



## Mainstreaming the Equality Duty

### Introduction

The Highlands and Islands Transport Partnership (HITRANS) is the statutory Regional Transport Partnership covering most of the Highlands and Islands (Highland Council; Moray Council; Orkney Islands Council; Comhairle nan Eilean Siar and parts of Argyll & Bute). HITRANS works in partnership with these five partner Councils, the Scottish Government, Transport Scotland, and other stakeholders to improve transport services and infrastructure in the north of Scotland and on routes to the Highlands and Islands.

HITRANS first Regional Transport Strategy (RTS) was approved by Scottish Ministers in July 2008, setting out the key policies and proposals required to deliver our vision for transport in the region. To capture updates in terms of policy and trends in transport and travel since its publication in 2008, an RTS Refresh was undertaken in 2018 following consultation. A full update of the RTS was approved by the HITRANS Partnership Board in November 2024. Subject to Ministerial approval, it is anticipated that this will be formally adopted later this year (2025).

HITRANS RTS vision is:

***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.***

The high-level objectives are to:

- Make a just transition to a post-carbon and more environmentally sustainable transport network
- Transform and provide safe and accessible connections between and within our city, towns and villages, to enable walking, wheeling and cycling for all
- Widen access to public and shared transport and improve connectivity within and from / to the region
- Improve the quality and integration of public and shared transport within and from / to the region
- Ensure reliable, resilient, affordable and sustainable connectivity for all from / to our island, peninsular and remote communities
- Improve the efficiency, safety and resilience of our transport networks for people and freight and adapt to the impacts of climate change

The National Transport Strategy was also updated in 2020 (NTS2) providing a vision for Scotland's transport system for the next 20 years, with inclusiveness and equality key ingredients of the new Strategy. The NTS2 states that Scotland's transport system will provide fair access to services, be easy to use for all, and be affordable for all.

HITRANS Equalities Outcomes have been compiled based on available evidence of national and local transport inequality, in addition to surveys launched by HITRANS. This report sets out how equality becomes part of the structures, behaviours, and cultures of HITRANS and demonstrates how, in carrying out its functions, we are promoting equality.

## Equalities Duties

The Equality Act came into force on 1<sup>st</sup> October 2010 and brings together over 116 separate pieces of legislation into one single Act. The Act provides a legal framework to protect the rights of individuals and advance equality of opportunity for all. The Act includes a public sector equality duty which came into force on 5<sup>th</sup> April 2011.

The purpose of the public sector equality duty is to ensure that public authorities and those carrying out a public function consider how they can positively contribute to a more equal society through advancing equality and good relations in their day-to-day business. The public sector equality duty covers the following protected characteristics: age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, marriage and civil partnership, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation.

The Equality Act 2010 defines ‘general equality duties’ as follows:

- Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other prohibitive conduct
- Advance equality and opportunity between people who share a relevant protected characteristic and those who do not
- Foster good relations between people who share protected characteristics and those who do not

The Act also sets out that:

- Meeting different needs includes (among other things) taking steps to take account of disabled people’s disabilities
- Fostering good relations means tackling prejudice and promoting understanding between people of different groups
- Meeting the general equality duty may involve treating some people more favourably than others

## Specific Duties

The specific duties are the steps required to deliver the general duties as outlined above. The actions required are:

- A mainstream report (which includes employee information) to be published every 2 years
  - This report is to include the following:
    - Show how equality becomes part of the structures, behaviours, and culture of an authority
    - Demonstrate how, in carrying out its functions, it is promoting equality
    - Mainstreaming equality contributes to continuous improvement and better performance
- Equality outcomes report, prepared using involvement and evidence, published every 4 years
  - This report is to:

- Define a set of equality outcomes which it considers will enable the authority to better perform the general equality duty

## Meeting Our Duties

### Identifying the functions and policies relevant to equality

HITRANS is the statutory Regional Transport Partnership covering most of the Highlands and Islands (Highland Council; Moray Council; Orkney Islands Council; Comhairle nan Eilean Siar and parts of Argyll & Bute). HITRANS was established under the Transport (Scotland) Act 2005 and is a Model 1 partnership with a statutory duty to develop a Regional Transport Strategy for its area. HITRANS has a total of 22 staff as of 1<sup>st</sup> April 2025:

- Partnership Director
- Senior Partnership Manager
- Partnership Manager (0.6 FTE)
- Active Travel Team Leader
- Business Support Assistant
- Project Officer – People and Place (Western Isles)
- Project Officer (Public Transport Information)
- Public Transport Information and Infrastructure Support Officer
- SATE Manager
- SATE Project Coordinator
- SATE Business Manager
- Scottish Islands Passport Project Manager (part time)
- Smart Travel Choices Promotion and Marketing Officer (Job Share) x 2
- Project Officer – People and Place (Cowal)
- Project Officer (Finance)
- Project Manager (EVIF)
- Project Officer – People and Place (Orkney)
- Operations Manager (HI-Bike)
- Transport Integration Manager
- eBike Technician (HI-Bike) x 2

HITRANS is assisted in carrying out its functions by the provision of Human Resources and Legal Services by Comhairle nan Eilean Siar and Finance Services by The Highland Council. These services were agreed by resolution of the HITRANS Board and in effect form service agreements with the Councils concerned.

HITRANS continue to focus on developing and delivering the Regional Transport Strategy for the Highlands and Islands. Our focus is on enhancing the region’s viability and has the core aim of enabling sustainable economic growth across the Highlands and Islands to be supported by a modern transport system that meets the needs of our region. This reflects the Scottish Government’s purpose of increasing sustainable economic growth and moving towards a fairer society.

HITRANS works hard to attract external funding and focus on a partnership approach to delivery, continuing to develop its role in supporting better integration of public transport. At present, HITRANS is responsible for funding projects through its revenue budget and through bidding for funds from the Scottish Government, European Union, and other sources. In 2024/25, the Revenue Budget was £3,575,750.

To deliver on our aspirations, HITRANS continue to investigate a wide range of external funding opportunities and we have enjoyed success through our engagement with other regions across Europe. A large proportion of external funding project work is targeted at improving the availability and accessibility of transport services in the HITRANS area, such as increasing the number of publicly available charge points, trialling new transport services in rural areas, and introducing low carbon transport services.

The implementation of equalities policies is an ongoing process rather than simply the requirement to publish a specific scheme. Equal opportunities are at the heart of the HITRANS ethos, and we intend to meet our statutory duties in this regard. It must be recognised that we are also a small public authority with limited resources and influence and the scope of any scheme should reflect this.

### ***HITRANS Partnership Board***

In terms of the Order which established HITRANS, members consist of a total of 5 Councillor members from the constituent councils, The Highland Council, Moray Council, Argyll & Bute Council, Comhairle nan Eilean Siar, and Orkney Islands Council. In addition, HITRANS is entitled to have between 2 and 3 other (non-Councillor) members (paragraph 1(2) of Schedule 2 of the Order) which, during the period ending with the ordinary elections for Councillors in 2007, were appointed by the Scottish Ministers and have subsequently been appointed by the Partnership with the agreement of Scottish Ministers. The current Chair, Councillor Uisdean Robertson, and Vice Chair, Councillor Amber Dunbar, were appointed on 24 June 2022. The Partnership has a full quota of 5 Councillor members and currently has 3 other (non-Councillor) members.

### **HITRANS Regional Transport Strategy (RTS)**

HITRANS first Regional Transport Strategy (RTS) was approved by Scottish Ministers in July 2008, setting out the key policies and proposals required to deliver our vision for transport in the region. To capture updates in terms of policy and trends in transport and travel since its publication in 2008, an RTS Refresh was undertaken in 2018 following consultation. A full update of the RTS was approved by the HITRANS Partnership Board in November 2024. Subject to Ministerial approval, it is anticipated that this will be formally adopted later this year (2025). RTS documents are available on our website: <https://hitrans.org.uk>.

The high-level objectives are to:

- Make a just transition to a post-carbon and more environmentally sustainable transport network
- Transform and provide safe and accessible connections between and within our city, towns and villages, to enable walking, wheeling and cycling for all
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## Equal Opportunities

HITRANS RTS fully supports Scotland's Accessible Travel Framework giving disabled people an absolute right to live a life of equal opportunities; with the ability to travel as an important enabler to access those opportunities. Notably, the RTS supports the purpose of the Framework to:

- Support disabled people's rights by removing barriers and improving access to travel
- Ensuring disabled people are fully involved in work to improve all aspects of travel

HITRANS RTS states that each community across the region should be able to expect good transport connections to enable, support and empower communities to thrive – ensuring equality of opportunity across the region and in Scotland as a whole. Investment in good transport connections will ensure that communities throughout the Highlands and Islands have equality of opportunity to prosper and maximise what they can contribute to Scotland, locally and on a national scale.

HITRANS RTS supports the aim of equality of access right across the region meaning that people in all geographical areas, and people with accessibility needs, can travel in comfort, at an affordable cost and in a reasonable time to the places that they need to get to play an active role in their community. Services and connections across the region are often lifeline in nature.

## Employment Duty

Advice on Human Resource issues is provided to us by Comhairle nan Eilean Siar who have developed their own comprehensive Equality Scheme. Therefore, any advice supplied is compliant with our equality requirements.

As a result, we have made significant progress on several fronts and have developed, approved, published, and applied policies and procedures on:

- Capability
- Data Protection
- Disciplinary Procedures
- Equal Opportunities Statement and Policy
- Family Leave
- Flexible Working
- Grievance
- Sickness and Absence Procedure
- Violence and Aggression Policy
- Training
- Terms and conditions of Employment
- Stress Prevention Policy
- Smoke Free Policy
- Severance
- Retirement
- Relocation
- Recruitment
- Public Interest Disclosure
- Public interest (Whistle Blowing)
- Mobile and Landline Communications Policy
- Policy on Media Contact

- Performance Appraisal
- Information Management Policy
- Home Working
- Fraud and Corruption Policy
- Fire action plan
- Emergency Action
- Drug and Alcohol
- Diversity and Equality
- Anti-Bribery
- Anti-Fraud and Anti-Corruption
- Adverse Weather Guidance
- Accidents and Incidents at work
- Health and Safety
- Grievance Policy and Procedures
- Recruitment
- Risk Management Policy
- Code of Conduct

In applying equal opportunities in our recruitment procedures, we carry out monitoring of the candidates and have provided a web-based application documentation that allows applications electronically and large print access. This allows us to identify any bias in the selection process and enables those with disabilities to apply more easily.

The building that we currently use for our offices is a listed building, resulting in limitations in providing full accessibility. Therefore, HITRANS have an agreement in place with Highland Council that we can hold meetings in the Council Headquarters, which is located very close to the HITRANS office, should level access be required for anyone meeting HITRANS officers. The secondary office in Lairg has level access.

## Assessing and Consulting on the Impact of our Policies

### **Assessment**

The Regional Transport Strategy was developed and assessed in line with STAG (Scottish Transport Assessment Guidance). The STAG process examines the strategy in terms of Economy, Accessibility, Environment, and Safety & Health indicating the overall impact of the strategy in these areas. The process identified that improving public transport accessibility by improving the availability, facilities, and affordability of public transport as key issues.

HITRANS conducted an RTS Monitoring Report in 2019 that used 35 transport indicators to provide information and data on progress against the six transport objectives from our RTS. The findings of the RTS monitoring report highlight the unique nature of the HITRANS region compared to the rest of Scotland, and the challenges and advantages of delivering effective, efficient, and affordable transport in remote and rural areas. This is exemplified by the fact that there is a higher proportion of car usage in the HITRANS region and more people having access to 2 or more cars compared to the rest of Scotland. This is coupled with a greater likelihood of travelling distances of between 10 and 40 kilometres. This means that to serve the needs of the HITRANS population there needs to be a greater emphasis on fairer access to transport, as highlighted in the 2024 Strategy update.

HITRANS continues to update on performance against targets to the Board, with further enhancement of this process taking place annually.

### **Consultation**

A comprehensive consultation was carried out as part of the development of our RTS as described in our Report of Consultation and is published on our website. In addition, the 2018 RTS Refresh was informed and influenced by widespread public and stakeholder consultation. The RTS objectives were validated to ensure compatibility with Community Planning Partnership Single Outcome Agreement outcomes and priorities from the five local authority areas, as well as the National Transport Strategy.

As part of building the Case for Change for the new RTS, HITRANS sought comments and feedback from the public and other organisations. An Options Appraisal was then published in July 2023, which involved developing and appraising a set of options to help resolve the transport and associated issues identified and deliver the strategy objectives. The outputs from this process were developed into the final Regional Transport Strategy update.

Throughout the process for both the initial HITRANS RTS, RTS Refresh and RTS 2024 numerous organisations representing the interests outlined below were sought.

Health	Safety	Mobility	Commerce	Employment
Cycling	Emergency Services	Education	Bus	Heritage
Walking	Economic Dev.	Environment	Rail	Freight
Tourism	Road	Leisure	Education	
Young People	Air	Shopping	Elderly	

### **Monitoring Policies for any Adverse Impact on Equalities**

Built into the RTS is a monitoring plan associated with specific targets. A monitoring report is reported to our Board on an annual basis within our Annual Report. All Board reports require comments to be made on equalities impacts to ensure Board members are aware of any equality issues.

### **Publish the results of assessments, consultation, and monitoring**

The Mainstreaming the Equality Duty Report and Equalities Outcomes Report will be published on our website. Proposals related to the Equalities Outcomes report will be reported through our annual Business Plan. The Business Plan will include reference to equalities issues and proposals, allowing updating where required. Our Business Plan is published on our website and includes a specific section on equalities.

The implementation of equalities policies is an ongoing process rather than simply the requirement to publish specific reports.

### **Ensuring employees are aware of their duty to promote equality**

All our policies relating to employment and the strategy are available on our server. They are also subject to reports to the Board which again are available on our website.

Employee policies are circulated for comment prior to finalisation to allow comments to be made.

## Equality Outcomes

To ensure that equality issues are addressed, the following list has been prepared identifying outcomes acknowledged during the analysis of our functions and working environment, and subsequently how these outcomes will be achieved and measured.

Equality Outcome	Inequality	General Equality Duty	Activities	Link to Strategic Priority	Measuring Progress
<b>Promote transport accessibility in the HITRANS area by supporting accessible and accurate information on public transport</b>	<p>People can have trouble accessing the transport network because of safety, comfort, availability, connectivity, information, and assistance</p> <p>Consideration of communication needs of different protected characteristics to ensure people have the information required to plan and undertake their journey</p>	<p>Eliminate discrimination and advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not</p> <p>Eliminate discrimination in the planning and delivery of transport services</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Engage with stakeholder groups to understand information gaps</li> <li>• Conduct surveys to improve understanding of transport information needs</li> <li>• Further promote the Thistle Assistance Card and other travel accessibility schemes</li> <li>• Further improve real time passenger information</li> <li>• Ensure communications and language is accessible</li> <li>• Consider projects that deliver improvements to public transport information</li> <li>• Review HITRANS website for accessibility and begin the process of building a new website</li> </ul>	<p>NTS2: Reduce inequalities, help to deliver inclusive economic growth and promote greener, cleaner choices</p> <p>RTS: Improve the quality and accessibility (availability, affordability, information, and integration) of travel</p>	<p>Real time information software will inform accuracy of transport information and steps required to make changes. Action any requests if received on accessibility of information. Review success of project initiatives on public transport information improvements. Review success of Thistle Assistance Card marketing campaigns. Review HITRANS website and consider changes.</p>



<p><b>Gather evidence to provide better understanding of transport inequalities</b></p>	<p>Limited information available at a regional level on protected characteristics views and use of transport</p>	<p>Gather information and data to eliminate discrimination and advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not</p> <p>Take steps to meet the needs of people from protected groups where these are different from the needs of other people</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Gather views from analysing relevant sources &amp; reports available at a regional level</li> <li>• Conduct transport surveys and engagement activities to better understand views that represent the diversity of our people and communities and help to address any key issues</li> <li>• Use this information to implement support or changes that are within HITRANS remit</li> <li>• Further research &amp; targeted measures on the protected characteristics shown to be disproportionately dissatisfied with public transport in the area from our survey (disability, age, gender, ethnicity)</li> </ul>	<p>NTS2: Reduce inequalities</p> <p>RTS: Reduce barriers to participating in employment, learning, social, leisure, health, and cultural activities through the region</p>	<p>The baseline survey was launched February 2021. These baseline figures will be monitored regularly through research and engagement, and activities will change as appropriate. Develop further surveys and participate in European-wide research projects.</p>
<p><b>Support the sustainability of regional transport networks</b></p>	<p>Protected characteristic groups are more likely to use public transport, but regional transport networks are at risk</p>	<p>Advance equality of opportunity in the planning and delivery of transport services</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Seek to ensure that communities with poor access to employment by public transport and low car ownership / high deprivation will be the subject of targeted measures to address this</li> <li>• Work with stakeholders to protect key transport links</li> <li>• Take steps to deliver a more flexible, demand-responsive transport network so that</li> </ul>	<p>NTS2: Reduce inequalities, help to deliver inclusive economic growth, improve health and wellbeing, and get people where they need to get to</p>	<p>HITRANS has developed an accessibility tool to assist each member Council in monitoring the level of access to public transport across their area and provided training to Council employees on its use.</p>

			<p>services can be accessed when required – developed through numerous DRT pilot projects</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Further work on the CivTech technology solution to gather data on transport across the area, vehicle capacity and service gaps</li> <li>• Promote lift sharing and sustainable transport modes</li> <li>• Participate in projects with a focus on sustainable rural transport networks (e.g. SATE, RURALITIES).</li> <li>• Further advancement of our GO-HI Mobility as a Service platform</li> </ul>	<p>RTS: Reduce barriers to participating in employment, learning, social, leisure, health, and cultural activities through the region</p>	<p>The data gathered through HITRANS CivTech solution will aim to support the sustainability of regional transport networks.</p> <p>Pilot projects focusing on sustainable rural transport are regularly monitored and evaluated.</p>
<p><b>Improved access to public transport for those with mobility problems</b></p>	<p>People can have trouble accessing the transport network because of safety, comfort, availability, connectivity, information, and assistance</p>	<p>Remove or minimise disadvantages suffered by people due to their protected characteristics</p> <p>Encourage people from protected groups to participate in public life or in other activities where participation is disproportionately low</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• HITRANS will seek to ensure that people who have difficulties in using conventional public transport due to disability will be the subject of targeted measures to address this</li> <li>• Expand on findings from the Transport Equality Survey on accessibility issues being a reason to not use public transport</li> <li>• Develop projects with accessibility in mind</li> </ul>	<p>NTS2: Reduce inequalities, ensuring fair access to services we need that are easy to use for all</p> <p>RTS: Improve safety of transport and travel, improve the quality and</p>	<p>HITRANS officers work closely with health, Council and voluntary sector to improve integration of specialist transport services</p>

				accessibility of travel	
<b>Perform equalities audits, assessment of project activities and a forum for consultation</b>	Limited information available at a regional level on protected characteristics views and use of transport	Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Equalities is included as part of HITRANS Annual Report</li> <li>• Equalities items are included on agendas of all Advisors Meetings and Equalities impacts are considered within all Partnership meeting and reports</li> <li>• Councils report back to HITRANS on transport equality issues raised in their Forums, facilitated through the Partnership Advisors Group</li> </ul>	<p>NTS2: Reduce inequalities and help make our communities great places to live</p> <p>RTS: Improve the quality and accessibility of travel</p>	It was agreed that a regional forum was likely to be ineffective due to the size of the area and that each Council should consider transport agencies through their individual forums and report back through the PAs any issues identified.