners and associated timeframes. At this stage it is important to note that the principles are committed to by HITRANS which has allowed them to be used in considering the potential residual (i.e., post mitigation) environmental effects of the draft Strategy as reported in **Section 5**.

6.2 Monitoring Framework

6.2.1 The 2005 Act requires SEA Environmental Reports to provide a *"description of the measures envisaged concerning monitoring in accordance with section 19"*. Section 19 requires the responsible authority to *"monitor the significant environmental effects"* in a manner which enables it to *"identify any unforeseen adverse effects at an early stage" and to "undertake appropriate remedial action"*.

6.2.2 The Draft RTS includes a set of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) linked to the RTS Strategy Objectives. These in-turn are closely related to those for monitoring the NTS2. These will be used to measure the change in performance of the transport system in the HITRANS region against the baseline initially established in the HITRANS 'Case for Change' report. Monitoring will be produced on a two-yearly basis.

6.2.3 Many of these indicators are considered to be suitable to help track progress in the delivery of the Strategy with respect to environmental outcomes. Further, monitoring of environmental effects will be better integrated and practical to undertake where the indicators used are

shared with those proposed for the main RTS monitoring process. The indicators considered to be useful in tracking progress against both RTS Objectives and SEA Objectives have been captured in **Table 6-2**.

Table 6-2 Indicators for Monitoring RTS Environmental Effects

SEA Objective	Monitoring & Tracking Indicators	Relevant RTS Objectives
1. Climate Change	▪ Transport emissions in the HITRANS region (Department for Business Energy and Industrial Strategy ▪ Number of Air Quality Management Areas in the region (Scottish Transport Statistics) ▪ Proportion of road vehicle fleet which is ULEV (DfT Vehicle Licencing Statistics) ▪ Total public charging and rapid charging devices (DfT EV charging map) ▪ Number of kilometres of electrified rail track or number of battery-electric or alternatively fuelled rail rolling stock units (Network Rail and ScotRail) ▪ Number of battery-electric or alternatively fuelled vessels (CMAL and local authorities) ▪ Number of battery-electric or alternatively fuelled aircraft used on PSO air services (Transport Scotland and local authorities) ▪ Use of EVs by residents (HTTS)	1
2. Air Quality and Amenity	▪ Number of Air Quality Management Areas in the region (Scottish Transport Statistics)	
3. Biodiversity, Geodiversity and Soil	None identified	
4. Water, Flood Risk and Resilience	None identified	
5. Cultural Heritage	None identified	
6. Landscape	None identified	
7. Accessibility and Connectivity	▪ Passenger journeys by region for local bus services (Scottish Transport Statistics, although the figures for the region also include the Shetland Islands) ▪ Rail passengers by station (ORR estimates of station usage) ▪ Use of local bus services in previous month (Scottish Household Survey Travel Diary, SHSTD) ▪ Use of local train services in previous month (SHSTD) ▪ Main mode of travel – bus (SHSTD) ▪ Main mode of travel – rail (SHSTD) ▪ Number of taxi vehicles and private hire cars (Scottish Transport Statistics, local authority level) ▪ Number of taxi driver licences (Scottish Transport Statistics, local authority level) ▪ Number of wheelchair accessible taxis and private hire cars (Scottish Transport Statistics, local authority level) ▪ Annual ferry passenger carryings by route (Scottish Transport Statistics) ▪ Annual ferry car carryings by route (Scottish Transport Statistics)	2, 3, 4, 5, 6

SEA Objective	Monitoring & Tracking Indicators	Relevant RTS Objectives
	▪ Annual ferry commercial vehicle and coach carryings by route (Scottish Transport Statistics) ▪ Annual proportion of scheduled sailings cancelled, diverted or late by route (ferry operator data) ▪ Terminal passengers by airport – Inverness, Passengers on selected domestic air routes to and from Inverness, Terminal passenger traffic by origin / destination – Inverness, Aircraft movements, by airport and type of movement – Inverness, and Air transport movements by airport - Inverness (Civil Aviation Authority reported in Scottish Transport Statistics) ▪ Residents' use of public transport (including barriers to travel) (HTTS)	
8. Inclusive Growth	▪ Road journey times by time period / time of year (INRIX, for the 17 route sections identified in the 'Case for Change') ▪ Average freight lifted by UK HGVs in the HITRANS region (Scottish Transport Statistics) ▪ Foreign and domestic freight at ports in the HITRANS region (Scottish Transport Statistics) ▪ Breakdown of freight commodity at ports in the HITRANS region (Scottish Transport Statistics) ▪ Tonnage of freight carried, by airport (Civil Aviation Authority reported in Scottish Transport Statistics)	**Objectives:** 5, 6
9. Human Health	▪ Adults (16+) – frequency of walking in previous seven days (SHSTD) ▪ Main mode of travel – walking (SHSTD) ▪ Main mode of travel – bicycle (SHSTD) ▪ Cycling mode share (SHSTD) ▪ Percentage of pupils cycling to primary school (Sustrans Hands-Up survey) ▪ Percentage of pupils cycling to secondary school (Sustrans Hands-Up survey) ▪ The level of, barriers to, and attitude to walking, wheeling and cycling will be monitored in the biennial (HTTS) ▪ Road-based casualties by severity and type local authority level are regularly published and will be monitored ▪ Reported road collisions (Scottish Transport Statistics) ▪ Personal injury accidents, overall and by route section as per the 'Case for Change' report (Scottish Transport Statistics) ▪ Fatal and serious personal injury accidents per million vehicle kilometres, by route section as per the 'Case for Change' report (Scottish Transport Statistics) ▪ Residents' perceptions of safety (HTTS)	**Objectives**: 2, 3, 4, 5 6
10. Material Assets	▪ Total public charging and rapid charging devices (DfT EV charging map) ▪ Number of kilometres of electrified rail track or number of battery-electric or alternatively fuelled rail rolling stock units (Network Rail and ScotRail) ▪ Number of battery-electric or alternatively fuelled vessels (CMAL and local authorities)	**Objectives**: 5, 6

SEA Objective	Monitoring & Tracking Indicators	Relevant RTS Objectives
	▪ Number of battery-electric or alternatively fuelled aircraft used on PSO air services (Transport Scotland and local authorities)	

6.2.4 These indicators will be developed and refined following feedback from consultation on the Draft RTS.

7 Next Steps

7.1.1 The Scottish Ministers will review the finalised RTS and determine whether it can be approved with or without any further modifications. Following approval of the finalised RTS, HITRANS will formally adopt and publicise the Strategy. At this time, an SEA Post Adoption Statement (PAS) will be prepared to explain how the SEA process has closely informed the development of the finalised RTS and how the feedback from consultation has been taken into account in finalising the Strategy. The PAS will also set out proposals for future monitoring of the environmental effects of the RTS.

Appendix A Review of Plans and Programmes

Table A-1 Policy documents of relevance

SEA Topic	Relevant Plans, Programmes and Strategies
International[3]	
Air and Climate: Air & Climatic Factors	World Health Organization (2018) Environmental Noise Guidelines for the European Region, WHO Air Quality Guidelines, United Nations (1979) Geneva Convention on Long Range Transboundary Air Pollution, The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) (1992), Kyoto Protocol to the UN Convention on Climate Change (2005), United Nations (2009) The Copenhagen Accord, United Nations (2010) Cancun Adaptation Framework, United Nations (2016) Paris Agreement, The UNFCCC (United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change) Glasgow/ COP26 Agreement (2021), WHO Global Air Quality Guidelines (2021) European / EU legislation and plans now of indirect relevance include: Ambient Air Quality Directive 2008/50/EC and Air Quality Framework Fourth Daughter Directive 2004/107/EC, Environmental Noise Directive 2002/49/EC, EU (2009) Renewable Energy Directive (2009/28/EC), A Resource Efficient Europe, United Nations (1994), EU (2009) Renewable Energy Directive (2009/28/EC,), European Commission (2001) National Emissions Ceiling Directive 2001/81/EC, European Commission (2007) The Integrated Climate and Energy Package, European Commission (2010) Energy 2020 - A Strategy for Competitive, Sustainable and Secure Energy, European Commission (2011) A Roadmap for Moving to a Competitive Low Carbon Economy in 2050, European Commission (2012) Energy Efficiency Directive (2012/27/EU), European Council (2013) Seventh EU Environmental Action Plan (EAP) (2013-2020, European Commission (2013) Strategy on Adaptation to Climate Change, European Commission (2013) Seventh Environmental Action Programme to 2020 'Living well, within the limits of our planet', European Commission (2014) 2030 Policy Framework for Climate and Energy, European Union (2005) Emissions Trading Scheme (EU ETS)
Physical Environment: Biodiversity, Flora & Fauna, Soil, Water, Cultural Heritage & Landscape	The Ramsar Convention on Wetlands (1971), EU Convention on the Agreement on the Conservation of African – Eurasian Migratory Waterbirds (2006) (The Bonn Convention), United Nations (1992) The Rio Convention on Biodiversity, Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011 - 2020 + Aichi Biodiversity targets, UNESCO (1972) Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage. World Cities Culture Report 2015 – measures and cultural assets, UNESCO (2001) Convention on the Protection of Underwater Cultural Heritage, Charter for the Protection and Management of Archaeological Heritage (1990), The World Heritage Convention (1972), United Nations (1982) Convention on Law of the Sea, European / EU legislation and plans now of indirect relevance include: Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats - The Bern Convention (1981), Birds Directive 2009/147/EC/, Habitats Directive 92/43/EEC as amended by 97/62/EC, Convention for the Protection of the Architectural Heritage of Europe (Granada Convention), European Landscape Convention (The Florence Convention), EU Biodiversity Strategy (2011), Council Regulation No. 1100/2007: Establishing measures for the recovery of the stock of European eel

[3] Some European Union (EU) legislation remains of indirect relevance.

SEA Topic	Relevant Plans, Programmes and Strategies
	(2007), EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030 (2020), European Convention on the Protection of Archaeological Heritage (1992) (Valletta Convention/ Malta Treaty)
Socio-economics: Population, Human Health & Material Assets	United Nations (2016) Habitat III (Quinto), United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (1998) Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters (The Aarhus Convention), World Health Organisation (2004) Children's Environment and Health Action Plan for Europe, Transforming our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (2015)
Interrelated Effects	Johannesburg Declaration on Sustainable Development, Communication COM (2005) 666: Taking Sustainable use of resources forward, United Nations (2002) The World Summit on Sustainable Development, UN Agenda 2030 European / EU legislation and plans now of indirect relevance include: Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) Directive 2001/42/EC European Spatial Development Perspective (ESDP) (97/150/EC), Environmental Impact Assessment Directive 2014/52/EU amending Directive 2011/92/EU
National (UK) - legislative and policy frameworks informed by relevant higher-level frameworks	
Air and Climate: Air & Climatic Factors	The Environment Act 1995, The Air Quality Standards Regulations (2010) as amended, Cleaner Air for Scotland: The Road to a Healthier Future (2015), UK's Air Quality Action Plan (Defra, revised January 2016), Defra (2011) Air Quality Plans for the Achievement of EU Air Quality Limit Values for Nitrogen Dioxide (NO2) in the UK: List of UK and National Measures, Climate Change Act 2008, DECC (2011) UK Renewable Energy Roadmap, DECC (2014) UK National Energy Efficiency Action Plan, HM Government (2017) UK Climate Change Risk Assessment 2017
Physical Environment: Biodiversity, Flora & Fauna, Soil, Water, Cultural Heritage & Landscape	The Environment Act 2021, The Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, Environmental Protection Act 1990, The Protection of Badgers Act 1992, Conservation of Habitats & Species Regulations 2010 (as amended), UK National Ecosystem Assessment (2011) UK National Ecosystem Assessment: Understanding Nature's Value to Society, The Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2010 as amended, JNCC (2012 The UK Post 2010 Biodiversity Framework, Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006, , Environmental Protection Act 1990 Part SEA, Good Environmental Status, DECC (2010) Department for Transport (2011) National Policy Statement for Ports, The Marine and Coastal Access Act (2009), Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs (2011) UK Marine Policy Statement, The Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act (1979)
Socio-economics: Population, Human Health & Material Assets	The Enterprise and Regulatory Reform Act (2013), Equality Act (2010), Health Effects of Climate Change in the UK 2008 - An update of the Department of Health Report 2001/2002, Health Protection Agency (2009) Health Strategy for the United Kingdom 2, Health and Safety Executive (2009) The Health and Safety of Great Britain: Be Part of the Solution, Sustainable Development Commission (2010) Sustainable Development: The Key to Tackling Health Inequalities, HM Treasury (2014) National Infrastructure Plan, HM Government (2009) The UK Renewable Energy Strategy.
Interrelated Effects	HM Government (2005) The UK Sustainable Development Strategy, Defra (2011) Mainstreaming Sustainable Development, Department for Transport (2008) Delivering a Sustainable Transport System, HM Government (2005) One Future – Different Paths. Shared Framework for Sustainable Development.

SEA Topic	Relevant Plans, Programmes and Strategies
National (Scotland) - legislative and policy frameworks informed by relevant higher-level frameworks	
Air and Climate: Air & Climatic Factors	Air Quality (Scotland) Regulations (amended) 2016, Cleaner Air for Scotland 2 - Towards a Better Place for Everyone (2021), The Environment Act 1995 & Part IV of the Environment Act 1995 Local Air Quality Management Policy Guidance, The Environmental Noise (Scotland) Regulations 2006, Transportation Noise Action Plan, Planning Advice Note 1/2011: Planning and Noise, Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009 and Orders, Climate Change (Emissions Reduction Targets) (Scotland) Act 2019, The Scottish Government's Update to the Climate Change Plan 2018-2032 (2020), Securing a Green Recovery on a Path to Net Zero Switched On Scotland Phase Two: An Action Plan for Growth, Reducing car use for a healthier, fairer and greener Scotland A route map to achieve a 20 per cent reduction in car kilometres by 2030 (draft, Transport Scotland, 2022)Third Report on Proposals and Policies 2018-2032, Switched On Scotland: A Roadmap to Widespread Adoption of Plug-in Vehicles 2013, 'Climate Ready Scotland'- Scotland's Climate Change Adaptation Programme 2019-2024, Transportation Noise Action Plan (2019-2023).
Physical Environment: Biodiversity, Flora & Fauna, Soil, Water, Cultural Heritage & Landscape	Nature Conservation (Scotland) Act 2004, Wildlife and Natural Environment (Scotland) Act 2011, Scottish Government: Scottish Forestry Strategy 2006 and Implementation Plan 2015 – 2018, It's in your Hands: Scotland's Biodiversity Strategy (2005), 2020 Challenge for Scotland's Biodiversity (2013), Scotland's Biodiversity, a Route Map to 2020 (6 Big Steps for Nature), Scotland's Biodiversity List, Scottish Biodiversity Strategy indicators, Scottish Government and its Key Agencies: The Scottish Soil Framework (2009), State of Scotland's Soils Report 2011, National Soil Map of Scotland, Soil Monitoring Action Plan & Implementation Plan, Contaminated Land (Scotland) Regulations 2000 as amended, Scottish Government's Statutory Guidance: Edition 2 (2006), Getting the best from our land: A Land Use Strategy for Scotland 2016 – 2021, Water Environment and Water Services (Scotland) Act 2003, Water Environment (Controlled Activities) (Scotland) Regulations 2011 as amended (CAR), Groundwater Protection Policy for Scotland: Environmental Policy (SEPA, 2009), River Basin Management Plan for the Scotland River Basin 2015 – 2027, Flood Risk Management (Scotland) Act 2009, Scottish Canals Asset Management Strategy 2019-30, Marine (Scotland) Act 2010, Historic Environment Policy for Scotland (HEPS, 2019), Our Past, Our Future (OPOF) 2023, Historic Environment Circular 1, The Town and Country Planning (Historic Environment Scotland) Amendment Regulations 2015 , The Historic Environment (Scotland) Act 2014, Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) (Scotland) Act 1997, Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act 1979 (as amended, 2014), Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) (Scotland) Act 1997 (as amended, 2014), PAN71 Conservation Area Management 2004, Scotland's Scenic Heritage, NatureScot Landscape Policy Framework (2005), NatureScot's Landscape Character Assessment (2019), Planning etc. (Scotland) Act 2006, Creating Places: The Scottish Government's policy statement on architecture and place, National Parks (Scotland) Act 2000, Scotland's Landscape Charter, It's in your Hands: Scotland's Biodiversity Strategy, 2020 Challenge for Scotland's Biodiversity and Scotland's Biodiversity: a Route Map to 2020'. The Scottish Government's 'Scottish biodiversity strategy post-2020: statement of intent.
Socio-economics: Population, Human Health & Material Assets	General Registers of Scotland: National Population Projections (2018), Equality Act 2010 (as amended specific to Scotland), Scottish Government: Fairer Scotland Action Plan, Going Further: Scotland's Accessible Travel Framework, National Bus Travel Concession Scheme for Older and Disabled Persons (2006 and amended), Scotland's National Strategy for Economic Transformation (2022), Town Centre Action Plan, Scottish Government: Let's Get Scotland Walking - A National Walking Strategy 2014, Cycling Action Plan for Scotland, A Healthier Scotland - Actions and Ambitions on Diet, Activity and Healthy Weight 2017, Mental Health Strategy 2017 – 2027, Good Mental Health for All, Scottish Government: Go Safe on Scotland's Roads It's Everyone's Responsibility: Scotland's Road Safety Framework to 2020, Audit Scotland (2011) Transport for Health

SEA Topic	Relevant Plans, Programmes and Strategies
	and Social Care, Scottish Government: Short Life Working Group (2013) Healthcare Transport Recommendations, A connected Scotland - Tackling social isolation and loneliness and building stronger social connections, Going Further: Scotland's Accessible Travel Framework, Scottish Government: Good Places, Better Health. A New Approach to the Environment and Health in Scotland: Implementation Plan (2008), Creating Places (2013), Place Standard Tool (2016), Scottish Planning Policy (2014), National Planning Framework 3 (2014), Scottish Government: Equally Well (2008), First Equally Well Review (2010), Second Equally Well Review (2014), Equally Well Implementation Plan and Outcomes Frameworks (2008), Transport (Scotland) Act 2005, Scotland's Energy Strategy 2017, Switched On Scotland Roadmap 2013, Switched On Scotland Phase Two: An Action Plan for Growth, Infrastructure Investment Plan (2015), Scotland's NTS2 (2020), Strategic Transport Projects Review 2 Phase 1 Report (2021), Scottish Planning Policy (2014), National Planning Framework 3 (NPF3) (2014), NPF4 (emerging).
Interrelated Effects	National Transport Strategy 2 (NTS2) (2020), NTS2 1st Annual Delivery Plan (2020), Strategic Transport Projects Review 2 (STPR2) (emerging), National Planning Framework 4 (NPF4) (emerging), Scottish Planning Policy (2014), NPF4 (2023), Place Principle (2019) Designing Streets (2010), Infrastructure Commission for Scotland Report, Scotland's Economic Strategy 2015, Infrastructure Investment Plan (2015), Cycling Action Plan for Scotland, National Walking Strategy, Delivering the Goods - Scotland's Rail Freight Strategy (2016), Rail Enhancements & Capital Investment Strategy, Scottish Ferries Plan, National Roads Development Guide, Climate Ready Scotland Adaptation Programme (2019), Land Use – Getting the best from our land (2021-2026), The Scottish Governments Programme for Government (2020-2021), The Scottish Government's Infrastructure Investment Plan 2021-22 to 2025-26 (2021), Cycling Action Plan for Scotland (2017), Scottish Government Aviation Strategy (2021, draft).
HITRANS Region - policy frameworks informed by relevant higher-level frameworks	
Air and Climate: Air & Climatic Factors	Air Quality and Climate Change Strategies for Argyll and Bute, Eilean Siar, Highland, Moray and Orkney. These include: Air Quality Annual Progress Report (2020) for Argyll and Bute, Carbon Management Plan 2017-2023 (Eilean Siar, 2017), The Highland Council Climate Change Strategy (2007), Highland Council's Net Zero Strategy (2023), Climate Change Strategy 2020-2030 (Moray Council, 2021), Carbon Management Programme 2016 – 2026: Appendix 4 (Orkney Islands Council, 2015). Air Quality Action Plan: Inverness. Highland Council (2016)
Physical Environment: Biodiversity, Flora & Fauna, Soil, Water, Cultural Heritage & Landscape	Biodiversity Action Plans for Argyll and Bute, Eilean Siar, Highland, Moray, Orkney and Cairngorms National Park Argyll and Bute Biodiversity Duty Action Plan 2016-2021, Argyll and Bute Biodiversity Duty Compliance Report 2021-2023 (2023), A Framework for Biodiversity Action in the Western Isles (2004), Biodiversity Duty Report 2018 – 2020 (The Highland Council, 2021), Orkney Local Biodiversity Action Plan 2018 – 2022 (2018), Cairngorms Local Biodiversity Action Plan 2022 – 2013 (2002). Cairngorms Nature Action Plan 2019 - 2024 (2019), Cairngorms Landscape Toolkit.
Socioeconomics: Population, Human Health & Material Assets	Community Plans for Argyll and Bute, Eilean Siar, Highland, Moray and Orkney
Interrelated Effects	Local Transport Strategies, Local Development Plans and Tourism Strategies for Argyll and Bute, Eilean Siar, Highland, Moray and Orkney. These include: National Plan for Scotland's Islands (2019), Development plan scheme Local Development Plan Environmental Report (Argyll and Bute, 2016), Development Plan Scheme 2023 (Moray Council, 2023), Local Development Plan 2020 (Moray Council, 2020), Orkney Development Plan Scheme 2024/25 (Orkney Council),

SEA Topic	Relevant Plans, Programmes and Strategies
	Orkney Local Development Plan 2017 – 2022 (Orkney Council 2017), Orkney's Regional Spatial Strategy (Orkney Islands Council, 2021) (Emerging), Highland-wide Local Development Plan (2012), Cairngorms National Park Local Development Plan (2021), Highlands Indicative Regional Spatial Strategy to 2050 (Highland Council, 2020), HITRANS Active Travel Strategy (2018), Islands (Scotland) Act 2018, Central Highlands QLD – Visitor Economy Strategy 2020 – 2022 (2019). Portree Active Travel Masterplan (HITRANS, 2022), Inner Moray Firth Local Development Plan (IMFLDP) (2024)

A.1 Key Policy Considerations

A.1.1 As set out in **Table A-1**, an extensive policy review of relevant plans, programmes and strategies which need to be taken into account in the development of the emerging RTS and this associated SEA has been carried out.

International

A.1.2 Mitigating and adapting to climate change is a critical policy consideration at an international level with multiple agreements in place to address the climate emergency. The UNFCCC is the forum for international action on climate change with the aim of stabilising GHG concentrations in the atmosphere at a level that would prevent dangerous anthropogenic interference with the climate system. The UNFCCC focuses on mitigating (reducing) GHG emissions, adapting to climate change, reporting of national emissions, and financing of climate action in developing countries. Agreed at COP 21, the Paris Agreement commits signatories to reducing global greenhouse gas emissions with the long-term goal of withholding a temperature increase by no more than 2°C. The recent COP26 gathering in Glasgow led to the Glasgow Climate Pact, reaffirming the Paris Agreement goal of limiting the increase in the global average temperature to well below 2°C above pre-industrial levels and pursuing efforts to limit it to 1.5 °C. The pact recognises that GHG emissions need to fall by 45% by 2030 if the world is to stay on track to reach net zero by 2050 and requests countries revisit their 2030 targets by the end of 2022. In addition, the Cancun Adaptation Framework recognises that adaptation is required to be given the same priority as mitigation including reducing vulnerability and increasing resilience. Any major transport infrastructure development set out in the emerging RTS should contribute to meeting the requirements and targets set out in international climate change policies and agreements.

A.1.3 As the United Kingdom formally left the European Union (EU) in 2020, European legislation and associated policies are no longer of direct relevance to domestic policies or strategies such as the RTS. However, EU legislation has historically developed policy frameworks to address environmental issues which have subsequently been implemented at UK and Scotland levels, and prior to leaving the EU, existing EU legislation was transposed and incorporated into UK and Scottish legislation. This means some EU legislation remains of indirect relevance to the emerging RTS in terms of having established frameworks and requirements which the RTS will still need to implement in accordance with UK and Scottish legislation.

National

A.1.4 The Scottish Government's update to the Climate Change Plan 2018-2032 (2020) sets out a commitment to reduce greenhouse gas emissions to 75% of 1990 levels by 2030, 90% by 2040 and net-zero by 2045. The Plan recognises the key role that the decarbonisation of transport will play in reducing Scotland's emissions and includes:

i. an aim to reduce the number of kilometres travelled by car by 20% by 2030

ii. a commitment to phase out the need for new petrol and diesel cars and vans by 2030

iii. a £120 million investment in Zero Emissions Buses, driving forward a fully decarbonised future for Scotland's bus fleet and supporting the Scottish supply chain

iv. an investment of £50 million to create Active Freeways, providing a sustainable link between our towns, cities and some of our most beloved national landmarks

A.1.5 The upgrade to the Climate Change Plan follows on from the publication of Climate Ready Scotland Adaptation Programme in 2019 which sets out the current state of the climate in Scotland including average rainfall increases, temperature rises and changes in mean sea level around the UK. The Programme sets out low and high emission scenarios, predicts a high emissions prediction of a summer temperature increase of 2.6°C and a winter

temperature increase of 2.2 °C by 2070 with associated changes in rainfall in the summer (14% drier) and in winter (18% wetter). The transition to a low-carbon transport system will be critical to mitigating and adapting to the impacts of climate change in Scotland. This is backed up by several national policy documents, including NTS2.

A.1.6 The National Transport Strategy 2 (2020) sets out the transport strategy for Scotland over the next 20 years, seeking to deliver a transport system which is sustainable, inclusive, safe and accessible across Scotland. NTS2 provides a strategic framework comprising four key priorities and associated enablers to ensure that NTS2:

- **Reduces inequalities:** providing fair access to services that are accessible and affordable for all
- **Takes Climate action:** to help deliver the net-zero emissions target, adapting to the effects of climate change and promoting greener, cleaner choices
- **Helps to deliver inclusive economic growth**; which is efficient, reliable, high quality and innovative
- **Improves our health and wellbeing:** delivering a safer and secure Scotland, with a wide variety of travel choices for communities

A.1.7 NTS2 also sets out proposals (as stated in the Scottish Government's Climate Change Plan) to reduce reliance on private transport to help to address the ongoing climate emergency, including a reduction in car kilometres by 20% in 2030, an ambition to phase out new petrol and diesel cars by 2032, decarbonise Scotland's passenger railways by 2035 and decarbonise scheduled internal Scottish flights by 2040. The delivery of inclusive economic growth is also a key pillar of NTS2, seeking to increase the resilience of Scotland's transport system and foster greater integration of transport and wider infrastructure policies and investments. It aims to increase Scotland's competitiveness and help Scotland to become an innovative leader in beneficial transport innovations.

A.1.8 STPR2 is a Scotland-wide review of the strategic transport network across all transport modes which aims to help deliver the visions, priorities, and outcomes for transport set out within NTS2. STPR2 will report in two phases. Phase 1 made recommendations on transport interventions for investment in the short term and was published in February 2021. Phase 2 made further recommendations in the consultation draft published in January 2022.

A.1.9 The National Islands Plan from the Scottish Government was published in December 2019 and provides a framework for action in order to meaningfully improve outcomes for island communities. The Plan includes 13 Strategic Objectives all designed to improve the quality of life for island communities. The National Islands Plan was prepared in response to The Islands (Scotland) Act which was passed in the Scottish Parliament in 2018 and sets out the purpose of the National Islands Plan. The objectives and strategies within the Plan to improve outcomes for island communities are underpinned by four key values: fairness, integration, environmental protection and inclusiveness. The 13 Objectives within the National Islands Plan are all relevant to the emerging HITRANS RTS however the following are deemed most significant:

- **Strategic Objective 1 Population Levels** – To address population decline and ensure a healthy, balanced population profile
- **Strategic Objective 2 Sustainable Economic Development** – To improve and promote sustainable economic development
- **Strategic Objective 3 Transport** – To improve transport services
- **Strategic Objective 6 Digital Connectivity** – To improve digital connectivity
- **Strategic Objective 9 Climate Change and Energy** – To contribute to climate change mitigation and promote clean, affordable and secure energy

A.1.10 Scotland's third Land Use Strategy was published in March 2021 and sets out the Government's vision for achieving sustainable land use in Scotland. The Strategy sets out a set of key considerations for climate change adaptation and mitigation and the biodiversity crises, understanding the need for nature-based solutions for island communities. The Strategy also recognises that the islands need thriving business environments that allow for a wide range of economic opportunities. It takes a holistic landscape and ecosystems approach to sustainable land use, recognising the need for nature-based solutions.

A.1.11 The Scottish Government's Programme for Government (2020-2021) is guided by the National Performance Framework. This edition focuses on protecting and renewing Scotland, addressing the ongoing impact of COVID-19 on health, the economy and society and in supporting the transition to net-zero emissions. Two key interrelated policy issues that the HITRANS RTS must respond to are encapsulated by this target: delivering sustainable economic growth through climate change adaptation, and enhanced infrastructure investment.

A.1.12 The Scottish Government's Infrastructure Investment Plan 2021-22 to 2025-26 (2021) sets out priorities for public investment through a long-term strategy. With progress updated annually, it sets out why the Scottish Government invests, how it invests and what it intends to invest up to 2040 by sector. This Infrastructure Investment Plan focuses on the importance of infrastructure investment to aid in the recovery from the economic, health and social harm from COVID-19 and also to address the adjustments required following the UKs exit from the EU in December 2020. It sets out the Scottish Government's long term infrastructure investment priorities and plans including the transition to a lower- carbon economy, strategic roads projects, high speed rail, low emission vehicle infrastructure, active travel infrastructure and accessibility improvements to infrastructure.

A.1.13 Scotland's National Strategy for Economic Transformation (2022) sets out the ambition for 2032 for Scotland to be successful, with a strong economy, with good, secure and well-paid jobs and growing businesses have driven a significant reduction in poverty and child poverty. It sets out five policy programmes of action:

- Establish Scotland as a world-class entrepreneurial nation founded on a culture that encourages, promotes and celebrates entrepreneurial activity in every sector of our economy.
- Strengthen Scotland's position in new markets and industries, generating new, well-paid jobs from a just transition to net zero.
- Make Scotland's businesses, industries, regions, communities and public services more productive and innovative.
- Ensure that people have the skills they need at every stage of life to have rewarding careers and meet the demands of an ever-changing economy and society, and that employers invest in the skilled employees they need to grow their businesses.
- Reorient our economy towards wellbeing and fair work, to deliver higher rates of employment and wage growth, to significantly reduce structural poverty, particularly child poverty, and improve health, cultural and social outcomes for disadvantaged families and communities.

A.1.14 The National Planning Framework 4 (NPF4) was published on 13 February 2023. The plan sits under a National Spatial Strategy, which is guided by a set of overarching principles, outlined below:

- **Sustainable places –** where we can reduce emissions and restore and better connect biodiversity
- **Liveable places –** where we can live better, healthier lives

- **Productive places –** where we have greener, fairer and a more inclusive wellbeing economy

A.1.15 NPF4 outlines a wide range of plans and developments across five action areas of Scotland. The HITRANS region is fully or in part of three zones: North and West Coastal Innovation, Northern Revitalisation and North East Transition. A description of each area and the intended policy outcomes are listed in **Table A-2** below.

Table A-2 NPF4 Action Areas and Policy Objectives

Action Area	Area Description	NPF4 Priorities
North and West Coastal Islands	This area broadly comprises the island communities of Shetland, Orkney, the Western Isles, and parts of Highland and Argyll and Bute including the north and west mainland coastline.	▪ Maximise the benefits of renewable energy whilst enhancing blue and green infrastructure, decarbonising transport and building resilient connections. ▪ Support coastal and island communities to become carbon neutral, thus contributing to net-zero commitments and reducing fuel poverty. ▪ Seize the opportunities to grow the blue and green economy, recognising the world class environmental assets that require careful management and opportunities to develop skills and diversify employment.[4]
North	This area broadly includes Highland with parts of Argyll and Bute, Moray and much of the National parks.	▪ Protect environmental assets and stimulate investment in natural and engineered solutions to climate change and nature restoration, whilst decarbonising transport and building resilient connections. ▪ Maintain and help to grow the population by taking a positive approach to rural development that strengthens networks of communities. ▪ Support local economic development by making sustainable use of the areas' world class environmental assets to innovate and lead greener growth.[5]
North-East	This area broadly includes Aberdeen City and Aberdeenshire with links through Moray towards Inverness, and south towards the Firth of Tay	▪ Provide net zero energy solutions including extended heat networks and improved energy efficiency, together with urban greening and low carbon transport. ▪ Pioneer low carbon, resilient urban living by rolling out networks of 20-minute neighbourhoods, future proofing city and town centres, accelerating urban greening, investing in net zero homes, and managing development on the edge of settlements. ▪ Target economic investment and build community wealth to overcome disadvantage and support a greener wellbeing economy.[6]

A.1.16 The only geographically specific 'National Development' designation ('Sustainable Places') in the region is 'Energy Innovation Development on the Islands' which covers the Outer Hebrides, Orkney and Shetland. This designation focuses on providing infrastructure for low carbon fuels for communities and commerce, as well as for export. It is intended that this will

[4] *National Planning Framework 4* (Scottish Government, 2022), p. 23.

[5] *National Planning Framework 4* (Scottish Government, 2022), p. 26.

[6] *National Planning Framework 4* (Scottish Government, 2022), p. 31.

contribute towards improved energy security, unlock opportunities for employment and business, and help to put Scotland the forefront of low carbon fuel innovation.[7]

A.1.17 In this context, a number of classes of development are designated a national development including:

- Supporting the Arnish Renewables Base and Outer Hebrides Energy Hub
- Supporting Scapa Flow Future Fuels Hub and Orkney Harbours[8]

A.1.18 It should be noted that NPF4 also advocates an **'infrastructure first'** policy, which is focused on ensuring that infrastructure considerations are at the heart of placemaking.[9] The key implications for the emerging RTS includes:

- Plans to increase connectivity through the development of new 20-minute neighbourhoods and improvements to strategic connections between all modes of transport will require the RTS to improve current connectivity levels within the region, adhering to the 'Place Principle' as far as possible.
- The 'Energy Innovation Development on the Islands' is also a key issue. The overarching 'Sustainable Places' theme highlights the inter-connectivity of climate change and biodiversity loss, supports nature-based solutions and sustainable design and use of resources.

Regional

A.1.19 The Highland Indicative Regional Spatial Strategy (2020) extends across the study area to identify strategic development priorities for the region. It identifies strategic development projects via candidate National Developments (cNDs), including:

- Utilising the Highlands as a 'mitigation bank' for climate change that will be fundamental for Scotland to meet net zero by 2045, via protection and restoration to natural assets
- Cromarty Firth development to be a leading contender for Greenport status to support offshore wind projects
- Opportunity at Dounreay to support Europe's first space hub at Sutherland to host the development of prototype fusion reactors
- Flow Country as a potential World Heritage Site to proceed to the next stage
- Transport shift to integrate a sustainable travel network via rail, trunk and road improvements
- Development of renewable energy, including off-shore renewables
- Improvements to the digital and virtual network

A.1.20 The HITRANS local authorities each have Local Development Plans, (LDP) as identified in **Table A2** above. The LDPs set out the strategic and detailed planning policy framework for development within the local planning authority area. The LDP's policies for transport seek to give priority to active and public transport modes, reducing the need to travel and situating development in sustainable locations, integrated transport to support sustainable economic growth, reducing the need to travel, social inclusion and wellbeing and healthy communities. Furthermore, policies support inter-island links such as air services, ferry services and associated infrastructure.

[7] *National Planning Framework 4* (Scottish Government, 2022), p. 7.

[8] *National Planning Framework 4* (Scottish Government, 2022), p. 100-101.

[9] *National Planning Framework 4* (Scottish Government, 2022), p. 67.

A.1.21 Local Development Plans provide the vision for how communities will grow and develop in the future. They provide certainty for communities and investors alike about where development should and should not take place and the infrastructure required to support growth. The NPF4, once finalised, will also form part of the statutory Development Plan. The implementation of the emerging RTS will need to take account of the spatial strategy and transport requirements contained within Local Development Plans.

A.1.22 The HITRANS region Local Authorities have their own Local Biodiversity Action Plans (BAP), see **Table A2** above. The BAP aims to translate national targets for habitats and species into effective action at the local level by conserving and enhancing biodiversity and landscape/seascape; incorporating biodiversity into all relevant decision making; identify biodiversity resources and priorities in the local area and improve awareness, understanding and engagement and enhance local distinctiveness.

A.1.23 The Highland Council's Carbon CLEVER initiative targets being carbon neutral in Inverness, as well as low carbon Highlands by 2025[10]. The vision includes *'By 2025, the Highlands will be a region where its residents and visitors can move around easily by low carbon and sustainable forms of transport. The region is well connected both in terms of transport links and through digital connectivity.'* This is supported in part by its Electric Vehicle Infrastructure Strategic Control Plan which sets out its ambition to create Scotland's greenest transport system across its largest area.

A.1.24 In May 2017, HITRANS published the Highlands and Islands RTS Refresh, an update to the HITRANS RTS 2008. The strategy promotes the maintenance, enhancement and improvement of transport infrastructure and services throughout the area. A number of strategic objectives are set out which include:

- Support sustainable growth across the region
- Reduce barriers to participation in employment, learning, social, leisure, health and cultural activities
- Maintain and improve lifeline transport networks and services
- Promote efficient business connectivity and import/ export
- Improving the quality, accessibility, affordability and integration of travel
- Supporting communities to thrive socially, physically and economically

A.1.25 In addition, HITRANS published an Active Travel Strategy in 2018 that aims to meet the following outcomes:

- Reduce the effects of climate change and other negative environmental impacts by developing a low carbon transport system
- encourage residents to lead more active lifestyles with increased opportunities for outdoor recreation and sustainable travel
- Support resilience and wellbeing in the local economy by creating better access to local businesses and services
- Improve physical and mental health by promoting active travel choices
- Create a more equal society by improving access to low cost and convenient transport options

A.1.26 In terms of climate change, the HITRANS Local Authorities have each prepared a Local Climate Change Strategy for their local authority that sets out the regions approach to mitigation and adaptation as well as outline how the HITRANS region will achieve net zero.

[10] Climate CLEVER, the Highlands Council (2021)

A.1.27 The Central Highlands Visitor Economy Strategy 2020-2022 sets out the strategic aim, priorities and activity areas that activate tourism assets to ensure the region is a destination of choice for quality, value and experience.

Appendix B Baseline Environment

B.1 Introduction

B.1.1 This appendix supports **Section 3** of the RTS SEA ER by providing a review of current environmental and socio-economic conditions within the area likely to be affected by the emerging RTS, in particular (but not exclusively) the HITRANS administrative area. In doing so this review:

- Identifies relevant aspects and characteristics of the environment, including those likely to be significantly affected by the outcome of the new HITRANS RTS. This includes the identification of sites designated at international or national levels for reasons of biodiversity conservation, geological importance, heritage or landscape value which have the potential to be affected by the emerging RTS.
- Identifies relevant socio-economic trends and baseline conditions, focusing on matters likely to be significantly affected by the outcome of the emerging RTS.
- Outlines how the identified environmental and socio-economic characteristics and baseline conditions should be addressed within a refreshed RTS and considered within this SEA. The terms 'must' and 'should' are used to differentiate between statutory requirements to consider particular issues and non-statutory considerations, for example evidence from the baseline analysis which indicates a need to improve environmental quality.

B.1.2 This evidence is then used to:

- Inform consideration of the expected evolution of baseline environmental conditions in the absence of the emerging RTS.
- Define a suite of key environmental issues which will need to be addressed within the emerging RTS and which should be considered throughout this SEA process (presented in **Section 3** of this report).

B.1.3 The purpose of this baseline review is therefore to inform both proposals for the emerging RTS and the content of the SEA Framework which has been used to assess all substantive components of the emerging RTS.

B.2 Overview of Designated Sites

B.2.1 **Table B-1** below summarises identified sites at international, national or local level for reasons of biodiversity conservation, geological importance, heritage or landscape value which are considered to have the potential to be affected by the emerging RTS. The list has been summarised using environmental baseline information from the constituent HITRANS local authorities, namely Argyll & Bute, Comhairle nan Eilean Siar, Highland, Moray and the Orkney Islands. The context of these designated sites needs to be considered when characterising the environmental baseline position and identifying the relevance of existing issues and problems to the emerging RTS.

Table B-1 Summary of Highlands and Islands Environmental Designations (Source: STPR2 SEA Environmental Report Appendix D – Regional Environmental Summaries, January 2022 and NatureScot comment received on July 2022)

SEA Topic	Designation	Number of Sites
Air quality	Air Quality Management Areas	1
Biodiversity	Special Protection Areas	98
	Special Areas of Conservation	119

SEA Topic	Designation	Number of Sites
	Ramsar Wetlands of International Importance	26
	Sites of Special Scientific Interest	591
	UNESCO Biosphere Reserve	1
	National Nature Reserves	22
	RSPB Reserves	35
	Marine Protected Areas (Nature Conservation and Demonstration and Research)	15
	Marine Consultation Areas	16
	Local Nature Reserve	7
Heritage	World Heritage Sites	2
	Scheduled Monuments	1,934
	Battlefield Sites	10
	Listed buildings (Category A-C)	7,362
	Conservation Areas	58
	Historic Parks and Gardens	82
Landscape	National Parks	2
	National Scenic Areas of Scotland	27
	Gardens and Designated Landscapes	58

B.2.2 **Figure B-1** and **Figure B-2** illustrate the locations of key environmental designated areas and landscape features within the HITRANS region respectively.

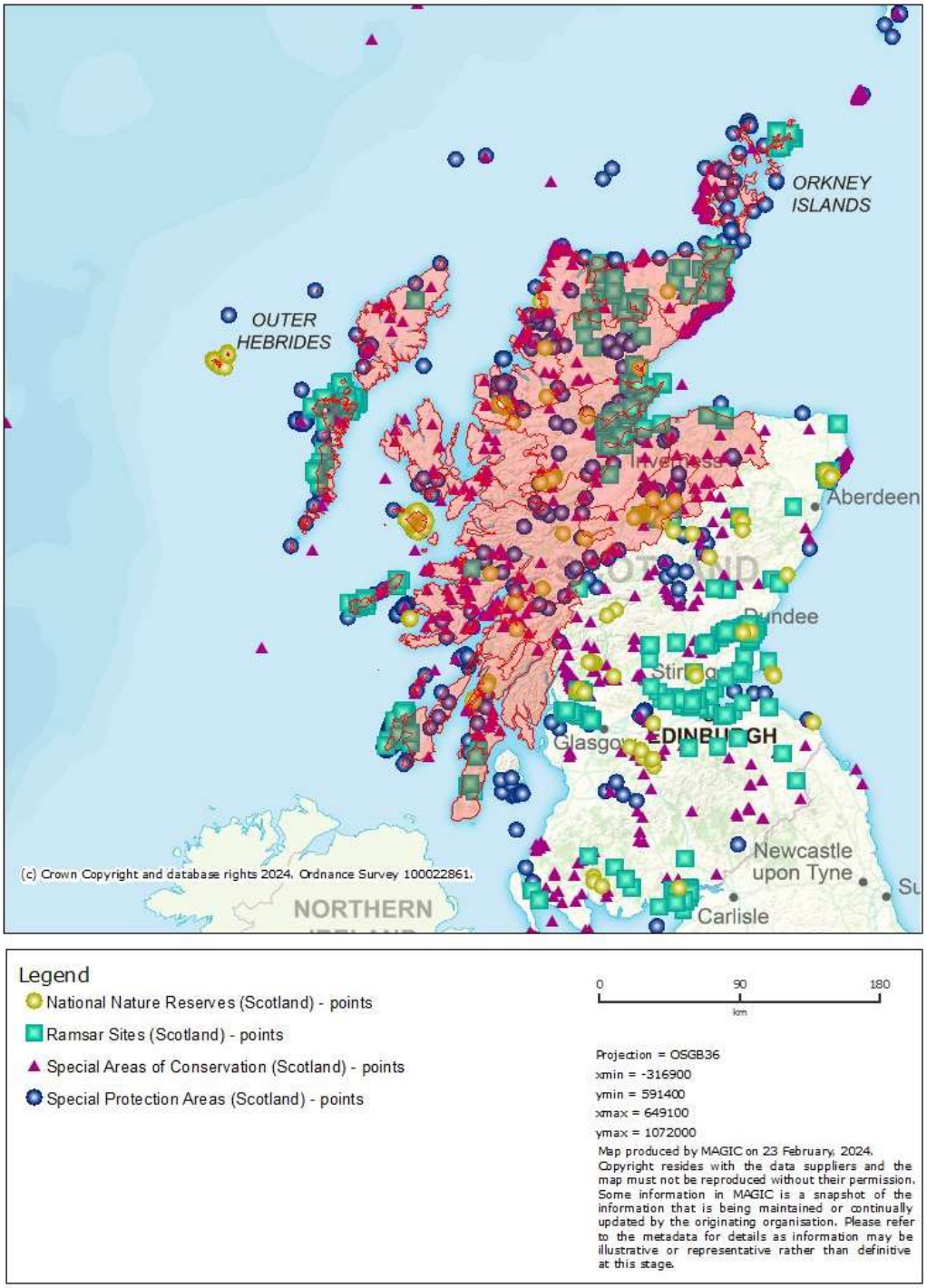

Figure B-1 Locations of key environmental designated areas within HITRANS area (Source: Magic Map, Defra)

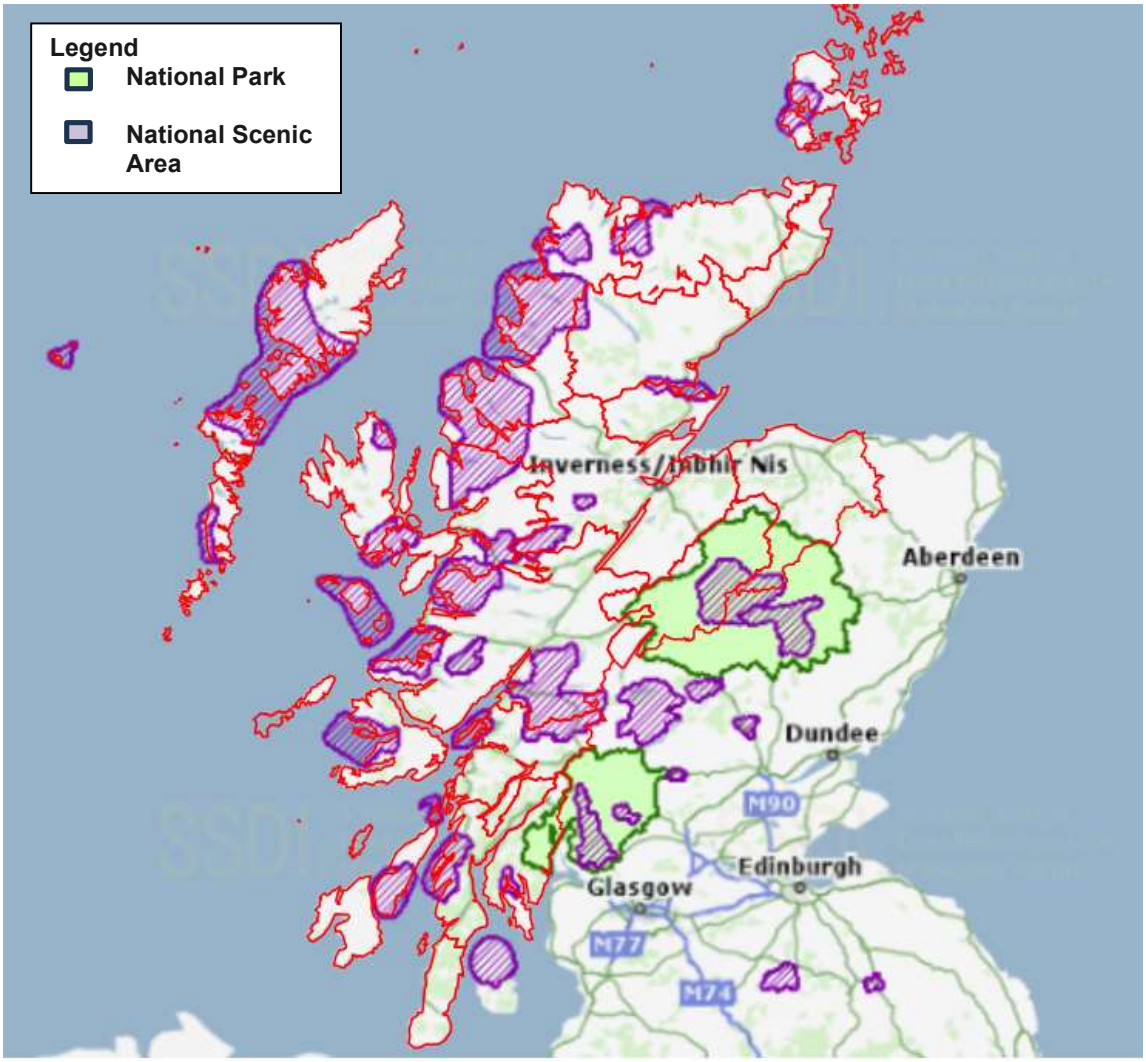

Figure B-2 Locations of key landscape features within HITRANS area (Source:SpatialData.gov.scot)

B.2.3 The HITRANS region hosts a number of international, national and local environmentally designated sites that contain a rich diversity of land and marine species and designations. The emerging RTS should provide an appropriate level of protection and enhancement opportunities for the designated sites and landscapes and must support the management of designated sites in pursuit of their defined conservation objectives.

B.3 Environmental and socio-economic baseline conditions

B.3.1 The following section outlines the current environmental conditions (including with respect to population, health and infrastructure) within the area likely to be affected by the emerging RTS, namely the HITRANS region. This review also identifies associated existing environmental problems and issues the emerging RTS should address, and which should be considered throughout this SEA process.

B.3.2 For the purpose of brevity, the qualitative baseline is presented in distinct categories, each in accordance with the required SEA objectives as shown below.

- **Air and climate**: Air and climatic factors;
- **Physical environment**: Biodiversity, flora and fauna, soil, water, cultural heritage and landscape; and
- **Socio-economics**: Population, human health and material assets

Air and Climate

Air and Climatic Factors

B.3.3 There is one Air Quality Management Area in the region in Inverness City Centre. Otherwise, there are no significant issues with respect to air quality in the Highlands and Islands, with air quality generally performing well in relation to National Air Quality objectives.

B.3.4 The latest available reporting indicates that Greenhouse Gas (GHG) emissions across the HITRANS region are relatively low, reflecting its rural nature and low population density. Moray has the highest relative emissions in the HITRANS region in 2019 (emitting 0.27kt km^2), followed by Orkney (0.25kt km^2), Eilean Siar (0.17kt km^2), Highland (0.05kt km^2) and Argyll & Bute (0.03kt km^2). Emissions per capita throughout the region are far higher on the Orkney islands and Eilean Siar, reflecting the inter-island travel between the islands and the Scottish mainland.[11]

B.3.5 Based on a literature review, STPR2 identifies the following predicted changes in future climate for the region:

- Frequency and intensity of hot extremes projected to increase in all future climate scenarios
- Wetter and warmer winters projected, with increased likelihood of pluvial flooding and extreme rainfall
- Increased soil moisture fluctuations will lead to increased risk of landslips, a key issue for vulnerable roads and railway lines in the area, including at the A83 Rest & Be Thankful and Stromeferry
- Under a high emission scenario, peak river flows for some areas could increase by more than 50% by the 2080s
- Inverness will very likely see a sea level rise of nearly 1 metre between 2019 and 2100

[11] Emissions of Carbon Dioxide for Local Authority Areas. UK local and Regional CO_2 emissions (2005 – 2019)

- Projected increases to extreme coastal water levels increases the risk of coastal flooding and erosion
- Coastal erosion is a recognised issue for the Orkney Islands, where the low-lying land is very exposed to storms
- Additional changes in storm surges are possible but difficult to predict
- The economically important North Coast 500 route has various exposure zones to coastal erosion

Physical Environment

Biodiversity, Geodiversity, Flora and Fauna

B.3.6 **Table B.1** above identifies the relevant European sites (Special Protection Areas (SPAs), Special Areas of Conservations (SACs) and Ramsar sites) and sites designated at the national level and benefiting from statutory protection within the HITRANS region for specific reasons of ecological importance or biodiversity conservation. The Highlands and Islands is particularly valued for its biodiversity and habitats. One third of the Highland Council region alone is covered by some form of national or local nature conservation designation, including an area of the Loch Lomond & the Trossachs National Park and areas of Cairngorms National Park[12].

B.3.7 Each local authority in the Highlands and Islands has developed their own Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) that lists the BAP priority habitats and species for each local authority area. Many of the habitats and species are protected by a range of designated areas, however it is recognised that important flora and fauna are also located outwith these protected areas and should also be considered when developing strategies for the RTS.

Soil and Ground Conditions

B.3.8 Overall, the HITRANS region comprises a mix of semi-urban, semi-rural and rural landscapes. The HITRANS region is made up of a mixture of soils including; Peaty Gleys, Peaty Podzols, Peat and Mineral Podzols[13]. The region has extensive deposits and a high concentration of peat, a soil type that acts as an important carbon sink, for habitat, water management and preserving archaeology.

Water

B.3.9 The region holds the highest proportion of freshwater resources in the UK by a significant margin. There are over 1,370 surface water features in the region, which includes rivers, lochs and coastal waterbodies. Eilean Siar contains the highest concentration of lochs in Scotland. Main waterbodies located within the HITRANS region include Loch Ness and Loch Leven. In 2012, 63% of lochs and ~80% of rivers and canals have been classed as 'Good' or 'High' in terms of water quality.[14]

B.3.10 SEPA has identified flood risk from river and coastal flooding at medium to high likelihood of flooding within the region. Mainland settlements at greatest risk include Inverness, Nairn, Cromarty, Golspie, Thurso, Lochinver, Fort William and Wick Airport. Coastal island communities are also affected, including the Orkney Islands and the Outer Hebrides. This includes the Neolithic site at Skara Brae that was first revealed from coastal erosion in 1850. River flooding risk is highest within the catchments of River Thurso, River Alness, River Ewe, River Peffery and Mill Lade.

[12] HITRANS SEA RTS Annex B – Environmental Baseline (2006)

[13] National Soil Map of Scotland. Available at: Scotland's Soils - soil maps (environment.gov.scot)

[14] Scotland's State of the Environment Report (2014). Available at: state-of-environment-report-2014.pdf

Cultural Heritage

B.3.11 The HITRANS region has a rich cultural history with two World Heritage Sites, 1,934 Scheduled Monuments and 7,362 Listed Buildings.

B.3.12 Scotland's cultural heritage reaches from prehistoric standing stones to medieval castles and formal great gardens through to Georgian houses, Victorian factories and Second World War defences. Much of this heritage can be found in the Highlands and Islands region.

B.3.13 There are two UNESCO designated World Heritage Sites located in the Highlands and Islands:

- St Kilda is a chain of islands located in the north Atlantic, 115 miles off the coast of Scotland that is prized for its natural and cultural heritage. The islands represent an authentic example of a crofting community that once lived there with little interference from the outside world. The last permanent residents were evacuated in 1930 and the island chain is now owned by the National Trust for Scotland
- Heart of Neolithic Orkney is a group of Neolithic monuments on the Orkney Islands that consist of numerous sites dating back five thousand years. This includes Maeshowe, the Stones of Stenness and the Ring of Brodgar and the settlements of Skara Brae

B.3.14 Many of the cultural heritage resources are on low-lying coastline and vulnerable to coastal erosion.

B.3.15 In 2021, the Highland Council submitted an initial bid for the Flow Country in Caithness and Sutherland to also become a World Heritage Site. A full bid will be submitted in 2023[15].

B.3.16 Consideration will be required during the development of the RTS of the heritage value of the transport infrastructure itself, such as railway infrastructure, piers and harbours.

Landscape

B.3.17 The Highlands and Islands are a predominantly rural region with sparse populations spread across a number of small towns, villages and rural settlements. Several small towns act as service centres for a large surrounding rural hinterland (e.g., Portree) or as a main island service centre (e.g., Stornoway and Kirkwall). Main settlements include the only city in the region, Inverness and other such Campbeltown, Lochgilphead, Oban, Fort William, Elgin and Wick and Thurso amongst others. The island archipelagos of the region over 170 islands, 35 of which are inhabited. In addition, there are around 27 National Scenic Areas designated across the Highlands and Islands. The Cairngorms National Park is located in the region.

Socio-Economics

B.3.18 A detailed socio-economic baselining exercise was developed as part of the main 'Case for Change' report, but this section summarises the main points for the purposes of this SEA.

Population

B.3.19 The HITRANS region spans almost 50% of Scotland's landmass yet is home to 10% of its total population[16]. The estimated total population of the region in 2021 was 440,750[17] (8% of the Scottish total), 54% of whom lived in The Highland Council area. Some 11% of HITRANS residents live in the island groups of the Outer Hebrides (Na H-Eileanan) and Orkney.

[15] Biodiversity Duty Report (2018 – 2020). The Highland Council (2021)

[16] HITRANS SEA of RTS (2006)

[17] NRS mid-year population estimates

B.3.20 Between 2011 and 2020, population growth in the Highlands and Islands (0.3%) lagged that for Scotland overall (3.1%), with some remote and island communities experiencing considerable population decline. Overall, Scotland's remote rural population declined by 0.3% while accessible rural areas grew by 8.7%.[18]

B.3.21 **Figure B-3** below shows the breakdown of the HITRANS population by age (Argyll & Bute data are only available at full local authority level).

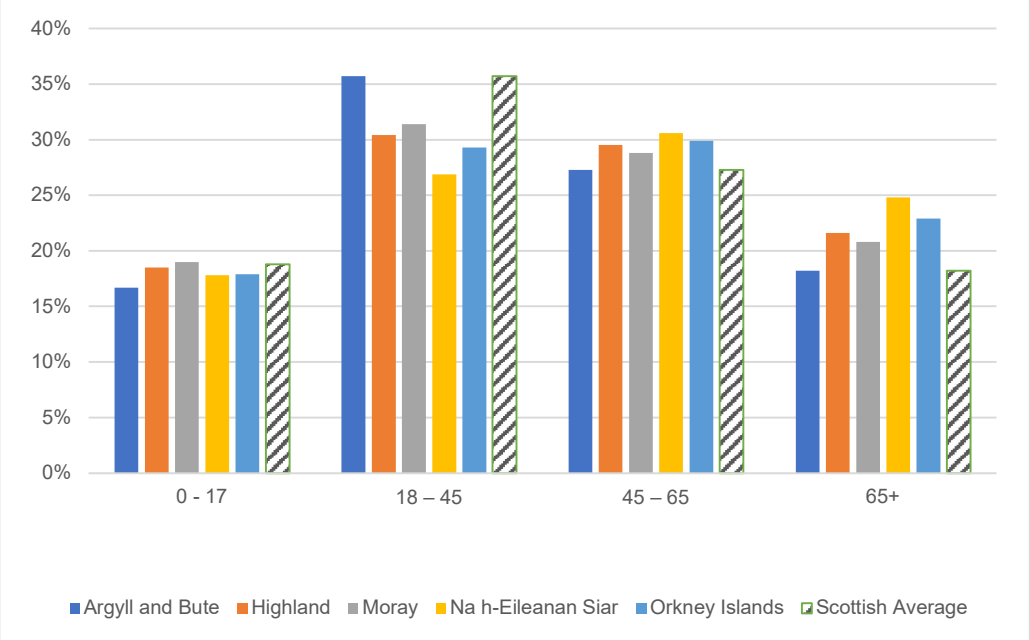

Figure B-3 HITRANS local authorities population age profile (Source: NRS mid-year population estimates)

B.3.22 **Figure B-3** shows that the Argyll and Bute local authority area most closely mirrors the Scotland average (although this may be skewed somewhat by the Helensburgh and Lomond areas of the authority, which are in the SPT area). The other four local authorities have an older age profile than Scotland as a whole, with notably lower proportions of those aged 18-45 and higher proportions of those aged 65+. This perhaps reflects young people moving to the bigger cities for education / work then potentially returning later in life. In-migration may also be concentrated amongst older groups who make a lifestyle choice to move to rural Scotland.

B.3.23 **Figure B-4** below shows the long-term population trend across the constituent HITRANS local authorities, indexed to 1981.

[18] rural-and-regional-disadvantage-in-the-highlands-and-islands-executive-summary.pdf (hie.co.uk)

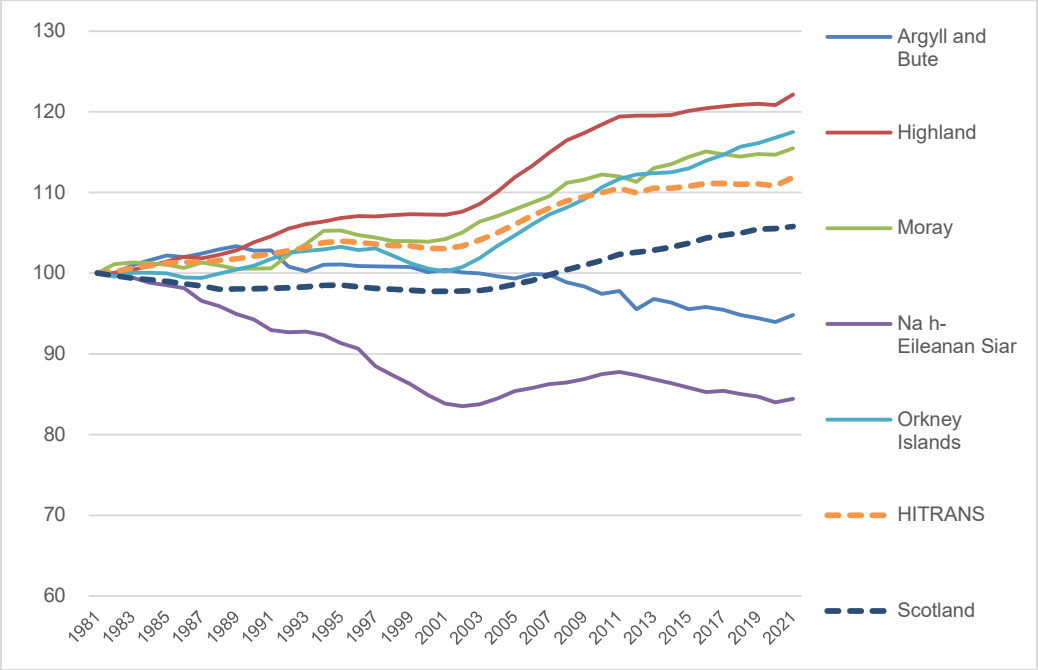

Figure B-4 HITRANS long-term population trend (1981 to 2021, 1981=100) (Source: NRS mid-year population estimates)

B.3.24 There are very distinct trends amongst the HITRANS local authorities. Highland, Moray and Orkney have generally grown over this period, with population growth accelerating after the turn of the century. Na h-Eileanan Siar saw a steep decline between 1981 and 2001 before stabilising and fluctuating since then. Argyll and Bute has been more stable at ± 5% from 1981 levels over this period.

B.3.25 The most recent sub-national population projections are the 2018-based local authority projections from National Records of Scotland (NRS)[19]. Despite recent population growth and net in-migration, the NRS population projections suggest that population will decrease by around 5% by 2043 in the HITRANS region, set against an increase for Scotland overall.

B.3.26 Across the HITRANS region, **16%** of households do not have access to a car. This is much lower than the Scotland-wide figure (28%) since many more households in larger towns and cities tend not to have access to a car. This implies a high degree of car dependency, reflecting the rural nature of much of the area. Indeed, HIE has recently published research which found that the vast majority of Highlands and Islands residents (87%) rely on a car or van to get around to at least some extent, and this rises to 92% of residents in accessible or remote rural locations.[20] High levels of car ownership combined with above average trip lengths present a challenge that the RTS will have to wrestle with, given that the prevailing national policy context is focused on reducing vehicle kilometres.

B.3.27 In terms of deprivation, the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) identified that deprivation in the Highlands and Islands is overall relatively low, with 7% of data zones falling within the 20% most deprived in Scotland and only one area of very high deprivation in Inverness, ranking 8/6,976 of the most deprived places in Scotland. Whilst overall deprivation

[19] https://www.nrscotland.gov.uk/statistics-and-data/statistics/statistics-by-theme/population/population-projections/sub-national-population-projections/2018-based

[20] *My Life in the Highlands Islands Research* (HIE, 2022), p. 3.

levels are low, deprivation in terms of access to services is much higher, as is the cost of living in many remote rural and island communities.

B.3.28 **Figure B-5** below shows the SIMD profile of all HITRANS datazones relative to Scotland. If the HITRANS region mirrored the national picture, then 10% of HITRANS datazones would fall into each decile. A negative figure indicates a lower proportion than the national picture and vice versa:

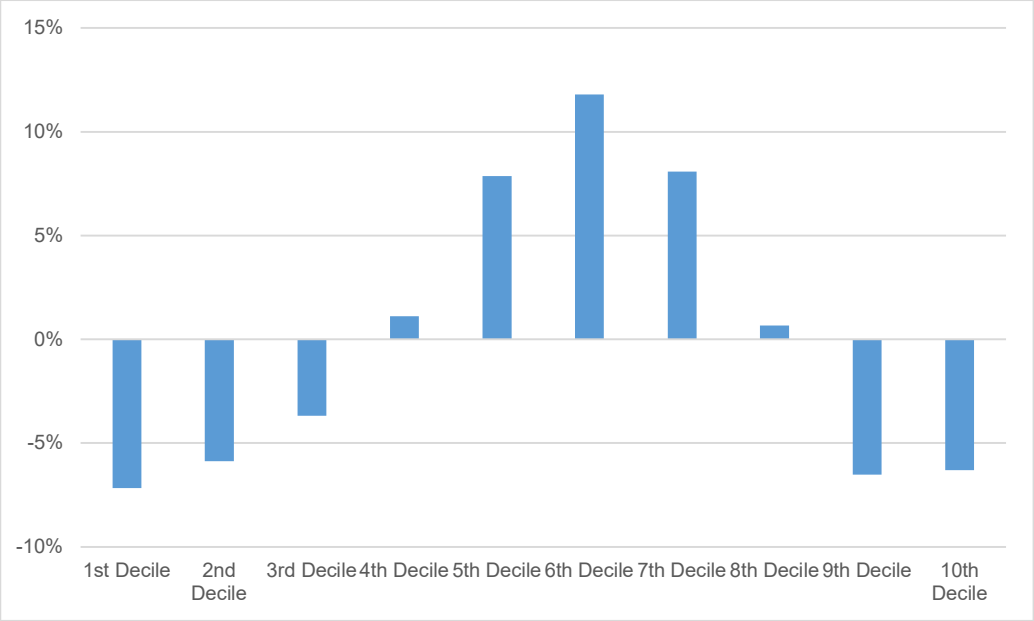

Figure B-5 HITRANS datazones relation to Scotland overall (Source: SIMD)

B.3.29 It can therefore be seen that the HITRANS region has fewer extremes of deprivation compared to Scotland. Datazones in the first-to-third and ninth-to-tenth deciles being under-represented with the fourth-to-eighth deciles overrepresented. Nevertheless, there are areas with pockets of multiple deprivation in Dunoon, Rothesay, Alness, Balintore, Inverness, Oban and Wick. Deprivation in rural areas is also frequently 'hidden' in that standard indices often do not fully capture the impact of the higher cost of living and geographic isolation on these communities.

B.3.30 In terms of employment, between 2020 – 2021, the three highest employment rates in Scotland are the Orkney Islands (84.2%), Eilean Siar (81.2%) and Highland (77.6%) with Argyll & Bute and Moray ~76% and ~74%, respectively21. All local authorities within the HITRANS region have higher employment than the Scottish national average of 74.8%.

B.3.31 Tourism is an important industry in the HITRANS region, particularly for nature tourism with 169 heritage paths, six of Scotland's Great Trails, three National Cycle Routes, six walking routes and the North Coast 500 scenic route. The area experiences a mass influx of seasonal tourism, which puts significant pressure on transport and other infrastructure. The popular North Coast 500 road tour provides a focus for tourism in the north of the region.

Human Health

B.3.32 In 2018 – 2020, life expectancy in each of the local authority areas was higher for both males and females than the Scottish average. For example, the life expectancy for females is 81.9

[21] Scotland's Labour Market – Statistics from the Annual Population Survey 2020/2021

years in the Highland Local Authority area (81.0 Scottish average), and 77.5 for males (76.8 Scottish average), according to National Record of Scotland.

B.3.33 Access to health care facilities can involve long-distance travel for those in island and more remote rural areas, such as to hospital facilities in Glasgow and Inverness. **Figure B-6** shows the locations of General Practices and Hospital in HITRANS region.

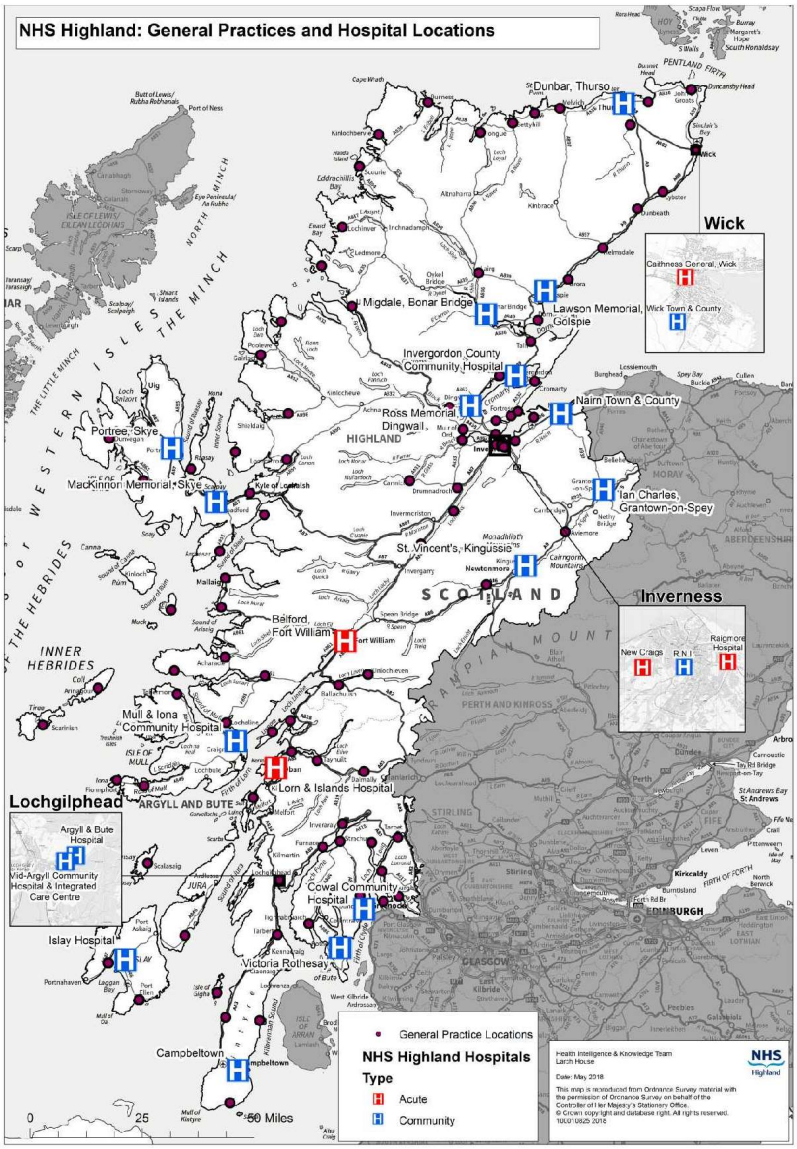

Figure B-6 Location of General Practices and Hospital in HITRANS region.

Inclusive Growth

B.3.34 The structure of the HITRANS economy in terms of employment is shown in **Figure B-7** below using data from the Business Register and Employment Survey (BRES).[22].

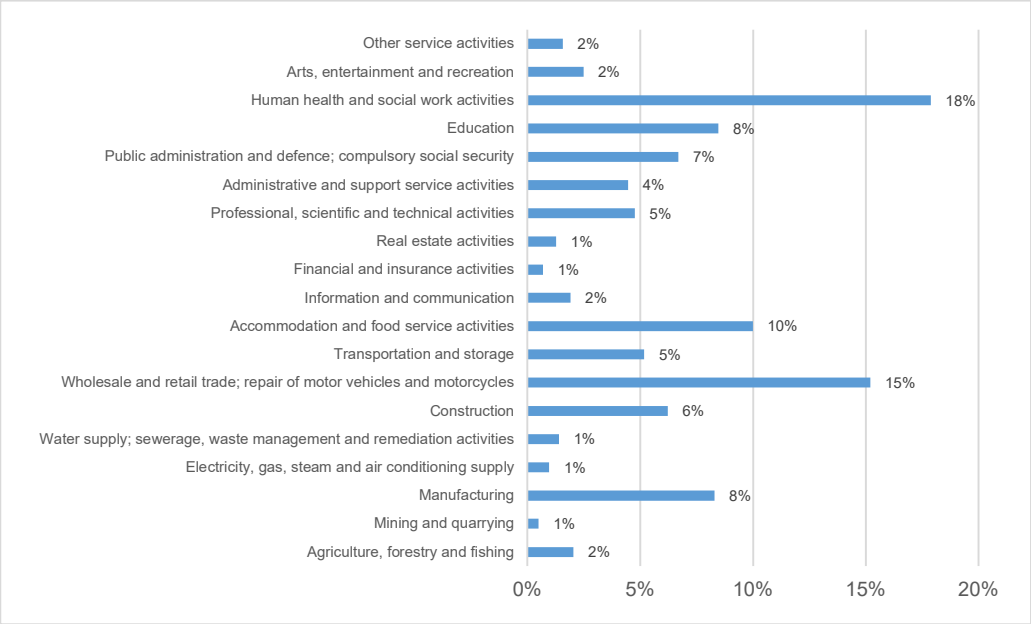

Figure B-7 Sectoral breakdown of HITRANS economy (Source: BRES, 2020)

B.3.35 The three biggest sectors in terms of employment are therefore the healthcare (33,300 jobs), retail (28,300) and tourism (accommodation and food service activities) (18,600) sectors. Despite being a mainly rural area, it is notable that only 2% of employment in the HITRANS region is in agriculture, forestry and fishing. Healthcare and retail are also the two largest sectors nationally.

B.3.36 Taking human health and social work activities, education and public administration etc together as a proxy for public sector employment, it is estimated that **o**ne third of all employee jobs in the region are in the public sector.

Material Assets

B.3.37 The HITRANS area covers circa half of Scotland's land mass, most of its islands and almost all of the west and north coast of the country. The scale of the area, its geography and topography and the location and density of its population and natural resources mean that a wide range of transport assets are required to deliver effective connectivity to residents and visitors alike. Some of the key assets are summarised below.

Active Travel

B.3.38 As with much of Scotland, active travel provision in the HITRANS area has been expanding significantly in recent years. Provision and maintenance of this infrastructure is the responsibility of the respective local authorities, but external funding through Sustrans and other bodies is often provided to support initial capital investment.

22 https://www.ons.gov.uk/surveys/informationforbusinesses/businesssurveys/businessregisterandemploymentsurvey

B.3.39 HITRANS also runs the HItravel scheme, which promotes travel by active modes and public transport.

Roads

B.3.40 From a roads perspective, connectivity between the HITRANS area and the rest of Scotland is largely delivered through four core Transport Scotland managed trunk roads:

- A9 (Scrabster to Central Scotland via Inverness and Perth)
- A82 (Inverness to Glasgow via Fort William)
- A83 (Campbeltown to Tarbet, where it connects with the A82)
- A96 (Aberdeen to Inverness)

B.3.41 Several other trunk roads branch off of these core routes, such as the A85 to Oban and A87 to Uig. The trunk road network is supplemented by an extensive network of local authority owned A-class roads, such as those which make up the Outer Hebrides Spinal Route, the A965 between Kirkwall and Stromness and the A890 between Achnasheen and Auchtertyre. Further local connectivity is provided by a network of connecting B and C class and unclassified roads.

Bus

B.3.42 The HITRANS area is served by long distance coach connections, which offer both internal (e.g., Inverness to Fort William) and external (e.g., Campbeltown to Glasgow) connections. Stagecoach North Scotland and West Coast Motors are the largest 'local' bus companies. However, given low population density and long distances, there are numerous small bus companies – sometimes single bus operations – that connect communities to their nearest settlement and meet other local needs such as school transport provision.

B.3.43 Whilst there are some commercial services in the area, particularly on the trunk routes to Central Scotland, the majority of routes are subsidised. Indeed, Demand Responsive Transport is an important feature of the overall bus service offer.

B.3.44 HITRANS invests in, owns and maintains a network of bus shelters around the Partnership area.

Rail

B.3.45 There are three main railway lines connecting Inverness to Central Scotland:

- The **Highland Mainline** between Inverness and Perth, with onward routes to Edinburgh Waverley via the Fife Circle and Glasgow Queen Street via Stirling
- The **Aberdeen – Inverness Line**, which connects the two cities and major settlements within Moray including Elgin, Forres and Nairn
- The **West Highland Line**, which connects Oban, Fort William and Mallaig with Glasgow Queen Street

B.3.46 The Caledonian Sleeper provides overnight services between Inverness and Fort William and London Euston.

B.3.47 The **Far North Line** (Inverness – Wick / Thurso) and the **Kyle Line** (Inverness – Kyle of Lochalsh) provide essential rail connectivity for communities in Caithness, Sutherland, Lochalsh and Wester Ross.

Ferries and Ferry Terminals

B.3.48 The HITRANS area contains many of Scotland's publicly supported ferry routes, as well as a handful of commercially operated services. These are as follows:

- *Clyde and Hebrides Ferry Services (CHFS):* The Scottish Government supported network of routes connecting most of the island and peninsular communities on the West Coast of Scotland. These services are currently operated by the state owned CalMac Ferries Ltd using a fleet of 36 vessels owned by Caledonian Maritime Assets Limited (CMAL), which is also wholly owned by the Scottish Government.
- *Northern Isles Ferry Services (NIFS):* The two Scottish Government supported routes connecting the Scottish mainland to the Orkney and Shetland Islands. These services are operated by Serco NorthLink Ferries under a Public Service Contract, with the vessels owned by CMAL.
- *Orkney Ferries:* A network of routes connecting thirteen of the inhabited islands in the Orkney archipelago with Orkney mainland. The service is delivered by Orkney Ferries, an arms-length company owned by Orkney Islands Council, using a fleet of nine vessels.
- *Argyll & Bute Council Ferries:* A network of four routes directly operated by Argyll & Bute Council using a fleet of four vessels.
- *Highland Council Ferries:* The Highland Council's primary route is the two-vessel Corran Ferry service, which connects Nether Lochaber and Ardgour. Operated by one vessel at any given time, it is the busiest single route service in Europe. The Council owns the vessels and operates the routes, whilst also operating or supporting a range of other much smaller routes.

B.3.49 There is an extensive network of ferry terminals around the HITRANS area which are owned and operated by a combination of local authorities, CMAL, trust ports and commercial port companies.

B.3.50 It should also be noted that there are a wide range of other strategically important non-ferry ports around the coastline. These vary from major fish landing ports (e.g., Scrabster and Lochinver) to energy sector hubs (e.g., Invergordon) to sheltered anchorages (e.g., Scapa Flow).

Airports / Airfields and Aircraft

B.3.51 Highlands and Islands Airports Ltd (HIAL), a Non-Departmental Public Body wholly owned by Scottish Ministers) owns and operates a network of airports / airfields around the HITRANS area, as follows: area, as follows:

- Barra
- Benbecula
- Campbeltown
- Inverness
- Islay
- Kirkwall
- Stornoway
- Tiree
- Wick John O'Groats

B.3.52 Orkney Islands Council and Argyll & Bute Council also maintain and operate several island airstrips which meet the needs of their contracted services.

B.3.53 The majority of air services in the HITRANS area are delivered either commercially (e.g., Kirkwall to Aberdeen, Inverness to London etc) or through a Public Service Contract with a commercial operator (e.g., the internal Argyll & Bute and Orkney Islands services). The only exception to this is two Twin Otter aircraft owned by HIAL and leased to the contracted operator (Loganair) of services to Barra, Campbeltown and Tiree.

Appendix C HITRANS RTS SEA Framework

SEA Objectives	Guide Questions: Will the RTS (component)…	Criteria to Assess Candidate Transport Interventions and Schemes
1. Climate Change: Respond to the climate emergency by decarbonising infrastructure assets, protecting, promoting and enhancing natural infrastructure, facilitating a low carbon economy and adapting to accommodate the effects of climate change.	▪ Contribute to decarbonisation of the transport system? ▪ Promote modal shift towards sustainable public transport and active travel? ▪ Support a sustainable pattern of development which minimises energy consumption and GHG emissions? ▪ Support sustainable tourism? ▪ Reduce the number of single occupant car journeys and encourage car sharing? ▪ Promote the use of clean fuels and technologies? ▪ Enhance the resilience of infrastructure assets to adverse weather and the effects of climate change? ▪ Include the use of nature-based solutions? ▪ Include blue-green infrastructure? ▪ Contribute to net zero emissions of all greenhouse gases by 2045 (2030 for Orkney Islands and Moray)? ▪ Help make the Highlands and Islands become the world's first net zero aviation region by 2040?	▪ Support a sustainable pattern of development that facilitates achieving carbon neutrality. ▪ Changes in emissions from traffic and public transport services. ▪ Impacts on climate change mitigation: modal shifts and GHG emissions or saving (construction and operational phases). ▪ Adaptability of new and upgraded transport infrastructure and services. ▪ Resilience to adverse weather and the effects of climate change.
2. Air Quality and Amenity: To maintain and improve air quality and, reduce concentrations of harmful atmospheric pollutants and minimise exposure to noise and vibration.	▪ Maintain or enhance air quality? ▪ Avoid unacceptable noise and vibration levels at sensitive locations (including ports and ferry terminals)? ▪ Prevent and reduce emissions of harmful pollutants from all forms of transport?	▪ Proximity to congestion pinch points. ▪ Sensitive areas (human and habitats). ▪ Likely operational emissions, including at ports and ferry terminals.
3. Biodiversity, Geodiversity and Soil: Conserve, protect, restore and enhance biodiversity and geodiversity interests,	▪ Ensure appropriate safeguards for the integrity, conservation objectives and features of sites designated at international,	▪ Proximity and connectivity to and impacts on sites designated at international, national and regional levels for reasons of

SEA Objectives	Guide Questions: Will the RTS (component)…	Criteria to Assess Candidate Transport Interventions and Schemes
including through safeguarding designated and non-designated sites, species and soil resources and by protecting, promoting and enhancing green infrastructure.	national, or local levels for reasons of biodiversity or geodiversity value or species protection? ▪ Support the protection and enhancement of valued species and habitats? ▪ Support safeguarding against habitat loss or fragmentation? ▪ Support the protection and enhancement of protected trees and important woodland areas? ▪ Protect and enhance important soil resources? ▪ Support the protection and restoration of soils, including peatland?	biodiversity conservation, ecological importance or geological importance (i.e., effects on integrity, objectives and features). ▪ Potential impacts on protected species. ▪ Proximity and connectivity to and impacts on designated woodlands and other valued habitats. ▪ Proximity and connectivity to and impacts on non-designated biodiversity features including wildlife corridors and connectivity. ▪ Opportunities to deliver positive effects for biodiversity and promote the enhancement of natural capital. ▪ Through tackling climate change, improvements in the quality and quantity of habitats and soils and an increase in the species that depend on them. ▪ Positive impacts on soils.
4. Water, Flood Risk and Resilience: Conserve, protect and enhance water environments, coastal environments, water quality and water resources, whilst adapting to climate change and reducing exposure to flood risks.	▪ Avoid deterioration and enhance the overall, ecological and chemical classification of water bodies and the water environment in accordance with the Water Framework Directive? ▪ Affect the volume of surface water runoff into or abstraction from water bodies including groundwaters? ▪ Minimise the risk of flooding to people, property, infrastructure and environmental assets? ▪ Manage residual flood risks appropriately and avoid new flood risks including by incorporating nature-based solutions? ▪ Seek to minimise new development in proximity to areas shown to be at risk on SEPA's Flood Map or mitigate the potential for such risk? ▪ Support the coastal environment?	▪ Proximity to areas shown to be at risk on SEPA's Flood Map. ▪ Proximity to and impacts on the WFD status of waterbodies and aquifers. ▪ Resilience to flood risk. ▪ Consideration of marine aquatic resources and the coastal environment.

SEA Objectives	Guide Questions: Will the RTS (component)…	Criteria to Assess Candidate Transport Interventions and Schemes
5. Cultural Heritage: Conserve, protect and enhance the historic environment, designated and non-designated cultural assets and promote the Highlands and Islands distinct cultures.	▪ Conserve, protect and enhance the integrity, character and setting of heritage assets? ▪ Preserve important archaeological sites and protect potential unknown archaeological resources? ▪ Promote sustainable access to and interpretation of cultural heritage sites for communities and visitors?	▪ Proximity to and potential effects on designated and non-designated heritage assets, archaeological sites and their settings. ▪ Opportunities to enhance sustainable access to, and enjoyment and understanding of, sites of archaeological and cultural heritage significance.
6. Landscape: Protect and enhance the landscape character, townscape character, seascape character and visual amenity.	▪ Protect and enhance landscape character? ▪ Safeguard important landscape and townscape features? ▪ Protect visual amenity and valued views? ▪ Protect the unique characteristics of the Highlands and Islands? ▪ Maintain and enhance the attractiveness of the public realm and built environment and locally valued landscapes?	▪ Proximity to and impacts on designated landscapes and areas with wild land character. ▪ Changes in landscape, townscape and seascape character from new infrastructure. ▪ Impacts on visual amenity and key views. ▪ Impacts on settlement integration or coalescence and locally valued landscapes and townscape areas.
7. Accessibility and Connectivity: Facilitate appropriate connectivity and affordable access for all to employment, education, facilities and services, and social and leisure opportunities, including tourism.	▪ Improve connectivity to employment, education, personal business and social and leisure opportunities (including tourism) in particular by active travel and public transport? ▪ Improve the accessibility and integration of the transport network, including between islands? ▪ Improve availability and uptake of sustainable transport modes for tourists? ▪ Improve availability and access to transport and travel information (including for tourists)? ▪ Respond to periods of increased travel demand e.g., during holiday periods and special events? ▪ Reduce the need to travel? ▪ Maintain or improve connections between island communities and the wider HITRANS area?	▪ Support the NTS2 sustainable travel hierarchy. ▪ Address the evidenced physical accessibly problems. ▪ Proximity to and impacts on the public transport network. ▪ Proximity to the existing transport network. ▪ Proximity to and impacts on identified congestion pinch points. ▪ Proximity to and impacts on the accessibility of community facilities, public services and key amenities. ▪ Proximity to and impacts on the accessibility of education infrastructure. ▪ Proximity to and impacts on the accessibility of tourist attractions/routes. ▪ Impacts on journey times to mainland Scotland.

SEA Objectives	Guide Questions: Will the RTS (component)…	Criteria to Assess Candidate Transport Interventions and Schemes
	▪ Reduce congestion and allow for greater journey time reliability? ▪ Help reduce severance effects of the transport network? ▪ Help to meet the Climate Change Plan commitment to reduce vehicle kilometres by 20% by 2030? ▪ Maintain or improve access to nature?	Access to nature and areas of green space and open space including in communities.
8. Inclusive Growth: Improve social and economic prosperity for all by enhancing productivity and competitiveness and through reducing socio-economic inequalities.	▪ Support better integration of land-use/spatial planning, transport planning and economic development decisions, including those relating to tourism? ▪ Help to integrate labour and housing markets to meet identified population needs in a sustainable manner? ▪ Support the delivery of existing and emerging spatial strategies at national, regional and local levels? ▪ Support the growth of the population of the Highlands and Islands through both retaining and attracting people to live, work and invest in the region? ▪ Promote the co-location of synergistic economic activities and land uses? ▪ Support efficient, sustainable and affordable freight movement within and to / from the Highlands and Islands? ▪ Support increased and diversified employment opportunities? ▪ Address transport needs resulting from existing and changing demographic socio-economic characteristics? ▪ Support the implementation of relevant equalities duties, as assessed through separate reporting?	▪ Economic development, employment benefits and social value unlocked by the intervention. ▪ Support the creation of safe and attractive public realm. ▪ Contribution to area-based regeneration and socio-economic renewal. ▪ Impacts on transport efficiency including inter-island and mainland journey times. ▪ Impacts on freight movement. ▪ Proximity to and impacts on key employment locations (existing and planned). ▪ Ability to help reduce identified inequalities (as assessed through separate reporting).

SEA Objectives	Guide Questions: Will the RTS (component)…	Criteria to Assess Candidate Transport Interventions and Schemes
9. Human health: Improve the health of the resident and workplace population, including with respect to physical and mental health and social wellbeing.	▪ Facilitate and encourage use of public transport and active travel? ▪ Improve connections to and access to recreational opportunities and facilities? ▪ Reduce the negative impacts of transport on human health, especially in terms of pollution and air quality? ▪ Reduce the likelihood of transport-related road accidents and casualties? ▪ Improve connectivity to healthcare facilities, including e.g., connectivity to on-island facilities in Orkney (Balfour Hospital), Western Isles (Western Isles Hospital) and longer-distance health journeys to access specialist treatment? ▪ Safeguard sensitive environmental receptors to maintain and enhance human health?	▪ Proximity to and impacts on access to healthcare facilities, including through long distance travel. ▪ Proximity to and impacts on active travel networks. ▪ Levels of active travel. ▪ Health outcomes and determinants. ▪ Proximity to impacts on open space. ▪ Contribution of biodiversity and the natural environment (access to them) in people's health. ▪ Consideration of post COVID-19 issues for transport and working/ living patterns.
10. Material Assets: Manage, maintain and where possible improve the efficient and effective use of natural resources, ecosystem services, land and infrastructure to meet identified needs.	▪ Unlock the delivery of housing to meet identified needs? ▪ Prioritise the re-development of previously developed (brownfield) land? ▪ Support the provision of adequate infrastructure, services and facilities to meet identified needs? ▪ Improve movement of people, goods and services within, out of and into the Highlands and Islands? ▪ Support the large seasonal influx of overnight tourists, day trippers and cruise passengers? ▪ Promote efficient resource and materials use consistent with the objectives of a circular economy?	▪ Alignment with or ability to support land-use/spatial planning and economic development decisions. ▪ Proximity to and impacts on the delivery of major development allocations and committed developments. ▪ Facilitate the redevelopment of previously developed (brownfield) land. ▪ Proximity to and impacts on vacant and derelict land (VDL). ▪ Impacts on best and more versatile agricultural land and important grazing land ▪ Impacts on marine-based assets / fisheries. ▪ Impacts on natural resources, including the extraction of mineral resources. ▪ Impacts on ecosystem services. ▪ Improve the connectivity of the islands to the mainland of Scotland or the main destination within that island archipelago.

Appendix D Environmental Appraisal of RTS Policies

D.1 Introduction

This appendix supports Section 5.3 of the Environmental Report and presents the findings of the environmental and climate appraisals of each individual Policy. The significance criteria for assessing the environmental effects are:

Score	Description	Symbol
Significant (Major) Positive Effect	The proposed policy contributes significantly to the achievement of the SEA Objective	++
Minor Positive Effect	The proposed policy contributes to the achievement of the SEA Objective but not significantly	+
Neutral Effect	The proposed policy is related to but does not have any effect on the achievement of the SEA Objective	0
Minor Negative Effect	The proposed policy detracts from the achievement of the SEA Objective but not significantly	-
Significant (Major) Negative Effect	The proposed policy detracts significantly from the achievement of the SEA Objective. Mitigation is therefore required	--
Uncertain Effect	The proposed policy has an uncertain relationship to the SEA Objective or the relationship would be dependent on the way in which the aspect is managed	?
No Clear Relationship	There is no clear relationship between the proposed policy and the achievement of the SEA Objective, or the relationship is negligible	~

RTS Theme and Policies	SEA Objective									
	Climate	Air	Biodiversity	Water	Heritage	Landscape	Access	Growth	Health	Materials
Strategy Theme 1: Transforming our communities and reducing the impact of transport upon them.										
1. **ST1a:** The RTS supports the principle of reallocating road space, including parking, from general traffic. This should support placemaking to shape improved walking, wheeling and cycling opportunities in our communities as a means to promote safe active travel and encourage use of active travel modes. Reallocation of road space should avoid any negative impacts on bus services.	+	+	+?	+?	+?	+?	++	-?	++	+
2. **ST1b**: Where traffic in settlements is reduced by investment in road infrastructure, road space reallocation should be undertaken as an integral component of that investment.	+	+	0	0	0	0	++	-?	++	+
3. **ST1c**: The RTS supports the principle of traffic calming and speed limit reductions and enforcement where this is the wish of our communities, including on the Trunk Road network.	-?	-?	0	0	0	-?	++	-?	++?	-?
4. **ST1d:** The RTS supports measures to reduce road-based severance in our communities	+	+	0	0	0	0	++	+	+	+
5. **ST1e:** The RTS recognises the challenges presented by the impacts of increasing abnormal load movements across the region. It calls for a coordinated approach to be taken to ensure that appropriate planning and mitigation is put in place as part of the planning process for new developments that will generate such movements.	+	+	0	0	0	0	++	+	+	+
6. **ST1f:** The RTS supports greater consistency (in 'like-for-like' locations) of parking management across our region, including payment mechanisms, parking information and enforcement.	+	+	0	0	0	0	++	+	+	+
7. **ST1g:** The RTS supports the principle of improving the management and enforcement of traffic and parking around schools, including *School Streets* (a road outside a school with temporary restriction on motorised traffic at school drop-off and pick-up times).	+	+	0	0	0	0	++	+	+	+

RTS Theme and Policies	SEA Objective									
	Climate	Air	Biodiversity	Water	Heritage	Landscape	Access	Growth	Health	Materials
8. **ST1h:** The RTS supports the prioritisation of new development in locations that are in proximity to key services and already well-served by active travel and public transport.	++	++	0	0	0	0	++	+	++	++
9. **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.	++	++	0	0	0	0	++	+	++	++
10. **ST1j:** The RTS supports the integration of active travel, public transport and shared mobility into the planning of all new developments. New development proposals should be required to outline how they will connect into the local active travel and public transport networks.	++	++	+	0	0	0	++	+	++	++
11. **ST1k**: The RTS supports the concept of 'infrastructure first' in relation to major developments across our region.	++	++	0	0	0	0	++	+	++	++
12. **ST1l:** The RTS recognises the centrality of environmental considerations, particularly biodiversity enhancements and nature networks, within the planning and decision-making process.	++	++	+	+	+	+	0	0	++	0
Overall assessment	**++**	**++**	**+**	**+**	**+**	**+**	**++**	**+**	**++**	**++**
Strategy Theme 2: Connecting our communities										
13. **ST2a:** The RTS supports transformational investment in the improvement of our existing active travel networks to make these accessible to all.	+	+	+	0	0	0	++	0	++	+
14. **ST2b:**The RTS supports the reinstatement and expansion of a network of strategic and local traffic free / quiet walking, wheeling and cycling routes to connect communities across and beyond our region.	+?	+?	-	-	-	-	++	+	++	+
15. **ST2c:**The RTS supports the expansion of the National Cycle Network to all parts of the region.	+?	+?	–?	-	-	-	++	+	++	+
16. **ST2d:**Our active travel infrastructure should be designed to a high standard in accordance with the most up-to-date best practice and	+	+	0	0	0	0	++	+	++	+

RTS Theme and Policies	SEA Objective									
	Climate	Air	Biodiversity	Water	Heritage	Landscape	Access	Growth	Health	Materials
regionally appropriate design standards (as this evolves) to meet the needs of all users.										
17. **ST2e:**The RTS supports the integration of active travel and public transport connections within our communities.	++	++	0	0	0	0	++	+	++	+
18. **ST2f:**The RTS promotes the adoption of measures outlined in the *Sustainable Travel to Stations Strategy* with respect to access to railway stations.	+	+	0	0	0	0	+	+	+	+
19. **ST2g:**The RTS seeks the implementation of initiatives which widen access to bicycles and e-bicycles, including e.g., promoting ownership, expansion of bicycle share and hire and provision of new 'first mile, last mile' cycling opportunities.	+	+	0	0	0	0	++	++	++	+
20. **ST2h:**The RTS supports the upgrade and new provision of bicycle parking and facilities at all public buildings, transport interchanges and key on-street locations within the region	+	+	0	0	0	0	++	+	++	+
21. **ST2i:**Our active travel network should be developed, presented and promoted in a more coherent, recognisable and integrated way for regular, occasional and new users of the network, including visitors	+	+	+	0	0	0	++	++	++	+
Overall assessment	**+**	**+**	**--?** **+**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**++**	**+**	**++**	**+**
Strategy Theme 3: Enhancing public transport connectivity to / from: (i) Inverness; (ii) our sub-regional centres; and (iii) Scotland's other cities and beyond.										
22. **ST3a:** The RTS supports measures to reduce social exclusion for those without access to a car	0	0	0	0	0	0	+	+	+	0
23. **ST3b:**The RTS recognises that the decline in bus passenger numbers in the region needs to be reversed and supports measures to extend service coverage, improve frequencies, lengthen the operating day and make the network more integrated.	+?	+?	0	0	0	0	++	++	++	+

RTS Theme and Policies	SEA Objective									
	Climate	Air	Biodiversity	Water	Heritage	Landscape	Access	Growth	Health	Materials
24. **ST3c:** The RTS supports measures to reduce bus journey times both between and within settlements in the region, including through the provision of bus priority measures.	+?	+?	0	0	0	0	++	+	+	+
25. **ST3d:** The RTS supports innovative alternatives to fixed route bus services where these can be affordably provided.	+?	+?	0	0	0	0	++	+	+	+
26. **ST3e:** The RTS recognises the role which community transport and Demand Responsive Transport (DRT) plays in our most rural communities and supports its expansion and integration with timetabled services.	+?	+?	0	0	0	0	++	+	+	+
27. **ST3f:** The RTS supports measures to widen the awareness and use of community transport, DRT and EDRT amongst all members of society.	+?	+?	0	0	0	0	++	+	+	+
28. **ST3g:** The RTS recognises the role of taxis as a key element of transport provision in the region where community transport, DRT and EDRT services are not provided.	-	-	0	0	0	0	+	+	++	-
29. **ST3h:** The RTS recognises that rail journey times to, from and within the region are typically longer than elsewhere in Scotland, and therefore supports measures to reduce these journey times.	++	++	0	0	0	0	++	++	+	+
30. **ST3i:** The RTS supports the commitment to electrify the Highland Mainline as an opportunity to reduce rail journey times and improve reliability as part of the overall decarbonisation of the network	++	++	0	0	0	0	++	++	+	+
31. **ST3j:** The RTS recognises that very low rail service frequency often makes rail uncompetitive with the car and therefore supports measures which would facilitate increased rail service frequency, particularly between Inverness and Aberdeen, Edinburgh and Glasgow.	++	++	0	0	0	0	++	++	+	+
32. **ST3k:** The RTS promotes and supports the development of additional local rail services focused on our regional centres.	++	++	0	0	0	0	++	++	+	+
33. **ST3l:** The RTS supports infrastructure measures which would enable increased service frequency, such as the electrification of the Highland	++	++	0	0	0	0	++	++	+	+

RTS Theme and Policies	SEA Objective									
	Climate	Air	Biodiversity	Water	Heritage	Landscape	Access	Growth	Health	Materials
Mainline, Aberdeen - Inverness and improvements to the signalling system.										
34. **ST3m:**The RTS supports the planning and delivery of new railway stations, including innovative solutions proportionate to the location, subject to the development of an appropriate business case.	+?	+?	-	-	-	-	++	+	+	+
Overall assessment	**+**	**+**	**-?**	**-?**	**-?**	**-?**	**++**	**++**	**+**	**+**
Strategy Theme 4: Improving the integration, quality of and access to public and shared transport.										
35. **ST4a:**The RTS supports measures that will improve integration within and between modes of transport at key locations and transport interchanges in order to provide new travel options and alternatives to the private car, recognising the constraints within which this is possible (e.g., delivering school bus services).	+	+	0	0	0	0	++	+	+	+
36. **ST4b:**The RTS supports integrated ticketing measures to simplify travel and improve the passenger experience.	+	+	0	0	0	0	++	+	+	+
37. **ST4c:** The RTS supports the adoption of contract conditions for tendered and supported services that encourage operators to work in partnership to improve integration, timetable planning and coordination.	+	+	0	0	0	0	++	+	+	+
38. **ST4d:**The RTS supports the provision and enhancement of mobility hubs across the region, in line with a hierarchy reflecting local requirements.	++	++	0	0	0	0	++	++	++	++
39. **ST4e:**The RTS supports measures which will enable people to leave their bicycle in a secure environment at a bus stop / station, railway station, ferry terminal or airfield.	+	+	0	0	0	0	+	+	+	+
40. **ST4f:**The RTS supports, where practical, the provision of increased bicycle capacity on public transport services within the region	+	+	0	0	0	0	+	+	+	+
41. **ST4g:**The RTS supports the simplification of the process of taking a bicycle both to and onto a bus or train.	+	+	0	0	0	0	+	+	+	+

RTS Theme and Policies	SEA Objective									
	Climate	Air	Biodiversity	Water	Heritage	Landscape	Access	Growth	Health	Materials
42. **ST4h:**The RTS supports more widespread journeys which combine bicycle and public transport	+	+	0	0	0	0	+	+	+	+
43. **ST4i:**The RTS supports the provision of consistent standards of facilities at bus stations and bus stops reflecting location and usage.	0	0	0	0	0	0	+	+	+	0
44. **ST4j:**Our bus network should be safe secure and fully accessible to all.	0	0	0	0	0	0	+	+	+	0
45. **ST4k:**Our bus network should provide a high-quality and consistent onboard experience.	0	0	0	0	0	0	+	+	+	0
46. **ST4l:**Travel on buses to, from and within the region should, where possible, enable meaningful working time	0	0	0	0	0	0	+	+	+	0
47. **ST4m:**The RTS supports the provision of more consistent standards of facilities at railway stations, reflecting station usage.	0	0	0	0	0	0	+	+	+	0
48. **ST4n:**Our railway network should be safe, secure and fully accessible to all.	0	0	0	0	0	0	+	+	+	0
49. **ST4o:**The RTS supports the continuation and expansion of the *Scotland's Railway* Adoption Programme and other measures to enhance the station environment.	0	0	0	0	0	0	+	+	+	0
50. **ST4p:**Our ferry network should be safe, secure and fully and easily access to all. This includes both shore-to-vessel access and movement around the vessel itself	0	0	0	0	0	0	+	+	+	0
51. **ST4q:**The RTS recognises that there is not a short-term solution to the accessibility issues with the Argyll and Bute and Orkney inter-island air services. We will keep abreast of developments in technology and new aircraft types and, in the meantime, continue to work with partners to support alternative options such as the Scottish Ambulance Service.	0	0	0	0	0	0	+	+	+	0
52. **ST4r:**The RTS supports sufficient provision and better enforcement of Blue Badge parking across the region.	0	0	0	0	0	0	+	+	+	0
53. **ST4s:**The RTS recognises the important role of taxis as part of the overall transport mix in the region. It supports partnership working	-	-	0	0	0	0	+	+	+	-

RTS Theme and Policies	SEA Objective									
	Climate	Air	Biodiversity	Water	Heritage	Landscape	Access	Growth	Health	Materials
with licencing authorities and taxi providers to raise standards of provision where required and to facilitate the expansion of the network										
54. **ST4t:**The RTS supports the provision of taxi services which are fully accessible in terms of booking and vehicle access.	-	-	0	0	0	0	+	+	+	-
55. **ST4u:**A key component of making travel accessible to all, the RTS supports measures to remove barriers to travel, including increased staff training, passenger chaperones and the provision of physical and online travel information in accessible formats.	+	+	0	0	0	0	+	+	+	+
56. **ST4v:**The RTS supports the maintenance and expansion of at-stop / at-station multi-modal real-time information.	+	+	0	0	0	0	+	+	+	+
57. **ST4w:**The RTS promotes the simplification and consolidation of travel planning and in-journey information to make travel easier for less frequent users.	+	+	0	0	0	0	+	+	+	+
58. **ST4x:**The RTS supports the further development of the GO-HI travel app.	0	0	0	0	0	0	+	+	+	0
59. **ST4y:**The RTS supports the provision of up-to-date physical travel information at bus stops, and the removal of out-of-date information.	0	0	0	0	0	0	+	0	+	0
60. **ST4z:**The RTS Calls for improved cross-provider digital connectivity across the region to facilitate access to travel information for all (including in-car information), enable meaningful working time when travelling by public transport and to help reduce the need to travel where possible.	0	0	0	0	0	0	++	+	+	0
Overall assessment	**+**	**+**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**+**	**+**	**+**	**+**
RTS Theme 5 Enhancing our external connections and supply chain										
61. **ST5a**: The RTS supports the provision of longer daily time on-mainland and on-island where this is required for the long-term sustainability of a community.	-	-	0	0	0	0	+	++	-	-
62. **ST5b**:The RTS supports the provision of services which minimise the requirement for one or more overnight stays.	-	-	0	0	0	0	+	++	-	-

RTS Theme and Policies	SEA Objective									
	Climate	Air	Biodiversity	Water	Heritage	Landscape	Access	Growth	Health	Materials
63. **ST5c**:Where practicable, the RTS supports the operation of additional sailings on the supported ferry networks within the region.	-	-	0	0	0	0	+	++	-	-
64. **ST5d**:The RTS supports year-round seven-day connections for island and peninsular communities where this is required for the long-term sustainability of a community and enjoys public support.	-	-	0	0	0	0	+	++	-	-
65. **ST5e**:The booking and ticketing arrangements for ferry services in the region should support the convenience and efficiency of travel for all.	0	0	0	0	0	0	+	0	0	0
66. **ST5f**:The RTS calls for the earlier opening of ferry booking systems and increased transparency around the release and management of vehicle deck space.	0	0	0	0	0	0	+	0	0	0
67. **ST5g**: he RTS supports the principle of Road Equivalent Tariff (RET). However, where service frequency permits, controlled use of peak times / surge pricing could be used to help manage demand, recognising that this would need to be at no net detriment to the connectivity of island and peninsular communities.	0	0	0	0	0	0	+?	+	0	0
68. **ST5h**:The RTS supports operational measures which maximise the efficient management of vehicle deck space on sailings	+	+	0	0	0	0	+	+	+	+
69. **ST5i**:The RTS supports measures to improve door-to-door journeys through enhancing active travel, public transport and shared mobility connections to and from ferry terminals, combined with other measures to reduce the need to take a car onboard.	+	+	0	0	0	0	+	+	+	+
70. **ST5j**: The RTS recognises the long-term underfunding of vessels and infrastructure in the region and strongly calls for fleet and infrastructure modernisation to address issues of reliability and resilience.	++?	++?	0	0	0	0	++	++	++	++

RTS Theme and Policies	SEA Objective									
	Climate	Air	Biodiversity	Water	Heritage	Landscape	Access	Growth	Health	Materials
71. **ST5k**:The RTS calls for the development of a regularly maintained *Vessels and Infrastructure Planning Pipeline* across all publicly supported ferry networks in Scotland.	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
72. **ST5l**:The RTS supports an increase in the overall fleet size and the inter-operability of that fleet and supporting infrastructure to strengthen resilience	-	-	0	0	0	0	+	++	-	-
73. **ST5m**:The RTS supports the principle of increasing capacity through frequency rather than larger vessels.	-	-	0	0	0	0	+	++	-	-
74. **ST5n**:The RTS calls for an objective consideration of the design characteristics of future vessels for all routes, including hull form and the provision of crew accommodation.	+	+	0	0	0	0	+	+	+	0
75. **ST5o**:The RTS supports the introduction of new low or zero emissions vessels to replace life-expired tonnage. This should be done in line with the NTS2 *Sustainable Investment Hierarchy*.	++?	++?	0	0	0	0	++	++	++	++
76. **ST5p:** With the vessel and infrastructure replacement cycle, the RTS supports measures to reduce journey times for our island communities. This includes providing direct sailings rather than via another island (where this is the preference of the local community) and consideration of new ferry terminal locations that reduce crossing distances.	-	-	-	-	-	-	+	++	+	-
77. **ST5q:** The RTS supports harbour infrastructure improvements ahead of life expiry where this could contribute to a material improvement in reliability	-	-	-	-	-	-	+	+	+	+
78. **ST5r:** The RTS supports the conversion of the remaining Lo-Lo routes in the region to Ro-Ro where there is community support.	0	0	0	0	0	0	++	++	++	-

RTS Theme and Policies	SEA Objective									
	Climate	Air	Biodiversity	Water	Heritage	Landscape	Access	Growth	Health	Materials
79. **ST5s:** The RTS supports the further development of the Highlands and Islands' air network.	--	--	0	0	0	0	+	++	+	--
80. **ST5t:** The RTS supports the further development of commercial external routes, particularly to London Heathrow and other international hub airports, that support the economic competitiveness of the region.	--	--	0	0	0	0	+	++	+	--
81. **ST5u:** The RTS supports the retention of the PSO air network within the region and, where alternative travel choices are inadequate, its further expansion. 'Adequate' in this context refers to the ability to achieve an affordable daily return to / from a national centre.	-	-	0	0	0	0	+	++	+	-
82. **ST5v:** The RTS supports the operation of additional connections and flights on the PSO air networks within the region, whether delivered by existing, additional or new aircraft.	-	-	0	0	0	0	+	++	+	-
83. **ST5w:** The RTS supports more direct flights rather than via another island.	-	-	0	0	0	0	+	++	+	-
84. **ST5x:** The RTS supports the adoption of technological and infrastructure solutions which would improve the reliability and frequency of inter-island air services.	-	-	0	0	0	0	0	+	0	-
85. **ST5y:** The RTS supports the principle of fixed links where they represent value for money and are supported by the island or peninsular community. Any fixed link should be implemented in conjunction with improved public transport connectivity and incorporate provision for active travel.	-?	-?	--?	--?	-?	-?	++	++	+	--?
86. **ST5z:** The RTS supports the consideration of tolling where this would assist in making the case for a fixed link. The use of vehicle number	0	0	0	0	0	0	+	+	0	0

RTS Theme and Policies	SEA Objective									
	Climate	Air	Biodiversity	Water	Heritage	Landscape	Access	Growth	Health	Materials
plate recognition technology could allow local residents to travel for free.										
Overall assessment	-?	-?	--?	--?	-?	-?	+	++	+	-
Strategy Theme 6: Improving the efficiency of transport networks and supply-chains and reducing their impact on our communities.										
87. **ST6a**: The RTS supports the principle of new dedicated or high-capacity freight vessels on freight intensive routes.	-	-	0	0	0	0	0	++	-	-
88. **ST6b**: The RTS supports the formalisation and extension of the carriage of unaccompanied trailers to a wider range of routes.	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	+	+	0
89. **ST6c**: The RTS supports the operation of dedicated freight sailings, either by contracted or commercial operators where there is demand and it is operationally deliverable.	-	-	0	0	0	0	0	++	-	-
90. **ST6d**: The RTS supports moves towards greater simplification and consistency in the setting of ferry freight fares across the region, recognising that this would be achieved over the medium-term.	-	-	0	0	0	0	0	++	-	-
91. **ST6e**: The RTS supports infrastructure measures which will enable the growth of rail freight to and from the region.	++	++	-?	-?	-?	-?	+	++	++	++
92. **ST6f**: The RTS supports infrastructure investment and funding initiative which will enable the growth of waterborne freight to, from and within the region.	++	++	0	0	0	0	+	++	++	++
Overall assessment	**- to ++**	**- to ++**	**-?**	**-?**	**-?**	**-?**	**+**	**++**	**- to ++**	**- to ++**
Strategy Theme 7: Improving the safety, reliability and resilience of our road and rail networks										
93. **ST7a**: The RTS restates our support for the full dualling of the A9 and A96, with early prioritisation of the Elgin and Keith bypasses to dual carriageway standards, following the already committed Inverness to Wester Hardmuir scheme.	--	--	-	-	-	-	+	++	-	-

RTS Theme and Policies	SEA Objective									
	Climate	Air	Biodiversity	Water	Heritage	Landscape	Access	Growth	Health	Materials
94. **ST7b**: The RTS calls for incremental improvements to our road network where there are safety, efficiency and environmental benefits, including in relation to single track roads.	--	--	-	-	-	-	+	++	-	-
95. **ST7c**: The RTS supports the expansion of 50mph HGV speed limits across the Trunk Road network in the region	-	-	0	0	0	0	+	+	-	0
96. **ST7d**: The RTS supports the provision of improved overtaking opportunities on our roads, especially where there are known problems with vehicle platooning which can cause driver frustration.	0	0	0	0	0	0	+	+	+	0
97. **ST7e**: The RTS calls for investment in our regional road network where there are regular and sustained periods of disruption due to weather and / or geological instability.	+	-	-	-	-	-	++	++	+	-
98. **ST7f**: The RTS recognises the increasing vulnerability of our region's road network to severe weather events linked to climate change and supports capital and revenue measures to mitigate this.	+	-	-	-	-	-	++	++	+	-
99. **ST7g**: The RTS recognises the increasing vulnerability of the railway network to severe weather events linked to climate change and supports capital and revenue measures to mitigate this.	+	0	0	0	0	0	+	+	++	0
100. **ST7h**: The RTS supports the continued provision and expansion of real-time travel information for motorists and public transport users through existing and emerging platforms.	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	+	+	0
101. **ST7i**: The RTS recognises that many parts of our region's road network are in poor condition. It calls for enhanced preventative and remedial road maintenance to ensure the safe, reliable and efficient movement of people and goods and the delivery of services across our region.	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	+	+	0
102. **ST7j**: Investment in our road network should continue to have an overarching focus on safety with a view to reducing road traffic casualties in accordance with Scotland's Road Safety Framework to 2030.	-	-	-	-	-	-	++	++	++	-

RTS Theme and Policies	SEA Objective									
	Climate	Air	Biodiversity	Water	Heritage	Landscape	Access	Growth	Health	Materials
103. **ST7k**: To address risks which are particular to roads in our region, the RTS supports: enhanced advisory signage; ongoing public information campaigns around the use of single-track roads; provision of additional safe motorist services and HGV rest areas; and information campaigns for visitors driving left-hand drive vehicles.	-	-	-	-	-	-	++	++	++	-
104. **ST7l**: The RTS specifically supports the improvement or removal of priority junctions on higher speed trunk roads, especially for right-turning traffic.	0	0	0	0	0	0	++	++	++	0
105. **ST7m**: The RTS calls for increased provision of level boarding at stations across the region, which will reduce station dwell times.	0	0	0	0	0	0	+	++	0	0
106. **S17n**: The RTS supports the provision of additional sections of double track (or static or dynamic passing loops where double track does not represent value for money) to improve punctuality.	0	0	0	0	0	0	+	++	0	0
107. **ST7o**: The RTS supports infrastructure and timetable improvements external to the region which will improve the reliability of services to / from Inverness, Fort William, Oban and Mallaig.	0	0	0	0	0	0	+	++	0	0
Overall assessment	**-**	**-**	**-**	**-**	**-**	**-**	**+**	**++**	**++**	**-**
Strategy Theme 8: Facilitating sustainable visitor travel demand										
108. **ST8a**: The RTS supports the further development of long-distance walking, wheeling and cycling routes (including the National Cycle Network), recognising the visitor, economic and local benefits offered.	+	+	--?	-?	+?	+?	+	++	+	+
109. **ST8b**: The RTS supports the development of active travel connections to our ports, airports and regionally important railway stations.	+	+	--?	0	0	0	+	++	+	+
110. **ST8c**: The RTS supports the development of active travel connections to our key tourism destinations where this would be a realistic option for some visitors.	+	+	--?	0	-?	0	+	++	+	+
111. **ST8d**: Where there are concentrations of international tourists, including cruise passengers, the RTS supports the provision of	0	0	0	0	0	0	+	+	+	0

RTS Theme and Policies	SEA Objective									
	Climate	Air	Biodiversity	Water	Heritage	Landscape	Access	Growth	Health	Materials
enhanced local travel information and coordination to improve visitor experience and reduce impacts on local networks.										
112. **ST8e**: The RTS supports the operation and promotion of additional local rail services to key tourism destinations.	+	+	0	0	0	0	+	++	+	+
113. **ST8f**: The RTS supports the provision of additional rail carriages on existing services in peak season, where feasible.	+	+	0	0	0	0	+	++	+	+
114. **ST8g**: The RTS supports the principle of flexible timetabling where this can co-exist with regular services for local residents.	+	+	0	0	0	0	+	++	+	+
115. **ST8h**: The RTS supports the principle of expanded open access rail services where these can be accommodated at no disadvantage to scheduled services.	+	+	0	0	0	0	+	++	+	+
116. **ST8i**: The RTS supports the principle of sustainably accommodating visitor demand whilst maintaining or increasing visitor numbers.	-?	-?	0	0	0	0	+	++	+?	-?
117. **ST8j**: The RTS supports the introduction of additional parking restrictions and greater enforcement of existing traffic orders at tourist honeypots as a tool to encourage improved access to these locations by public transport or active modes and to address indiscriminate and dangerous parking.	-?	-?	0	0	0	0	+	++	+?	-?
118. **ST8k**: Where new or increased parking charges are introduced, this should be done in combination with improved visitor facilities, including e.g., parking provision, public toilets etc.	-?	-?	0	0	0	0	+	++	+?	-?
119. **ST8l**: Whilst recognising the benefits of motorhome and campervan-based tourism in our region, the RTS acknowledges that it can impact negatively on our communities at certain times of the year. The RTS therefore supports measures to ensure that this demand is sustainably accommodated.	+?	+?	0	0	0	0	+	++	+?	+?
120. **ST8m**: Whilst recognising the benefits of cruise tourism in our region, the RTS recognises that catering for this demand can negatively	+?	+?	0	0	0	0	+	++	+?	+?

RTS Theme and Policies	SEA Objective									
	Climate	Air	Biodiversity	Water	Heritage	Landscape	Access	Growth	Health	Materials
impact on our communities. The RTS therefore supports measures to ensure that this demand is more sustainably accommodated.										
121. **ST8n**: The RTS supports measures which would allow the benefits of cruise tourism to be more evenly distributed around the region.	+?	+?	0	0	0	0	+	++	+?	+?
122. **ST8o**: The RTS supports the principle of bespoke bus services aimed at tourists to address excessive car-based demand at honeypot locations.	+	+	0	0	0	0	+	++	+?	+
123. **ST8p:** The RTS recognises that high volumes of tourist traffic are impacting the condition of some roads in our region and that increased central government funding is required that reflects this increased pressure on local transport infrastructure to support enhanced repair and maintenance programme.	-?	-?	-?	-?	-?	-?	0	++	++	-?
124. **ST8q**: The RTS recognises that high volumes of tourist traffic can lead to slow and inefficient journeys and therefore supports measures to address this.	-?	-?	-?	-?	-?	-?	0	++	++	-?
Overall assessment	**-?**	**-?**	**-?**	**-?**	**-?**	**-?**	**+**	**++**	**+**	**-?**
	+?	**+?**								**+**
Strategy Theme 9: Decarbonising our transport, mitigating the effects of climate change										
125. **ST9a**: The RTS supports the implementation of measures which facilitate the decarbonisation of the public transport vehicle fleet within the region, including commercial vehicles, buses and community transport, rail rolling stock, aircraft and ferries.	++	++	0	0	0	0	++	+?	++	++
126. **ST9b**: The RTS recognises the opportunities brought about by the availability of renewable energy in our region, including locally	++?	++?	-?	-?	-?	-?	++	+?	++	++

RTS Theme and Policies	SEA Objective									
	Climate	Air	Biodiversity	Water	Heritage	Landscape	Access	Growth	Health	Materials
produced green hydrogen. The transport fleet mix and associated infrastructure should reflect this.										
127. **ST9c**: The RTS supports the development of vehicle pooling and vehicle sharing services across the region to reduce the need for personal car ownership.	+	+	0	0	0	0	+?	+	+	+
128. **ST9d**: The RTS calls for the expansion of BEV charging infrastructure to support the decarbonisation of all vehicle based travel in our region.	++?	++?	-?	-?	-?	-?	++	+?	++	++
129. **ST9e**: The RTS recognises the challenges of distance, topography, climate and short winter daylight hours to the rollout of battery electric powered commercial vehicles and seeks low or zero emission solutions appropriate to our region, and which capitalise on the surplus energy production within our region.	++	++	0	0	0	0	0	+	++	++
130. **ST9f**: The RTS supports the roll-out of other alternative fuels to promote the decarbonisation of our transport networks, ports, ferry terminals, airports and airfields	++	++	0	0	0	0	+	+	++	++
Overall assessment	**++**	**++**	**-?**	**-?**	**-?**	**-?**	**++**	**+**	**++**	**++**
Strategy Theme 10: Embracing new technologies.										
131. **ST10a**: The RTS embraces the opportunities provided by new technologies to improve the provision of transport infrastructure and services across the region.	+	+	0	0	0	0	+	+	+	+

RTS Theme and Policies	SEA Objective									
	Climate	Air	Biodiversity	Water	Heritage	Landscape	Access	Growth	Health	Materials
132. **ST10b**: The RTS supports consideration of the provision of future innovative personal transport within the design of our active travel network and mobility hubs.	+	+	0	0	0	0	+	+	+	+
133. **ST10c**: The RTS supports the principle and further development of Mobility-as-a-Service as the technology evolves, particularly through our Go-HI app.	+	+	0	0	0	0	+?	0	+	+
134. **ST10d:** The RTS supports opportunities for the more widespread adoption of Connected and Autonomous Vehicles and autonomous buses, whilst recognising the challenges posed in our region.	+?	+?	0	0	0	0	+	+?	++	+
Overall assessment	**+**	**+**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**+**	**+**	**+**	**+**
Strategy Theme 11: Reducing the cost of travel, particularly for those most in need.										
135. **ST11a:** Transport poverty is a complex, dispersed and often hidden problem in our region. The RTS commits to define and evidence this problem and identify appropriate actions to be delivered by HITRANS and our partners.	+	+	0	0	0	0	++	+	+	+
136. **ST11b:** Recognising that, for many in our region (and especially those living in our island communities), transport costs account for a high proportion of household income, the RTS supports a reduction in public transport fares and the introduction of payment plans for multi-journey tickets.	+	+	0	0	0	0	++	+	+	+
137. ST11c: The comparative costs of public transport mean that residents and visitors to the region often choose to travel by car. The	+	+	0	0	0	0	++	+	+	+

RTS Theme and Policies	SEA Objective									
	Climate	Air	Biodiversity	Water	Heritage	Landscape	Access	Growth	Health	Materials
RTS therefore supports a reduction in the cost differential between travelling by public transport and car										
138. **ST11d:** The RTS supports in principle the roll-out of Road Equivalent Tariff to any ferry routes on which it does not currently apply, including local authority services.	+	+	0	0	0	0	+	+	+	+
139. **ST11e:** The RTS calls for greater cross-industry partnership working and regulatory reform to reduce the cost penalty for interchange within or between modes of transport.	+	+	0	0	0	0	++	+	+	+
140. **ST11f**: The RTS calls for the extension of the National Concessionary Travel Scheme and Under-22s Concessionary Travel Scheme to rail, ferry and air services where these are the main or only mode of public transport in an area.	+	+	0	0	0	0	++	+	+	+
141. **ST11g:** The RTS calls for the retention and expansion of the Air Discount Scheme, including to businesses in the region.	0	0	0	0	0	0	++	+	+	**0**
142. **ST11h:** National road pricing proposals may emerge in response to the reduction in fuel duty and Value Added Tax as a result of the mass adoption of electric vehicles. If this eventuality materialises, the RTS calls for a road pricing system that recognises the unique characteristics of our region	+	+	0	0	0	0	0	+	+	+
Overall assessment	**+**	**+**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**++**	**+**	**+**	**+**

Appendix E Review of SEA Consultation Responses

Table E-1 Summary of SEA Scoping Consultation Responses

SEA Consultation Authority	Comment	Response
Scottish Environment Protection Agency (28 July 2022)	<u>Relationship with other Plans, Policies and Strategies (PPS)</u> Note that an update Cleaner Air for Scotland Strategy was published in 2021. The Action Plan for Inverness City Centre Air Quality Management Area and the proposed Inner Moray Firth Local Development Plan (which includes a transport policy) are additional regional relevant PPS for consideration. Some of the PPS included in the report have themselves been subject to SEA. Where this is the case you may find it useful to prepare a summary of the key SEA findings that may be relevant to the Strategy.	Noted. Those Plans have been included in the SEA report.
	<u>Baseline Information</u> SEPA holds significant amounts of environmental data which may be of interest to you in preparing the environmental baseline, identifying environmental problems, and summarizing the likely changes to the environment in the absence of the PPS, all of which are required for the assessment. Many of these data are now readily available on SEPA's website. Additional local information may also be available from our Access to Information unit (foi@sepa.org.uk). Other sources of data for issues that fall within SEPA's remit are referenced in our SEA topic guidance notes for air, soil, water, material assets and human health.	Noted. Baseline information would be requested if necessary.
	<u>Environmental Problems</u>	

SEA Consultation Authority	Comment	Response
	We consider that the environmental problems described generally highlight the main issues of relevance for the SEA topics within our remit.	Noted.
	<u>Assessment</u> We agree that in this instance all environmental topics should be scoped into the assessment. We are generally content with the proposed SEA objectives in relation to our interests. We support the air quality objective "To maintain and improve …" and presume that Table 4.2 simply includes an early iteration of the objective. We do however query whether objective 8 is required as both population and material assets are already covered by other objectives and the overall assessment may be better balanced without it. The use of guiding questions to help assess the SEA objectives looks a useful approach. We suggest that for SEA objective 4 the first proposed criterion for flood risk relates to proximity to areas shown to be at risk on SEPA's Flood Map (rather than Flood Risk Zones). We understand that the proposal is to integrate the STAG and SEA criteria to carry out a single assessment; this seems a sensible approach. We are content for the approach to be taken to the vision and strategic objectives as being an assessment of compatibility with the SEA objectives. We are also content that policy options, polices and proposed site-specific interventions and schemes will be assessed using a different matrix where significance is considered. When it comes to setting out the results of the assessment in the Environmental Report, please provide enough information to clearly justify the reasons for each of the assessments presented. It would also be helpful to set	Noted. Noted, the SEA objectives are subject to further review through the consultation process. The necessity of Objective 8 is subject to further review however is considered to remain relevant covering the more economic issues. Noted, the refence has been updated to SEPA's Flood Map. Noted. Noted, sufficient information has been included to clearly justify the reasons for each of the assessments presented. Assumptions have been set out alongside difficulties and limitations encountered where appropriate. Noted, policies/elements of the RTS have been considered individually as suggested (however

SEA Consultation Authority	Comment	Response
	out assumptions that are made during the assessment and difficulties and limitations encountered. We suggested that to get the most out of the SEA process it may be better to consider policies (and other elements) individually rather than in groups as this provides an opportunity to improve individual components, which can be lost if a grouped assessment is carried out. We would also encourage you to use the assessment as a way to improve the environmental performance of these individual aspects of the strategy with making amendments to the individual element (for example changing the wording of a policy) often being the best way to achieve this.	they may be grouped together within the main report for the purposes of concise reporting). Noted, the SEA team has been feeding back comments on the RTS throughout its development.
	<u>Alternatives</u> Our understanding of the information provided is that there is no alternative to updating the strategy and that assessment of alternatives will concentrate on the different vision components, aims, policies or projects that were considered as part of the strategy-making process. If this is the case then we welcome this approach as it can really help inform decision making regarding what elements to include within the final strategy or what overall direction to take.	Yes, it has been determined that a new RTS is required, the SEA has focused on the alternative components of the strategy.
	<u>Consultation Period</u> We are satisfied with the proposal for a four week consultation period for the initial Environmental Report that supports the Case for Change Report and a 12 week consultation period for the final draft Strategy consultation period. It is our understanding that the initial ER will provide an assessment of the transport planning objectives and related strategic objectives (and their reasonable alternatives).	Noted with thanks.

SEA Consultation Authority	Comment	Response
NatureScot (29 July 2022)	**Overall Approach to the SEA** We welcome that all of the SEA topics have been scoped into the SEA. This reflects the wide range of possible impacts from transport policies and projects, as well as the range of opportunities for environmental improvement. Key opportunities that we would highlight include: • The use of nature-based solutions for challenges, especially as part of transport infrastructure projects – this could be a key principle in the new RTS. • Improving opportunities for people to have access to and engage with nature through better transport provision – especially for those who don't have access to a private car. • Enhancing nature as part of proposals by delivering positive effects for biodiversity (also referred to as biodiversity/environmental net-gain) at both a strategy and project level. • Indeed, we note consideration of (in Table 4.4 from page 22 onwards) promotion of the use of nature-based solutions for addressing climate change, and delivering positive effects for biodiversity for biodiversity, geodiversity and soil, and we very much welcome this. Climate change and biodiversity loss are closely linked and must be tackled together, and we therefore advise that the SEA must focus on climate change and biodiversity loss as a twin crises, and not addressed separately, and that addressing the twin crises should be a common thread throughout the SEA and the Draft RTS.	Noted, references to climate change and biodiversity loss have been updated where appropriate.
	<u>1.5.8 Other Impact Assessments</u> We note that other impact assessments are to be carried out and that they will be integrated as part of the SEA for the Draft RTS. It is unclear, however, if a Habitats Regulations Appraisal (HRA) as per The	At this stage it is considered unlikely that a HRA will be required for the RTS, however the need to screen the RTS for HRA will be kept under review

SEA Consultation Authority	Comment	Response
	Conservation (Natural Habitats, &c.) Regulations 1994 (as amended) is planned to be conducted separately. An HRA can help to inform an SEA and vice versa, therefore, we would advise making reference to the HRA within the SEA environmental report and whether you intend to conduct this separately, and to note how it, along with other assessments, have helped to inform both the SEA and the emerging RTS.	as the strategy is developed to consider if any part of it would have a likely significant effect (LSE) on a European site. In line with the relevant guidance, if the strategy is restricted to general policy statements, or shows the general will or intent of HITRANS, it will not be likely to have a significant effect on a European site. A statement explaining the approach to consideration of the need for HRA will be included in the SEA Environmental Report for the Draft RTS.
	3.3 Relationship Between the Emerging RTS and Other Relevant Plans We note that the RTS will align with the National Transport Strategy 2 (NTS2) (and the Strategic Transport Projects Review 2 (STPR2)), plus wider policy and legislation including the National Planning Framework 4 (NPF4) which we support. Much, however, has changed significantly since the NTS2 was published in early 2020, including the Covid-19 pandemic and the need to tackle both the climate emergency and biodiversity loss, and these elements are addressed within the draft NPF4. We note the four thematic priorities and we would advise that instead of just taking climate action, that the SEA and the proposed RTS addresses both climate change and biodiversity loss. Both climate change and biodiversity loss are inextricably linked and cannot be addressed alone and should be addressed as a twin crises. To reflect the NPF4, we recommend that the second thematic priority to take climate action is amended to tackle the twin crises of climate change and biodiversity loss and that the twin crises is also reflected in the Case for Change.	Noted, references to climate change and biodiversity loss have been updated where appropriate within the RTS ER. In terms of the RTS, the strategy will have a larger direct influence on climate change as it deals primarily with public and active transport services, which will subsequently influence biodiversity loss, at least indirectly. The CFC document has provided a policy review, setting out the key elements of NTS2, STPR2, NPF4, and other requirements. Reference has been included in the CFC report of the later NPF4 principles, including the connection between climate change and biodiversity loss. Whilst the objectives of the RTS are to remain unchanged, the interrelationship of the issues has been highlighted to and discussed with the RTS team and drawn out within the 'implications for the RTS' text.

SEA Consultation Authority	Comment	Response
	Table 3.1 Key Issues Relevant to the SEA of the New RTS for the Highlands and Islands Air And Climate - We support the key issues noted to address air quality and climatic factors including those key issues associated with natural infrastructure, forests, woodlands and soil resources. Given that there is a twin crises of climate change and biodiversity loss, and that these are intertwined, we recommend strengthening and amending the fourth and fifth bullet points and associated key issues to state 'the need to integrate and enhance natural (green/blue) infrastructure for tackling climate change' and 'the need to protect and enhance forest, woodland and soil resources (including peat) for carbon storage and sequestration'. This will also help the new RTS take account of the NPF4 as noted within section 3.3.4 of your scoping report. We also suggest that the key issue should be about aiming to reduce carbon emissions and adapting to climate change rather than just mitigation. We would, therefore, recommend amending the second bullet point to state the following 'the need to reduce carbon emissions and adapt to climate change through promoting sustainable land use patterns (including the 20-minute neighbourhood) and the decarbonisation of the transport sector.'	Noted, the second bullet point has been amended to read 'the need to reduce carbon emissions and adapt to climate change including through promoting sustainable land use patterns (including the 20-minute neighbourhood) and the decarbonisation of the transport sector.' Likewise, the fourth and fifth bullet points has been amended to read 'the need to integrate and enhance natural (green/blue) infrastructure for tackling climate change' and 'the need to protect and enhance forest, woodland and soil resources (including peat) for carbon storage and sequestration'
	Section 3.3.5 We note that the first bullet point refers to 'likely significant adverse effects'. To ensure consistency throughout the SEA and with Scottish Government guidance, we suggest amending to 'likely significant environmental effects'. We support the need to 'ensure the avoidance of likely significant environmental effects from the implementation of the plan on sites designated at international and national levels for reasons of biodiversity conservation or ecological importance.' We do, however, note that the scoping report states that the RTS should 'minimise and appropriately mitigate likely adverse effects on sites designated at the regional and local level for their ecological importance'. To ensure that	Noted, 'likely significant adverse effects' has been amended to read 'likely significant environmental effects' as suggested. Agreed, the second bullet point has been amended to read 'Follow the mitigation hierarchy, and to always aim to avoid likely significant environmental effects on nature-rich sites both

SEA Consultation Authority	Comment	Response
	the RTS is in line with NPF4 and is addressing the twin crises, we would advise that the plan should aim to avoid likely significant environmental effects on all protected areas including non-protected areas important for biodiversity, and that the mitigation hierarchy should be applied as per the CIEEM's Good Practice Principles for Development which can be found at https://cieem.net/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/Biodiversity-Net-Gain-Principles.pdf We advise, therefore, to amend the second bullet point to say for example 'follow the mitigation hierarchy, and to always aim to avoid likely significant environmental effects on nature-rich sites protected at the regional and local level, including those nature-rich sites that have no level of protection.' Along with protecting habitats, we advise that the emerging RTS should also aim to protect species and that this aim should be reflected in the list of bullet points within section 3.3.5.	that are designated at the regional and local level and that have no level of protection.' Noted and added to the second bullet point.
	Table 4.1 Previous SEA Framework – Assessment of Continuing Validity Soils – we would suggest adding to the third column for 'Assessment of Continuing Validity', detail on the importance of soils as a carbon store and the links to climatic factors as well as biodiversity.	Agreed, whilst this table is not being carried forward through the RTS stage, the importance of soils as a carbon store (as well as for biodiversity) will be carried forward.
	4.5.1 Proposed SEA Framework We note in the third bullet point, proposed criteria that includes distance-based thresholds. With respect to natural heritage interests, some impacts on species or habitats can happen as a result of works that occur some distance away. For example, works which affect a stream in the upper parts of a catchment can subsequently affect interests much further downstream. On the other hand, a sensitive site can be quite close distance-wise to a project area, but be situated in a different catchment. As a result, there may be very little risk to natural heritage interests. Therefore, distance should not be the only	Agreed, both distance and connectivity to the habitats has been considered in the SEA.

SEA Consultation Authority	Comment	Response
	consideration and we advise that connectivity is also important and should also be considered.	
	Section 4.2.2 to 4.2.3 These paragraphs focus on climate change or the climate emergency only, when there is a twin emergency of climate change and biodiversity loss. As previously advised, the SEA (and the revised RTS) should focus on the twin crises and address climate change and biodiversity loss together and should be a common thread throughout the SEA.	Noted, climate change and biodiversity loss have been considered and addressed together as twin crises.
	Section 4.4.1 We note that the emphasis for the SEA will be on 'implementing a holistic approach to climate action and tackling inequalities across many objectives and is intended to reflect the cross-cutting nature of relevant environmental issues and to provide a focus to underpin this SEA.' While we do support this approach, we advise that the focus should be (along with tacking inequalities) on addressing the twin crises, and not climate change alone.	Noted, climate change and biodiversity loss have been considered and addressed together as twin crises.
	Table 4.2 Proposed SEA Objectives for the emerging RTS 1. Climate Change – to help address the twin crises of climate change and biodiversity loss, we recommend amending the objective to say 'Respond to the climate emergency by decarbonising infrastructure assets and services, protecting, promoting and enhancing natural infrastructure and the associated habitats, facilitating a low carbon economy and adapting to accommodate the effects of climate change.'	Noted, 'protecting' natural infrastructure has been added to the SEA objective. Given biodiversity is covered by a separate objective, 'and associated habitats' has not been added to the objective, although the interrelationship of these issues will be stressed elsewhere.
	Table 4.3 Relationship between Proposed SEA Objectives and the 2005 Act	Suggestions noted. As this table is not being carried forward to the subsequent stages, these additions have not been made however the

SEA Consultation Authority	Comment	Response
	1. Climate Change – we welcome that both biodiversity and climatic factors are noted as relevant SEA topics for the climate change SEA objective. We would advise that soils in terms of its role as a carbon store, and human health are also relevant. 3. Biodiversity, Geodiversity and Soil – we would advise that SEA topics climatic factors, landscape and human health are relevant here in terms of tackling the twin crises, and how access to nature and landscapes can help to improve health and well-being. 6. Landscape – habitats help to shape landscapes, and we recommend that biodiversity is included as a relevant SEA topic. Landscape also provides a range of social and health benefits, and we would advise that the SEA topic human health is also included. 7. Accessibility and Connectivity – due to the role of natural infrastructure for helping to provide 'leisure opportunities', we would recommend including the SEA topics biodiversity and landscape for this proposed SEA objective. 9. Human Health – access to nature and landscapes can help to improve health and wellbeing. We, therefore, recommend including the SEA topics biodiversity and landscape for this proposed SEA objective.	interdependency of the issues will be taken forward.
	<u>Table 4.4 Proposed RTS SEA Framework</u> We welcome the proposed SEA objectives covering all of the SEA topics including the objective to promote and enhance natural infrastructure to help address climate change and to protect, restore and enhance biodiversity for example. We would, however, like to suggest the following: - 1. Climate Change – to include within the second column a question relating to green and blue infrastructure. An example question could be - will the RTS 'include green and blue infrastructure?' Green and blue infrastructure can provide active travel options, enhance biodiversity,	Noted, a question relating to green and blue infrastructure has been included in the second column as suggested.

SEA Consultation Authority	Comment	Response
	enable people to have more access to nature as well as help to improve health and wellbeing. To strengthen the need to tackle the twin crises of climate change and biodiversity loss, we recommend changing the following question 'promote the use of nature-based solutions?' to say 'include the use of nature-based solutions?'. We also note that the questions in the second column include contributing to a '90% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions for Scotland by 2040, and the Highland Council to be carbon neutral by 2025, alongside the Orkney Islands and Moray aiming to be carbon neutral by 2030.' To reflect the significant changes since early 2020, the Scottish Government published a Climate Change Plan update in December 2020 which set a new target for net zero emissions of all greenhouse gases by 2045. The Councils are also aiming for net zero carbon emissions, with The Highland Council having agreed to develop a net zero strategy to align with national targets, and Moray Council aiming to reduce its carbon emissions to net zero by 2030. We would, therefore, recommend that the question noted above is amended to reflect current targets and aims for net zero carbon emissions. 3. Biodiversity, Geodiversity and Soil – for this proposed SEA objective, the table currently includes in the third column for proposed criteria 'consideration of climate change on vulnerability and condition of habitats, species and soils.' Due to the way it is written, we are not entirely clear as to the aim of this criteria. It may be that this (and some of the other criteria) would benefit from being more specific to reflect the desired outcome in terms of monitoring the effectiveness of the emerging RTS. We would, therefore, suggest amending this criteria to say 'through tackling climate change, improvements in the quality and quantity of habitats and soils and an increase of species that depend on them.' Following on from the previous comment, we would also advise including a criteria to support the question in column two which is will	Agreed, the question has been amended to read 'include the use of nature-based solutions?' Agreed, question has been amended to 'Contribute to net zero emissions of all greenhouse gases by 2045 (2030 for Orkney Islands and Moray)?' Agreed, the text has been amended to read 'through tackling climate change, improvements in the quality and quantity of habitats and soils and an increase of species that depend on them'

SEA Consultation Authority	Comment	Response
	the RTS 'protect and enhance important soil resources?'. The criteria could be 'positive impacts on soils.' Based on our previous comment regarding the need to consider connectivity rather than just distance, we recommend amending the first four bullet points to begin with 'connectivity and impacts on…'. 4. Water, Flood Risk and Resilience – we strongly support the inclusion of the question 'manage residual flood risks appropriately and avoid new flood risk including by incorporating nature-based solutions?' along with the criteria for 'resilience to flood risk'. We also support the question relating to the coastal environment and the criteria for 'consideration of marine aquatic resources and the coastal environment'. 7. Accessibility and Connectivity – we would like to see consideration of better access to nature and would recommend including a question in the second column to say for example 'improve access to nature?'. A relevant criteria could also be 'opportunities to accessing nature'.	Noted, text has been added to read 'positive impacts on soils' Noted, the text has been amended to read 'Proximity and connectivity to and impacts on…' Noted. Noted, a relevant question and criteria have been added accordingly.
	<u>6.1.2 Proposed Consultation Arrangements</u> We are content with the period of 12 weeks for consulting on the environmental report for the Draft RTS. We note that there will also be an environmental report produced for the Case for Change phase, and our understanding is that the Case for Change will help to inform the Draft RTS. We also note that the proposed consultation time for the Case for Change environmental report is 4 weeks, and we think this is rather short. We are also unclear on how the environmental report for the Case for Change will influence the Draft RTS if the plan is to consult its environmental report at the same time as the environmental report for the Draft RTS. We would recommend that a simple diagram is included to demonstrate clearly how the two environmental reports are going to inform the Draft	Noted. To clarify, there will be two SEA Environmental Reports produced within the development of the draft RTS, firstly a more succinct report for the Case for Change, and secondly for the draft RTS. These shall be separate reports undertaken alongside the progression of the RTS to ensure the SEA process informs its development.

SEA Consultation Authority	Comment	Response
	RTS. We would also recommend increasing the consultation period for the Case for Change to at least a minimum of 6 weeks up to 12 weeks, and to preferably consult on this environmental report prior to the consultation for the Draft RTS environmental report.	The consultation period for the Case for Change has been extended to 6 weeks in line with your request.
	Table A.1 Summary of Highlands and Islands Environmental Designations We note that some of the designations have the incorrect number of sites and we advise that Table A.1 is updated as follows: - Special Protection Areas – 98 Special Areas of Conservation – 119 Ramsar – 26 Sites of Special Scientific Interest – 591 National Nature Reserve – 22 Local Nature Reserve – 7 National Scenic Areas of Scotland – 27 National Park – 2 (Argyll and Bute Council covers an area of the Loch Lomond & the Trossachs National Park; Moray Council and Highland Council cover areas of the Cairngorm National Park.) Further information on protected areas can also be provided at the following NatureScot SiteLink: - https://sitelink.nature.scot/home	Noted with thanks, the numbers have been updated where appropriate.
	Table B.1 Policy Documents of Relevance at Scoping Stage	

SEA Consultation Authority	Comment	Response
	National (Scotland) – Physical Environment: Biodiversity, Flora & Fauna, Soil, Water, Cultural Heritage & Landscape – there is reference to a number of biodiversity documents including 'It's in your Hands: Scotland's Biodiversity Strategy, 2020 Challenge for Scotland's Biodiversity and Scotland's Biodiversity: a Route Map to 2020'. The Scottish Government's 'Scottish biodiversity strategy post-2020: statement of intent' (which can be found here - https://www.gov.scot/publications/scottish-biodiversity-strategy-post-2020-statement-intent/) should also be listed in this section and the key messages from that document should inform the Draft RTS SEA process. There is also reference to the 'SNH Landscape Policy Framework', and this should be changed to 'NatureScot Landscape Policy Framework' and can be found here: - https://www.nature.scot/professional-advice/landscape/framework-landscape-policy/naturescot-landscape-policy-framework We also advise that NatureScot's Landscape Character Assessment (which can be found here - https://www.nature.scot/professional-advice/landscape/landscape-character-assessment) should be listed either as a set of national documents, or the relevant ones for the HITRANS area should be listed in this part of the table.	Noted with thanks, these documents have been reviewed and included in Table A.1 of the RTS ER report. Noted with thanks, the document reference has been amended accordingly. Noted with thanks, these documents set has been included in Table A.1 of the RTS ER report.
Historic Environment Scotland (03 August 2022)	<u>Scoping and Level of Detail</u> It is our understanding that the HITRANS Regional Transport Strategy will set out the long-term transport vision, outcomes and strategic objectives for transport in the Highlands and Islands. We note that the historic environment has been scoped into the assessment and we agree with this. On the basis of the information provided, we are content with this approach and are satisfied with the scope and level of detail proposed for the assessment, subject to the detailed comments provided in the attached annex.	Noted with thanks.

SEA Consultation Authority	Comment	Response
	Consultation period for the Environmental Report We note from the scoping report that you intend to consult on an Environmental Report over two stages in tandem with both the STAG Case for Change stage as well as the draft Regional Transport Strategy. We welcome this approach although we would recommend that the consultation period for the Case for Change report and its ER be a minimum of 6 weeks. In terms of the consultation period for the draft strategy we can confirm we are content with the proposed 12 week timescale. Please note that, for administrative purposes, we consider that the consultation period commences on receipt of the relevant documents by the SEA Gateway.	The consultation period for the Case for Change has been extended to 6 weeks in line with your request. Noted. Noted.
	Baseline Historic Environment Scotland hold a substantial amount of cultural heritage baseline information and locational data including statutory designations and the National Record for the Historic Environment (NRHE). This information can be downloaded from the HES Portal and the NRHE is accessed through Canmore. When considering the historic environment at a strategic level we would encourage the holistic consideration of this resource, both designated and undesignated. It is also important to consider the connections between the historic environment and transport and the potential for mutual benefits through transport infrastructure investment. The historic environment provides elements of our transport infrastructure from bridges and stations to historic routes, canals and former branch railway lines that contribute across a number of areas such as our active travel network.	Noted, relevant information from HES Portal and Canmore has been reviewed. Noted, both designated and undesignated historic environment have been considered, and the connection between the historic environment and transport have been considered as well.

SEA Consultation Authority	Comment	Response
	Relationship Between the Emerging RTS and Other Relevant Plans We welcome the recognition in Appendix B of the relevant Plans, Programmes and Strategies for the historic environment. However, we would advise that the Historic Environment Scotland Policy Statement 2016 has now been superseded by the Historic Environment Policy for Scotland (HEPS). HEPS sets out principles and policies for decision making in Scotland that affects the historic environment. A key policy for preparation of strategies of this type is HEP3 which states that "Plans, programmes, policies and strategies, and the allocation of resources, should be approached in a way that protects and promotes the historic environment". The environmental assessment of the strategy should aim to inform and influence the final content of the strategy. We also welcome the recognition of the key relevance of the recently published Scottish Government's Infrastructure Investment Plan here. Of particular interest to the strategy topic and the historic environment is the introduction of a Sustainable Investment Hierarchy that encourages the maintenance, repair and use of our existing assets over new build.	Noted with thanks, the latest Historic Environment Policy has been noted and included. Particular attention to HEPS has been paid. Noted.
	Proposed SEA Methodology We note that a matrix based framework has been developed in order to test the components of the emerging strategy including the proposed vision, strategic objectives, polices and identified options as well as their reasonable alternatives. We are content with the SEA objective proposed for the historic environment and consider that the guide questions will aid in focussing the assessment. We also welcome the SEA objectives and guide questions around landscape and accessibility/connectivity as these also connect closely with historic environment considerations.	Noted.
	Mitigation and Monitoring As you will be aware, proposals for the monitoring of significant environmental effects should be put forward. Such monitoring proposals	

SEA Consultation Authority	Comment	Response
	should be driven by the identified effects and we look forward to further detail on this within the environmental report where appropriate.	Noted.

Table E-2 Summary of SEA Case for Change Consultation Responses

SEA Consultation Authority	Comment	Response
NatureScot (13 Apr 2023)	**Environmental Report Approach** NatureScot welcomes the approach taken for the Environmental Report including the easy to follow layout and the use of tables to help present information such as the Compatibility of the Regional Transport Strategy (RTS) Objectives with the Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) Framework. Indeed, we also welcome the level of integration between the RTS Case for Change and its SEA, and how the SEA process will continue to help the development of the RTS	Noted with thanks.
	Taking Account of Comments at Scoping Stage We welcome that our comments at scoping stage have been taken into account and we are content with the changes that have been made including the recognition of the need to tackle climate change and biodiversity loss as a twin crisis.	Noted with thanks
	Assessment of Compatibility of RTS Objectives with SEA Framework We agree with the findings of the assessment of the compatibility of the RTS objectives with the SEA objectives. The commentary which helped to explain the findings of the assessment was very clear and thorough, and we welcome this.	Noted with thanks
Historic Environment Scotland (27 April 2023)	**Part 1: HITRANS Regional Transport Strategy - Case for Change** We welcome the preparation of this Case for Change report which we understand will inform the development of the Regional Transport Strategy (RTS). In terms of the historic environment and transport we note the acknowledgment within the Transport Problem Themes section of the potential for the region's transport network to impact on the historic environment. While we agree with this, we would also note the important role that transport infrastructure can also in providing access to the historic environment as well as the recognition that such infrastructure can be of	Noted with thanks

SEA Consultation Authority	Comment	Response
	historic environment significance in itself. We have offered further comments on this below in our response to the first Environmental Report.	
	Part 2: Environmental Report We welcome the identification of the key issues relevant to the SEA with regard to the historic environment. We particularly welcome the recognition of the connections between our historic environment resource and transport. This relationship covers both the transport infrastructure that forms a part of our historic environment as well as the role that historic environment assets play in providing existing transport networks. As the report notes, these key issues will continue to be an important consideration for the emerging transport strategy. The assessment should also be mindful of potential mutual benefits for transport and the historic environment through the investment in, maintenance of, and continued use of our existing transport infrastructure.	Noted with thanks
	Compatibility of RTS Objectives with SEA Framework The assessment of the SEA Objective in relation to the RTS objectives notes that, while the historic environment is not explicitly covered it is considered that such interactions are implicit in RTS Objective 1. We would agree with this and welcome the commitment to consider impacts at the next stage of the RTS development.	Noted with thanks
	SEA Framework The approach outlined here for testing the components of the RTS is welcomed. As we have noted above, in using the proposed questions and criteria you should be mindful of both positive and negative potential effects on historic environment resources.	Noted with thanks
	Next Steps We welcome that the second Environmental Report will set out how the option development has been assessed and how the selection of options has been informed by this process.	Noted with thanks

SEA Consultation Authority	Comment	Response
	None of the comments contained in this letter constitute a legal interpretation of the requirements of the Environmental Assessment (Scotland) Act 2005. They are intended rather as helpful advice, as part of our commitment to capacity building in SEA.	

Table E-3 Summary of SEA ER Consultation Responses

SEA Consultation Authority	Comment	Response
Historic Environment Scotland **Date: 13 June 2024**	Thank you for your consultation which we received on 22 April 2024 about the above and its Environmental Report (ER). We have reviewed these documents in relation to our main area of interest for the historic environment. The first part of this response relates to the strategy with part two focusing upon its environmental assessment. **Part 1: HITRANS Regional Transport Strategy** We welcome the preparation of the Regional Transport Strategy. We have a number of minor comments to offer on the development of the strategy through its assessment and these can be found below.	Noted with thanks.
	Part 2: Updated Environmental Report We welcome that our comments at the scoping stage and in response to the environmental report that accompanied the Case for Change consultation have been taken into account in the assessment of the draft Regional Spatial Strategy. Overall, we note that while no significant effects on the historic environment are predicted as a result of the strategy objectives, themes and individual policies a number of minor effects and uncertainties have been identified. We therefore welcome the recognition within the report of the need to consider these further at project delivery level and identify mitigation as appropriate.	Noted with thanks.
	Appendix A Review of Plans and Programmes We would draw your attention to Scotland's new strategy for the historic environment Our Past, Our Future (OPOF) was published in April 2023 and replaced Our Place in Time which is reference in this Appendix. The strategy sets the direction of travel for the historic environment sector and identifies the priority areas of action to focus work to support this mission. The 3 priorities are *Delivering the transition to net zero, Empowering resilient and inclusive communities and places* and *Building a wellbeing economy*. The importance of the contribution that the	Noted with thanks. Text has been revised

	maintenance, reuse and adaptation of our historic environment can make in preventing waste and reducing carbon emissions is recognised under the transition to net zero priority.	
	Environmental Baseline We note that an appropriate historic environment baseline has been identified in order to test the content of the RTS against. It is particularly welcomed that the heritage value of elements of transport infrastructure itself is recognised.	Noted with Thanks.
	Guide Questions and Assessment Criteria We welcome the guide questions and criteria developed in order to support the assessment and in particular the testing of policies and proposals for potential positive benefits in relation to sustainable access management.	Noted with Thanks
	Individual policy assessment We note that no significant effects have been identified here for the historic environment. A number of minor negative and uncertain effects that will require consideration and potential mitigation for project level/locational specific delivery have been identified and we are generally content to agree with the findings presented.	Noted with Thanks
	None of the comments contained in this letter constitute a legal interpretation of the requirements of the Environmental Assessment (Scotland) Act 2005. They are intended rather as helpful advice, as part of our commitment to capacity building in SEA.	Noted with Thanks.
NatureScot **12 Jun 2024**	Thank you for consulting NatureScot on the Environmental Report for the HITRANS draft Regional Transport Strategy. In our role as Consultation Authority, we have reviewed the above report. NatureScot broadly agrees with the approach taken for the Environmental Assessment, however, we do have some comments to make, and these are provided in the following Annex of this response.	Noted with Thanks
	Annex **<u>Biodiversity Loss and Climate Change</u>** We note from your Environmental Report (ER) that many of our comments from our Scoping Report consultation response has been taken into consideration while conducting the Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA), and we welcome this.	Noted with Thanks
	We advise, however, that the SEA could go further in acknowledging and addressing biodiversity loss along with tackling climate change as part of the twin crises. The biodiversity and climate change crises are inextricably linked, and one cannot be addressed fully without addressing the other.	Noted. Section 2.4.3 has been further elaborated. A new section 4.4.12 in the

		SEA and 3.2.8 in the NTS have been added to emphasis the twin crisis.
	With that in mind, we advise that opportunities to address the twin crises through, for example, enhancement of green networks, which can improve biodiversity plus help improve health and wellbeing, needs to be reflected more in terms of environmental effects and mitigation / enhancement in **Table 5-2** as part of the Environmental Appraisal of the Transport Options, as well as some of the commentary in **Table 5-3**, A Summary of the Environmental Assessment by RTS Theme. This should also be reflected in section **5.4.4** onwards of the report. Specific details are provided in Table 1 below.	Noted. Text has been revised.
	Habitats Regulations Appraisal With reference to our query regarding a Habitats Regulations Appraisal (HRA), we also note the response within Appendix E to our Scoping Report comments where it states that an HRA is unlikely required for the RTS. Further to this, we note in section 1.2.3 under 'Other Related Appraisals', it states the following "At this stage of the RTS development, the 'Policies' set out within the Draft RTS are not predicted to have any likely significant effects (LSE) on European sites and as such the RTS is unlikely to be subject to a requirement for a Habitats Regulations Appraisal (HRA). This shall be kept under review as the RTS develops through to the Delivery Plan and implementation, and an HRA Screening will be completed if HITRANS considers that there is any potential for LSE from implementation of the RTS."	Noted.
	We advise that under The Conservation (Natural Habitats, &c.) Regulations 1994, all competent authorities must consider whether any plan or project will have a likely significant effect (LSE), alone or in-combination, on a European site. The SEA is a separate and distinct assessment and although it can help to inform an HRA, it cannot be used instead of an HRA to consider likely significant effects alone or in-combination, on a European site.	With regards to Habitats Regulation Appraisal (HRA) specifically, HITRANS recognises and supports the importance of HRA for any programme or project which may have LSEs on European sites. The policies in the RTS are not however location specific (with the exception of proposals to dual the
	The RTS must, therefore, be subject to at least screening as part of an HRA. With that in mind, we do note that there is potential for LSE's with some of the RTS Themes. For example, and as noted on page 64 within the ER, RTS Theme 5 and specifically ST5y which supports the principle of fixed links, "there is potential to significantly impact important habitats such as marine and terrestrial SPAs and SACs", and we advise that an Appropriate Assessment will also be required. We anticipate that given fixed links are not location specific at this stage of the plan, it is difficult to indicate which European Sites may be affected within the HITRANs area, therefore, the conclusion will likely be that there will be no Adverse Effects on Site Integrity (AESI). There are further strategy themes and policies that we believe may have LSEs alone or in combination on a European site within the HITRANs area, and these are noted in Table 1 below.	

		A9 and A96, which are subject to their own Transport Scotland-led consenting process) and it is therefore difficult to undertake meaningful HRA screening at this stage. HITRANS commits to undertake appropriate HRA assessment of programmes and projects emerging from the RTS.
	Positive Effects for Biodiversity Since the consultation on the Scoping Report for the HITRANS RTS, National Planning Framework 4 (NPF4) has been adopted. The twin global climate and nature crises are at the heart of its vision, and to help tackle this twin crises, securing positive effects for biodiversity is required to help benefit natural capital and contribute to net zero. We note that throughout the ER there is reference to biodiversity net gain, and to comply with NPF4, we advise changing this to positive effects for biodiversity (PEfB).	Noted. Text has been revised.
	Page 45 -46 Table 5-2 – Environmental Appraisal of Transport Options While the draft RTS is a high-level document, there are opportunities for enhancement measures that will provide positive environmental effects, and specific comments for the relevant transport options and noted below: -	Noted.
	Table 5-2 – Environmental Appraisal of Transport Options 1. Transforming our communities and reducing the impact of transport upon them Options 1A-1D - There are opportunities for enhancing green networks that also helps to improve biodiversity as part of reallocating road space to active travel for example. Further positive environmental effects include connecting people with nature and improving health and wellbeing.	Noted. Text has been revised.

	2. Connecting our communities Options 2A-2E – Similar to Transport Option 1, there are opportunities for enhancing green networks, enhancing biodiversity through planting measures and connecting people with nature which would also help to improve health and wellbeing. We note the need for careful siting and design of new active travel routes to prevent and minimise adverse effects on biodiversity for example, and we support this.	Noted. Text has been revised.
	3. Extending public transport connectivity We note the recommendation that mitigation measures "should be implemented during the construction of any new railway line or railway stations" and we advise that this should be conducted in line with the mitigation hierarchy. We also advise that opportunities for biodiversity enhancement that provides positive effects for biodiversity should also be implemented. Along with an EIA, an HRA should also be considered.	Noted. Text has been revised.
	7. Improving the safety, reliability and resilience of our road and rail networks Along with the requirement for an EIA as noted within the mitigation and recommendations column, an HRA will also need to be considered.	Noted. Text has been revised.
	8. Facilitating sustainable visitor travel demand As with previous Transport Options, there are opportunities for biodiversity enhancement as part of improving green networks to help improve active travel options. Further benefits include connecting people with nature and helping to improve health and wellbeing. An HRA will also need to be considered along with an EIA.	Noted. Text has been revised.
	Table 5-3: Summary of Environmental Assessment by RTS Theme Strategy Theme 1 We support the inclusion of opportunities for active travel such as enhancing biodiversity through the creation and connectivity of linear habitats as well as the use of nature-based solutions.	Noted with thanks
	Strategy Theme 2 Similar commentary should be included for	Noted. Text has been revised.

	Strategy Theme 2 – connecting our communities, where there will be benefits to biodiversity as well as the benefits to people through connecting with nature. An HRA will need to be considered along with an EIA.	
	Strategy Theme 7 An HRA will also need to be considered along with an EIA at implementation stage.	Noted. Text has been added.
	Strategy Theme 8 We note in the commentary the opportunities for "providing active options for accessing tourist sites, increase the accessibility of green spaces, open areas and new landscape and enhance the setting and appreciation of heritage assets." We advise that while there are benefits to improving access to tourist sites for example, there is potential for negative environmental effects through increased tourism on sensitive natural heritage areas, and that this should be considered in the assessment.	Noted. Text has been revised.
	SEA Objective 1 : Climate Change – Sections 5.4.8-5.4.12 As commented on in our Scoping Report response, it would be relevant to reflect on the twin crises and how measures for tackling biodiversity loss can also help address climate change. For example, on page 57 of your ER, it states that Strategy Theme 1 and its associated policies provide opportunities for active travel such as enhancing biodiversity through the creation and connectivity of linear habitats as well as the use of nature-based solutions including sustainable urban drainage systems, re-naturalisation of water courses and establishment of wetlands. We advise that this should also be reflected in the summary of the findings for SEA Objective 1: Climate Change.	Noted. Text has been revised.
	SEA Objective 3: Biodiversity, Geodiversity and Soil – Sections 5.4.15-5.4.20 We agree with the findings for potential positive and negative effects to SEA Objective 3: Biodiversity, Geodiversity and Soil. There are links with the SEA Objective 1: Climate Change, where improvements to biodiversity along with nature based solutions can help to tackle climate change, and this should also be reflected in this section.	Noted. Text has been amended in S.5.4.15
	Appendix D St1j, ST2a and ST2i – there are opportunities for enhancing biodiversity through the integration of active travel within new developments as well as improvements to existing active travel networks for example, and that along with Climate and Air, there is potential for positive effects for the SEA Objective Biodiversity.	Noted. The scores have been revised.

	There may be LSEs on Biodiversity including protected sites from the following RTS strategic themes. • ST2c – if the expansion of the National Cycle Network is within or has connectivity to sensitive habitats / species including protected areas such as European sites. • ST8a – if further long-distance walking, wheeling, and cycling routes are developed within or has connectivity to sensitive 6 habitats / species including protected areas such as European sites. • ST8b – if active travel connections to ports, airports, and regionally important railway stations are developed within or has connectivity to sensitive habitats / species including protected areas such as European sites. • ST8c – if the development of active travel connections increases tourism to areas with sensitive habitats / species including protected areas such as European sites.	Noted. The scores have been revised.
	This information should be reflected in the scoring as well as in page 78 for the summary of the findings in SEA Objective 3.	Noted. Relevant scores and text have been revised.