

HI·LIGHTS

NEWSLETTER WINTER 2024/2025

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WELCOME

Welcome to the Winter edition of HITRANS *HI·LIGHTS*, our newsletter which keeps you informed about the work of the regional transport

partnership and records the main outcomes of our recent Board meetings held in Stornoway and Oban. More detailed information about our work is available on our website: www.hitrans.org.uk and X (formerly Twitter) @HITRANS_RTP

RECOGNITION OF OUR WORK

We are delighted that our work has been recognised at two recent national award ceremonies.

Our pioneering SATE Project won the Urban Air Mobility category at the third CiTTi Magazine Awards in London and we were also Highly Commended in the Micro Mobility category for HI-Bike. We were also Highly Commended for the second year in a row in the Regional Transport Authority of the Year category at the National Transport Awards in London. Congratulations to the team for their well-deserved recognition of the excellent work they do for the Partnership.



Board meeting schedule for 2025:

7 February: Inverness;
25 April: Inverness;
12 September: Orkney;
and 7 November: Moray.

UK | **NTA** | NATIONAL TRANSPORT AWARDS | 2024

**REGIONAL TRANSPORT AUTHORITY
OF THE YEAR**

HITRANS

REGIONAL TRANSPORT STRATEGY APPROVED

Working with local authority partners, HITRANS has produced a new Regional Transport Strategy for the development of transport in the region over the next 20 years with the aim of delivering a transport system that reduces inequalities, takes climate action, helps deliver inclusive economic growth, and improves the health and wellbeing of people in the region.

The development of the strategy has involved three stages, beginning with the Case for Change and culminating with a statutory 8-week public consultation which elicited 37 responses. An online StoryMap was used to set out an overview of the RTS development process; a summary of the RTS vision and strategy objectives, themes and policies; the draft RTS and supporting documents along with an online survey on the material presented. Hard copies of the documents were also available on request and at HITRANS office in Inverness.

The strategy has now been approved by the Partnership Board and forwarded to the Scottish Cabinet Secretary for Transport for approval. In parallel, officers will finalise work on the first Delivery Plan and Monitoring and Evaluation Framework. Members and Advisors have already input to a draft version of the Delivery Plan and a final draft will be submitted to the Board following Government approval of the strategy. The intention is to regularly update the Delivery Plan, providing an opportunity to reset or realign priorities to the changing political, social, environmental and economic landscape. There will also be consideration of how the strategy and action plans for specific areas such as rail and active travel that sit underneath the RTS will be updated.

HITRANS TO LEAD ON FORT WILLIAM INTEGRATED TRANSPORT PLAN

Identifying a long-term solution to chronic congestion experienced in and around Fort William, particularly in the summer months, is to be the subject of an Integrated Transport Plan, with the first phase of work starting early in 2025.

HITRANS have agreed to chair the Client Delivery Group and lead on the procurement and project management of the commission of the Plan, contributing 25% of the funding up to a value of £100,000 over the next three financial years. The Plan will seek to build on previous studies already undertaken in around the West Highland hub.

It is widely recognised that the strategic road network in Fort William suffers from reliability and resilience issues, with congestion on the network impacting journey times on the A82 and A830 and also has a negative impact on the environment of the town with the A82 in particular, creating severance between different parts of the town and the town's connection with its waterfront. These routes also form important transport corridors serving not just Fort William but much of the northwest Highlands and Islands. A number of studies and trials have taken place in the last 10 years but the issues persist with evidence that they are having a significant impact on local economy with local businesses indicating that congestion in and around Fort William is preventing them from expanding and the local bus operator having to reduce its service because of the delays it is experiencing.



REGIONAL BUS STAKEHOLDER FORUM

This was held on 30 September when stakeholders had the chance to learn more about some key projects in the Partnership area.

This included a presentation by Paul White, Director, CPT Scotland and an insight into new bus operations in Moray and Orkney and from Shiel Buses.

INVERNESS BUS/RAIL STATION MASTERPLAN

We are allocating £40,000 towards the cost of a feasibility study on Inverness Interchange, investigating the relocation of the bus station and multi-storey car park as part of the Inverness Station Masterplan project.

Key partners are Network Rail, Transport Scotland and The Highland Council, with the wider stakeholder group including Bus Service Improvement Plan representatives, Inverness BID and Inverness Chamber of Commerce.



ISLAND PASSPORT PROJECT IS DELIVERING REAL BENEFITS TO COMMUNITIES

The success of Scotland's Island Passport Project has seen the programme extended until at least March 2026 with the possibility of an extension to 2030 if a major funding application to The National Lottery and their Climate Action Fund is successful.

The Passport scheme is delivering active and sustainable travel, balanced and sustainable tourism and thriving communities across the 72 islands it serves.

During the summer, Project Manager Katy Beasley launched two new travelogues, taking the total to 4 covering each of our 72 islands at least once. Each travelogue features 20 islands and are based on different themes. The third travelogue is called 'Eat, Drink, Explore' and is a reworking and expansion of the pilot travelogue that featured only 10 islands and was not released for general sale. The fourth travelogue is named 'Wandering Our Islands' and is based around the theme of sustainable and active travel and slow tourism.

Katy reports continued growth in Passport app activity with more than 32,575 app downloads and 203,465 unique sessions at the end of August (up from 17,000 and 117,000 respectively for August 2023). There have been

37,754 stamps collected for each of the 72 islands covered by the app with 25,416 people using the manual unlock option showing that the app is providing inspiration for island visits.

Since launching in December, last year, Katy has seen 1,753 travel stamps collected, by users while visiting an island. A total of 1,100 experiences in the app have been recorded with the majority of the main development work now completed.

Marketing is a key element of the project, with activity across 4 social media platforms to promote the project, islands, island businesses and events as well as the travel stamps and travelogues.

In the recent Highlands & Islands Thistle Awards the Project was short listed for the Innovation in Tourism award.

SCOTTISH GOVERNMENT'S AVIATION STATEMENT WELCOMED

We have welcomed the opportunity to respond to the Scottish Government's Aviation Statement published during the summer and we propose to work closely with Transport Scotland, HIAL and Scottish Government to conduct and complete the strategic work required to realise the desired outcomes contained within it

- We feel well placed to play a prominent role in delivering change through the world-leading expertise that has been developed by a small interdisciplinary team that was formed and developed through the Sustainable Aviation Test Environment programme (SATE).
- The Highlands and Islands region has been at the forefront of understanding and demonstrating the significant opportunities emerging from a range of decarbonising aviation technologies. The emergence of these will affect a revolution and create a new transport category of "Sustainable Aviation". These technologies offer a low or zero emission alternative to existing transport modes and at significantly lower operating cost than currently achieved. Lower operating costs will reduce fares and promote increased activity and choice. The development of aircraft that have greater operational flexibility (electric vertical take-off and landing (eVTOL) Airship, Seaplanes and heavy lift-drones for example) reduces their dependence on expensive infrastructure and offers higher levels of connectivity and route development. This brings positive benefits to all areas of potential demand. In this scenario aviation will play a more important role in local and regional connectivity, will drive down fares, increase routes and capacity and see "airports" change in both role and functionality. Aviation will become increasingly attractive when compared to other modes of transport both for the user (lower fares, quicker transit and lower emissions) and local and national Governments looking to optimise capital investment and infrastructure investments across transport modes.

TRIAL OF AUTONOMOUS VEHICLES AT INVERNESS AIRPORT AND INVERNESS CAMPUS

HITRANS has been closely involved in a recent trial which saw two types of automated people movers used in and around Inverness.

Passengers were given the opportunity to ride in Aurrigo's smaller Auto-Pod to test the potential for a future dedicated service connecting passengers between Inverness Airport and the new airport railway stop and in a larger vehicle at Inverness Campus, serving the NHS's National Treatment Centre.



This trial was staged to gauge public perception surrounding autonomous vehicles and assessed the feasibility of introducing an on-demand, low-cost connected and autonomous vehicle (CAV) service to the region. By using autonomous vehicle technology, the project aims to enhance accessibility, reduce passenger travel times, and significantly decrease CO2 emissions, contributing to Scotland's NetZero goals.

HITRANS Director Randal Robertson said, "HITRANS are delighted to be a partner in this project which will help improve our understanding of what passenger transport might look like in the Highlands and Islands in the future. The trial tested two different types of driverless shuttle with both operations providing a real test of what this technology can offer both at Inverness Airport and Inverness Campus."

Project partners include the University of Glasgow, Aurrigo International plc, Stagecoach North Scotland, and Darwin Innovation Group Ltd., and is funded through Innovate UK and the Centre for Connected and Autonomous Vehicles' ("CCAV") Commercialising Connected and Automated Mobility ("CAM") competition.

HIGHLANDS AND ISLANDS HEALTH AND TRANSPORT ACTION PLAN

Work has begun to establish a Health and Transport Action Plan in the HITRANS area to improve options for the public to access health care at – for example - doctor’s surgeries and hospitals.

It is recognised that access to healthcare is most challenging in the remote, rural and island areas of our region and this is exacerbated by the fact that the ageing population within many of these areas have the highest demand for health and social care. Establishing a more cohesive approach to providing the health and social care is at the heart of the action plan.

HITRANS has written to the Scottish Government to seek their assistance in taking forward the recommendations outlined within a recent Scoping Review. Following a response from the Cabinet Secretary, it is proposed that we write to members of the each NHS Boards that operate in the HITRANS area (NHS Grampian, NHS Western Isles, NHS Orkney and NHS Highland and Argyll and Bute) and NHS Shetland, the Scottish Ambulance Service and representatives from each Local Authority, sharing a copy of



the Scoping Review and to invite them to an initial meeting to discuss the Review’s recommendations.

Modification of the aircraft used to serve the 16 island airstrips in Orkney, Shetland, the Western Isles and Argyll and Bute to make them more accessible for patients with mobility challenges is seen as a priority for early action.

A specific piece of work to meet the increasing challenges of accessing healthcare by residents in the Western Isles has seen the creation of the Western Isles Connectivity for Health Travel Working Group, which we are chairing. The group has been fostering relationships to improve integration of transport provision for health services and consider alternatives and will present its recommendations in the near future.

SATE PROJECT

We are playing a lead role in the Sustainable Aviation Test Environment programme (SATE), which aims to create the UK’s first operationally based, low-carbon aviation test centre at HIAL’s Kirkwall Airport, Orkney.

Launched as part of UKRI’s Future Flight Challenge, which supports the development of greener ways to fly, the first phase started in November 2020 and ended in July 2022. The second phase took off from July 2022 and is currently due to end in March 2025 following an approved extension.

Trials, carried out over 9 weeks using the Windracers ULTRA self-flying cargo aircraft, have been conducted between Eday, Westray and North Ronaldsay. The aircraft has a cargo capacity of 700L, a payload capacity of 100kg, and a range of up to 600km. Operators, Windracers integrated its flight schedule with the existing logistics network to establish potential opportunities. Streamline Shipping Group, which handles 90% of last-mile deliveries to Orkney and Shetland, used its electric van as part of the sustainable transport journey. Windracers is now planning to undertake trials in early 2025 across Shetland and the Western Isles, pending

CAA approval. A stakeholder event held on 10 September in Kirkwall offered local businesses and stakeholders an opportunity to see the aircraft up close and gain wider information on the programme.

ARC Aerosystems are continuing to develop the C600 aircraft from its initial tethered Visual Line of Sight (VLOS) flight last year at Wick John O’Groats Airport. Recent positive engagements with the CAA provide confidence that incremental untethered VLOS flights can take place early 2025, moving to full power flights by March 2025. Hybrid Air Vehicles (HAV) and HITRANS are continuing to develop full business cases for the commercial operation of the Airlander 10 aircraft in the region for passenger and freight services, building on initial concept and feasibility work. HAV will reserve early production slots for six Airlander 10 aircraft for the HITRANS region.

FASTLINE FASLANE

Plans are progressing to improve transport movement around the HMNB Faslane Naval Base, and in particular to consider the case for provision of a rail link to tackle the overwhelming use of cars as a means of accessing the site.

Preliminary work has seen consultants Stantec complete a Sustainable Transport Options Study in line with the Scottish Government's appraisal guidance (STAG), which focused on access options to the area. This was followed by the Options Appraisal Study, focusing on an Assisted Travel Scheme; Enhanced Local Bus Services and a Rail Option.

The study has now been completed and sent to Transport Scotland for their consideration. HITRANS will also be meeting with HMNB staff to discuss further steps.

Following completion of the Detailed Options Appraisal, three options remain for further consideration:

- **ATS Option** – Which includes the expansion of the geographic coverage of the service and increased frequency.
- **Local Bus Option** – Including consideration of five potential local services that can be operated in the morning peak to maximise potential bus patronage to the Base.
- **Rail Option** – A commuter service running twice a day between Dumbarton and Garelochhead, servicing a new station at Faslane. All options provide a feasible alternative to the private car by delivering opportunities for modal shift and arrival at HMNB Clyde at more attractive time by public transport. It will be important to ensure that the delivery of any option does not make the potential user worse off in terms of cost.

The next step is preparation of an Outline Business Case to identify an ultimate preferred option and to set out the approach to funding, procurement and delivery.

CONTACTLESS PAYMENT AT 50KW CHARGERS

On 24th November 2024, the Public ChargePoint Regulations (PCPR) came into force, mandating that all existing 50kW Chargers require contactless payment facilities.

These aim to improve access and customer experience, but there has been considerable concern over the implementation of these amongst Councils, as 41 chargers in the HITRANS area cannot be upgraded and need to be fully replaced. This will either happen through the EVIF programme later this year, when funding is released, or through the recently announced Contactless Compliance Grant. We are waiting to hear the conditions of the latter to know if it can be utilised, and also for clarification on what will happen to current chargers in the interim. To date, no existing chargers have been 'switched off' or are due to be before the end of March.

HITRANS and the Councils have been providing information to Charge Place Scotland & Transport Scotland, who are in talks with OZEV (Office for Zero Emission Vehicles) and the enforcement body themselves, the Office for Product Safety & Standards (OPSS) to ensure as little public charging access as possible is unduly impacted. We are waiting to hear back on the timing challenges of enforcement but have been told that there are no immediate plans or requirements to "switch off" any units currently available to the public on the network.

RECRUITMENT OF PUBLIC TRANSPORT AND INFRASTRUCTURE SUPPORT OFFICER

We have recently recruited Donald Morris to the new post to help support and maintain the provision of public transport information and infrastructure on behalf of the Highland Bus Service Improvement Partnership (BSIP) within Inverness and Fort William.

Donald will be responsible for maintaining the provision of roadside and public transport information and infrastructure. He will be based in the HITRANS office in Inverness but his duties will also involve travel within the Inverness and wider area (in particular Fort William) as required. Welcome to HITRANS, Donald.

ELECTRIC VEHICLE INFRASTRUCTURE SHARED SERVICE - UPDATE

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In January 2022 Transport Scotland announced a restructure of their electric vehicle infrastructure funding model. Local Authorities are now required to leverage in private sector funding to enable delivery of infrastructure at the pace and scale required to meet demand and encourage further car users to switch to EV's to support the wider climate change objectives, collaborating regionally where possible. The new proposed structure will allow Local Authorities to access £30 million worth of funding and aims to leverage in a further £30 million of private sector investment, bringing the total investment for Scotland to £60 million. The funding is aimed at identifying market failures to support local authorities in enabling a Just Transition.

Moray Council is joining Highland, Aberdeenshire and Aberdeen City Councils in their strategy, which aims to generate a revenue long term for further investment and utilises a hub and spoke approach to ensure charging in remote and rural areas is deployed as an essential spoke to the more commercially viable hubs.

HITRANS is providing a project management shared service for Comhairle nan Eilean Siar, Orkney Islands Council, Shetland Islands Council and Argyll and Bute Council, developing a North West Scotland EV infrastructure operational plan and expansion strategy.

Phase I (2025, operational plan) will update the existing asset portfolio in line with new regulations (PCPR) and events (3G and CPS switch off) to improve reliability and reduce the risk on the Councils as current operators.



Phase 2 (from 2026, expansion strategy) aims to further develop a network expansion plan that could attract private investment, reduce connection costs, address utilisation factors and effects, and further improve reliability through revised maintenance and communication solutions. A report analysing the telecommunications options for EV infrastructure in remote and rural areas has been completed, which will aid optimisation of charging sites when we procure a partner. A feasibility study into the proposed location for the 50kW+ chargers has also been completed, highlighting risks at each site and making mitigation recommendations.

DEVELOPMENT OF A DEDICATED TEST ENVIRONMENT AIRSPACE

SATE has been selected as one of six projects under the CAA Integration Sandbox that will help safely integrate drones flying beyond visual line of sight (BVLOS).

HIAL and Windracers have partnered for the Sandbox trial that will see operations across Orkney. The SATE airspace trial will facilitate the establishment and cost-effective uncrewed aviation operations on a commercial scale within Orkney that will fulfil key use cases around logistics, survey

and inspection. Learnings from the trials will support the CAA's ongoing development of policy and regulations to enable drone flights to be fully integrated with other airspace users.

ACTIVE TRAVEL UPDATE

People and Place Programme:

For this financial year, 2024-25, the People and Place Programme funded by Transport Scotland is HITRANS' only source of active travel funding. It carries a budget of £1.6M, of which £584,370 is revenue and £1,041,816 is capital. The purpose of the Programme is to deliver behaviour change and access to bikes, with the aim of increasing the mode share of local, everyday journeys made by walking, wheeling or cycling rather than by private car.

The Programme has four themes namely – Active Schools; Active Workplaces; Accessibility and Inclusion and Capacity and Capability Building.

The early focus was on mobilising the programme and recruiting staff, with grant agreements in place with the two National delivery partners Living Streets and Cycling UK. All posts were filled and new starts in place by the summer. Colleagues have now been recruited to three new programme delivery roles within HITRANS, and we have extended the contract of our Business Support Assistant in the Western Isles, refocusing the role on active travel behaviour change rather than sustainable transport. We have also recruited an additional eBike technician, Henry // // // // //, to work on the HI-BIKE project. Our Mobility Hubs Officer, Chris Finlay, has moved to a new job in Norway; we were sad to see him go as he did an excellent job in managing the HI-BIKE scheme through the turbulence of last year's transfer of operations from Bewegen to HITRANS. Now in charge of the project is Zeemon Erhardt, our operations manager, who formerly ran the Fort William element of the scheme. Welcome Zeemon.

HI-BIKE Highlights (and lowlights):

The eBike share scheme continues to be well used, although the Inverness scheme suffered a sudden bout of vandalism over the summer which led to the scheme being closed for a month while the damage to bikes and docks was repaired. This was particularly disheartening given that the scheme had operated for almost three years with no significant damage or issues. All incidents were reported to the police, with

some good cctv and bystander footage provided. The docks have been modified so that it is no longer possible to break bikes out of the docks, and the vandalism seems to have subsided. In more positive news, this year we changed the student membership from an annual to a monthly half-price subscription, and have seen an increased uptake.

Transport Integration Highlights:

As part of the regional cycle parking programme, grants have been made to NHS Western Isles for cycle parking at sites in Stornoway and Uist, and to The Highland Council for residential cycle parking within Raigmore Estate in Inverness. The eCargo bikes introduced as part of the eHUBS project last year will soon be available for hire at Rose Street Car Park in Inverness, through the HI-BIKE app.

Oban Transport Hub:

Consultants Arup have been appointed to design a walkway between Oban rail station and the Calmac terminal. The current arrangement is of poor quality with numerous changes in surface and no clear direct route. There is potential conflict between walkers, wheelers and cycle pushers with cars entering/exiting the car park, and also with commercial road vehicles on the pier. A recent site meeting involving Transport Scotland, CMAL, Calmac, Network Rail, ScotRail, HITRANS and Argyll and Bute Council was convened to identify the optimum route. It is hoped that a preferred option will then be submitted as a candidate project to Transport Scotland's Active Travel Infrastructure Fund in 2025/26.

Route and Branch: HITRANS Rail Strategy

A major study is to be carried out over the next two years to create a rail strategy for the Highlands. HITRANS are allocating £50,000 towards the cost of the study, which aims to identify shortcomings in our rail network and areas for development so that the railway plays its role in the move to Net Zero. Key to this will be the introduction of decarbonised rolling stock and greater use of freight on the rail network. We will work with colleagues at Nestrans, Tactran and SPT where we have overlapping interests.

VISIT TO STORNOWAY DEEP WATER PORT

Ahead of our Board meeting at the Caladh Hotel, Stornoway, on 20 September, the Board and advisers were given a tour of the impressive deep water port at Stornoway.



SHARED SERVICES UPDATE ON PUBLIC TRANSPORT INFORMATION PROVISION

It is now 10 years since the introduction of the shared service model for co-ordinating the provision of public transport information across the HITRANS area.



Delivered by HITRANS on behalf of the partner Councils (Argyll and Bute, Highland, Moray, Orkney and Western Isles), the quantity and quality of public transport information available to the public has been greatly enhanced. The supplier for the public transport information database has changed twice since 2015 with all five local authorities now using the DIVA system supplied by MENTZ (who provide the database for Transport for London). This contract was awarded in July 2020. From this system data is provided to both Traveline Scotland (for their suite of information facilities) and the company that supply the Regional Real Time Information contract (Vix Technology) which delivers the information flow and hardware assets at all the real-time

display assets across the HITRANS area. The prime function of the database though is to support the production of the static at bus stop information throughout the HITRANS area with information currently produced for in excess of 2000 stops.

Work to improve the source information received from operators is being taken forward in collaboration with the operators themselves and each local authority. This improvement is on an ongoing basis to ensure the output information received by the public is continually improving.

BOTTLENECKS!

The continued growth of the whisky industry, which has seen a 26% capacity increase since 2009 and is said to be a strategic asset worth £23 billion to Scotland, is dependent on improvements to the road and ferry infrastructure at key locations in the Highlands and Islands.

Analysis produced by consultants, WSP, who were appointed by HITRANS and the Scotch Whisky Association to identify bottlenecks, identified as key concerns: the reliability and

capacity of the Islay Ferry; the restricted width of the A95; and rockfalls and landslips on the A82 and A83. Additionally, the A96 remains a critically important route to the industry to be maintained and upgraded so as to not risk becoming a future constraint.

HI LIGHTS

WE HOPE YOU ENJOYED
the latest issue of our newsletter.



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