

HITRANS BUSINESS PLAN 2024 / 2025

FOREWORD

The new year ahead will have challenges not least the continue pressure on public finances. As an organisation with Partnership at our heart it is essential that HITRANS continues to work so well with our partner Councils, Transport Scotland and others to deliver the best transport services we can. We are pleased that Scottish Government has recognised this in the enhanced role they are giving RTPs in supporting Active Travel behaviour change through the new People and Place programme. The Develop to Deliver report has been refreshed by RTPs to show where RTPs can better support public service reform bringing greater accountability to support improvements to transport across the country within the positive framework established through the Verity House agreement.

Our journey towards net zero continues and HITRANS are playing our part in our work in active travel, public transport and supporting the transition to low carbon fuels.

Working with partners to ensure that sustainable transport grows with more people travelling actively and flexible fares and planning / payment tools like our multi award winning GO-HI platform is helping to encourage people to choose public transport for those essential longer trips. In 2024/25 we will look to grow the user base of this app and explore the benefits it can bring to support more active and sustainable workplaces as a business travel planning tool.

HITRANS Business Plan for 2024/25 sets out where HITRANS will focus our efforts and resources in the year ahead. The Plan aims to link our work plan to the Regional Transport Strategy and sets out how we will work with our partners and stakeholders to achieve our objectives. As ever HITRANS will look to respond to events and new opportunities.

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. In 2024/25, we have several important actions to take forward. Public finance and the funding pressures associated with it continue to provide a challenge but we feel real progress is being made in developing efficient working practices and models through partnership

working. Our core aim is to support our partner Local Authorities, Scottish Government and other partners in delivering improved transport services across the Highlands and Islands.

We will continue to work hard to attract external funding and focus on a partnership approach in how we deliver change. HITRANS are now in a good place in terms of the framework under which we operate to step forward confidently to support the delivery of good transport services for the people and places of our region. While EU funding is no longer the option it has been in the past for HITRANS we have still secured funding through the Horizon Europe programme for the RURALITIES project and maintain good links across Europe with partners we could work with on new projects. This is evident in our being invited to be an Associate partner on INTERREG projects in the North Sea Area and Northern Periphery and Arctic Area.

Our role in the SATE project changed early in 2024 with the lead partner role transferring to HITRANS. This allows the learning from this transformational project to be more embedded in the Regional Transport Strategy. A key benefit that we are seeking to deliver as lead partner is to make the project and the opportunities available from net zero aviation to be understood and enjoyed across the Highlands and Islands.

Our Business Plan for 2024/25 sets out how we intend to achieve the objectives detailed above as well as moving forward several other actions. It sets out how the Partnership will work throughout the year underlining the need to be nimble at times. We are committed at all levels to focus on a strong partnership approach to delivery to ensure scarce resources are targeted in the most efficient manner to achieve the best result for the Highlands and Islands.



Uisdean Robertson
Chair



Ranald Robertson
Partnership Director

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The Scottish Executive published guidance on Regional Transport Strategies in March 2006. Paragraph 112 of the Guidance requires the preparation of an annual delivery or business plan to be submitted to Scottish Ministers. The plan should normally cover the first three years of implementation of the Regional Transport Strategy, and be updated annually to reflect local and central government planning and funding cycles and include plans for capital and revenue spending and borrowing.

HITRANS have produced this Business Plan identifying our intentions in 2024/25. The Business Plan again includes a two-year Research and Strategy Delivery Programme that will include an indicative programme of projects for 2025/26 and a forecast budget for the three years to 31 March 2028. This Business Plan is intended to fulfill our statutory duty and, after approval by the HITRANS Board, will be submitted to Scottish Ministers.

It describes the good governance procedures adopted by HITRANS and defines the areas where HITRANS may in time seek additional powers beyond the current Model 1 level. It forms the basis, with the detailed draft Delivery Plan linked to the Partnership's Transport Strategy which is currently being renewed, of HITRANS' ongoing input to partner authorities' transport prioritisation, the related and developing Community Planning Partnership Local Outcome Improvement Plans, and with Government for future bids for finance.

HITRANS was established by the Transport (Scotland) Act 2005 (“the Act”) and subordinate legislation, namely the Regional Transport Partnership (Establishment, Constitution and Membership) (Scotland) Order 2005. The Order came into effect - and HITRANS came into existence - on 1st December 2005. The Partnership operates in terms of the Act and the Order. Although “the Board” is not a statutory term for Regional Transport Partnerships, it is a useful term for distinguishing between HITRANS’ main decision making body, i.e. the members meeting together, from the Partnership as a corporate entity comprised of members, officials and other associated groups.

Membership

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 and 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.

To ensure that quorate decisions are achieved an annual calendar of meetings was agreed in September 2023 to provide notice for Members to include the meetings in their diaries. Four full Partnership meetings are scheduled for the calendar year. Meetings are being held in February, April, September and November. Should a situation arise that requires the call of additional meetings these can be called in accordance with the Standing Orders. Details of all Board Meetings, Agendas and Minutes are available on the HITRANS website.

Performance and Audit

Good governance of any corporate body involves three elements of a constant cycle: planning, performance and scrutiny. Proper scrutiny, which reviews performance and informs the next phase of planning of an organisation’s activities, is often most difficult to achieve. However, for organisations such as HITRANS, it is essential that there are appropriate mechanisms for review of all the Partnership’s activities.

Good governance is essential to any public body and HITRANS is no exception. The essential building blocks for governance are set out below.

Contract Standing Orders

The Standing Orders were reviewed and revised by the Partnership at their meeting on 15 September 2023. The Scottish Government had, in its provisions in the Establishment Order, set out certain minimum parameters for Standing Orders and these have been incorporated wholesale into our Standing Orders. The Standing Orders have used best practice from those of other organisations and are designed to meet the needs of the Partnership. They comprise not only procedural rules regarding meetings but also financial rules which dovetail with the financial regulations as well as the tendering and contractual rules which require to be followed for all contracts entered into by HITRANS. The contract standing orders may in future additionally require adapting to any new functional changes, as well as the normal requirement for periodic review.

Scheme of Delegation

In any corporate body, day to day operational decisions need to be taken by officials rather than awaiting a formal decision-making process. A clear distinction can be drawn between policy making and operational decisions and this is the purpose of a scheme of delegation which allows officers to keep the Partnership's activities running whilst leaving the main policy decisions to the Board itself.

The Scheme of Delegation was reviewed and revised at the Board meeting of 10 November 2023 and represents a set of powers tailored specifically for the workings of HITRANS as they currently stand.

Financial Regulations

As part of the Partnership's commitment to the development of its corporate governance arrangements the Partnership has adopted the Financial Procedures of the Highland Council with adjustment to reflect our organizational needs and structure. The financial rules were adopted by the Partnership at their meeting on 12 November 2021 and provide the basis under which all actions overseen by staff that have financial responsibilities and interests are undertaken. The Partnership is committed to reviewing the Financial Regulations and adopted the latest version of the Highland Council Financial Regulations in 2021/22.

Human Resources policies / procedures

Comhairle nan Eilean Siar provide the function of HR advisor for HITRANS.

Equalities

HITRANS, as a Regional Transport Partnership, has a statutory requirement to comply with requirements associated with Race Equality, Disability Equality and Gender Equality legislation and tackle discrimination on age, religious and sexuality grounds. The requirements under these headings have a common approach and therefore an agreement on the approach to fulfilling our requirements is required.

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 do 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.

The HITRANS Board approved an update of HITRANS Equality Duty in April 2023 and this was then presented to the Equalities Commission. The report is set out in two documents, these are:

Mainstreaming the Equality Duty. This report includes how equality becomes part of the structures, behaviours and culture of HITRANS and demonstrates how, in carrying out its functions we are promoting equality. Mainstreaming equality contributes to continuous improvement and better performance.

Equality outcomes. This report is designed to define a set of equality outcomes which it considers will enable the authority to better perform the general equity duty.

The implementation of equalities policies and practice is clearly an on-going process rather than simply the requirement to publish and monitor a specific scheme. Equal Opportunities are at the heart of the HITRANS ethos and we are committed to meeting our statutory duties in this regard. We will review the effectiveness of this change of process on an on-going basis and change



it should it be found not to be identifying relevant equality matters to the Partnership.

Interaction with Stakeholders

HITRANS has established a series of effective liaison groups with transport operators, service users, linked service providers, and the wider community planning groupings across the spectrum of its activities as detailed in HITRANS Partnership Approach to Delivery in Appendix 1. The Liaison Groups serve as forums for Members and officers of the Partnership, officers from the constituent Councils and wide stakeholder interests to discuss issues relating to policy, strategy and operations, and to form a consensus view (or otherwise) to inform the Partnership Board's deliberations. The Groups have no delegated powers and are not Sub-Committees of the Partnership. As such their meetings are not regulated by HITRANS Standing Orders but add significant value to HITRANS appreciation of issues and provide direction for further development of strategy and improved delivery by the Partnership and its constituent Councils. We continue to develop the structure and processes of these groups to ensure they best meet their function. They have proven to be invaluable in ensuring close working relationships with our partners and stakeholders. As indicated above the current groups with their respective remits are described in Appendix 1.

Powers and Functions

Services should be delivered in the most efficient way and with appropriate democratic accountability in promoting a viable and sustainable region into the future. This is particularly important given the challenges being faced in funding across the public sector. HITRANS looks forward during 2024/25 to working with the Scottish Government and its agencies to help deliver better transport services. HITRANS are focused on how the Partnership, Member Councils and other public and voluntary sector bodies can best contribute to improving outcomes for the people of Scotland: by driving up the quality and accessibility of services.

A distinction can be drawn between the powers and functions of HITRANS. Dealing briefly with its duties, these are, principally, in two categories. The first category relates to regional transport strategies and HITRANS, like the other transport partnerships, is under an obligation to produce a regional transport strategy and to monitor

and, wherever possible, ensure its implementation (sections 5, 9 and 12 of the 2005 Act). The second category is in relation to a more general raft of duties to comply with various regulatory matters both under the 2005 Act and other pieces of legislation (auditing requirements; Ethical Standards in Public Life, etc. (Scotland) Act 2000; Freedom of Information (Scotland) Act 2002; Scottish Public Services Ombudsman Act 2002).

HITRANS' Powers

In common with all transport partnerships, HITRANS' powers are set out by the 2005 Act. In summary, the powers of the Partnership, where it sees fit, are to (references being to sections of the 2005 Act):

- require funding from its constituent councils (section 3);
- give grants and loan in implementation of the RTS (section 3);
- borrow money for specific capital expenditure (section 3);
- employ staff (para. 1 of Schedule 1);
- acquire land by agreement or compulsorily and dispose of it (paras. 6 and 9 of Schedule 1);
- develop land for its own purposes - or if surplus for other persons' use (paras. 6 and 7);
- promote or oppose private legislation (para. 10);
- participate in community planning (para. 11);
- form or promote companies (para. 12); and
- erect buildings; provide offices, entering into building contracts etc. (para. 16).

HITRANS Functions

The legislative framework setting up HITRANS recognises that transport functions are currently carried out by other bodies and makes provision for transfer of some or all of these functions in certain circumstances should HITRANS, its constituent Councils and Scottish Ministers consider this is appropriate and adds value to the delivery of transport services in the area. Section 10 of the 2005 Act provides that transport partnerships such as HITRANS can carry out transport functions either instead of the previous function provider (usually the constituent council or a Government Agency); or concurrently with that person.

To exercise further transportation functions, HITRANS would have two options. The first would be for HITRANS to reach agreement with all the constituent councils and/or the Scottish Ministers that it carries out or supports certain of the transport functions which the councils are currently providing. This route is provided by section 14 of the 2005 Act. The second, as outlined above, is to apply to the Scottish Government under section 10 for additional functions.

Application for Additional Functions

Section 10 of the Act sets out the procedure which will require to be followed, should HITRANS resolve to seek additional functional capability. The precise functions would require to be the subject of Board approval. Thereafter HITRANS would require to consult with its constituent authorities for additional functions (s.10 (6)). It would in such circumstances be our intention to report to the Board on the results of that consultation before finalising any request to the Scottish Ministers. In terms of s.10 (8), the Scottish Ministers would again consult the local authorities on any request for additional functions.

The HITRANS Regional Transport Strategy (RTS) and related Delivery Plan do not indicate any area where additional powers might be sought at this time, but areas within which the Partnership might wish to examine the benefits of attracting additional powers in supporting improved delivery of transport services across the Highlands and Islands would include:

- **Ticketing** - Transport (Scotland) Act 2001: S28, 29. This area presents the strongest case for HITRANS to seek powers for direct delivery, as integrated ticketing is an area where the public and stakeholders would see the greatest benefit.
- **Supporting Constituent Authorities** - Where constituent councils may not have the capacity and resources to deliver local authority measures, the RTP could consider providing support to the local authority to provide optimum delivery of services, implement projects and initiatives relevant to the RTS, with agreement from the relevant authority. This could be the case in developing real time information systems and management, and management of demand responsive transport services.

For HITRANS to implement the regional transport strategy, projects, and initiatives, there is no need to transfer any powers from local authorities or central government to HITRANS, but there may be benefits in taking on additional powers to ensure that the strategy is delivered in accordance with the associated delivery plan should this be agreed as a future direction of regional transport governance.

Our Business Plan should be based upon a realistic estimate of the funding which is likely to be available to HITRANS. HITRANS 2024/25 Grant-in-aid from Scottish Government/Transport Scotland has been confirmed at £496,612.50 which is a 5% reduction on the previous year. This is to support revenue expenditure relating to core costs and the implementation of the Regional Transport Strategy.

Transport Scotland have not confirmed what level of funding – if any – HITRANS have secured through our application to the Active Travel Infrastructure Fund. Officers submitted proposals for a programme of projects valued at £780,000. Transport Scotland have indicated the next update on this application will be later in April 2024.

Transport Scotland have confirmed that HITRANS will receive a grant of £1,626,168 to support the delivery of the Active Travel Behaviour Change People and Place programme in the region. This is a significant increase on past funding for Active Travel and the reduced Grant in Aid for core costs is offset by this funding which includes the opportunity to cover staff costs for all Active Travel in house delivery from this dedicated funding.

HITRANS secured £87,000 from Path for All through the final call for projects from the Smarter Choices Smarter Places Open Fund. This will support promotion and development of the GO-HI app.

HITRANS received an additional £60,000 from Transport Scotland's MaaS Investment Fund to extend the GO-HI MaaS Platform for the remainder of 2024.

Constituent Authority Requisitions

The Transport (Scotland) Act 2005 requires the constituent councils of each Regional Transport Partnership to fund its net expenses, after allowing for any income, including any grants from the Scottish Government. In 2022/23 HITRANS constituent Councils contributed £200,000 towards the Partnership's net expenses. This represents match funding to complement the Scottish Government's revenue Grant-in-aid contribution towards nominal Core Funding. For the purposes of development of the business plan, HITRANS has intimated to the partner authorities a proposed requisition of £200,000 as core revenue funding for 2024/25.

The detailed Revenue Budget for 2024/25 is shown in Appendix 2.

Revenue: Other sources of funding

To deliver on our aspirations HITRANS investigate a wide range of funding opportunities. There are numerous European funding initiatives available to the Partnership as well as central Government funding. These opportunities continue to be assessed by HITRANS and we have enjoyed success through our engagement with other regions across Europe. Some successes that we have achieved in this arena are listed below and these represent current live projects:

- ERDF – Inverness the Smart City is a project that HITRANS will deliver in partnership with Highland Council with each local partner providing an equal share of the local budget contribution to secure a significant ERDF contribution.
- RURALITIES is a Horizon Europe project which commenced in October 2022. HITRANS budget for this project will be £311,111
- UKRI SATE project – HITRANS revised budget in our role of lead partner of the SATE project is £545,220.

Borrowing

Under the Transport (Scotland) Act 2005, HITRANS is permitted to borrow money for the purposes of its capital expenditure. HITRANS must have regard to the Prudential Code for Capital Finance in Local Authorities when determining any programme for capital investment. The key objectives of the Prudential Code are to ensure that the capital investment plans of local authorities are affordable, prudent and sustainable. No borrowing for the purposes of capital expenditure is anticipated during the period covered by this business plan. The Regional Transport Partnerships as a group continue to engage with Government and CoSLA on whether these powers and developing other potential funding opportunities may through joint working help support Government in delivering the Economic Strategy.

Reserves

It is the responsibility of the Treasurer to advise the Partnership about the level of reserves that they should hold and to ensure that there are clear protocols in place for their establishment and use. Guidance issued by CIPFA advises that local authorities and Partnerships, on the advice of their Finance Directors / Treasurers should make their own judgements regarding an appropriate level of reserves, considering all the relevant local circumstances.

Under the Transport (Scotland) Act 2005, constituent authorities are required to meet the net expenses of the Partnership. Section 122 of the Transport (Scotland) Act 2019 amended previous provision in respect to RTP Financial Arrangements to permit carrying a reserve across financial years. This is anticipated to be not more than 15% of the revenue budget.

The HITRANS Regional Transport Strategy is at an advanced stage of refresh with the draft Strategy now published and out for consultation. Comments are invited from partners, stakeholders and the wider public. Once the consultation process completed an analysis of responses will be undertaken and these will inform drafting of the final Strategy which will first be approved by the Partnership Board before submission to Scottish Ministers for their consideration.

Monitoring and Evaluation

It is important that HITRANS demonstrates that it is achieving its aims and objectives. The RTS provides a basis for monitoring and evaluation and the means of measuring success of implementation in a factual manner was comprehensively overhauled in 2017/18. Updates on performance against targets will be reported to the Board on a regular basis and included in the Partnership's Annual Report using the Framework that has been developed. Further enhancement of this process will take place annually.

Delivery Mechanisms

The Programme of Research and Strategy Development proposed to be undertaken by HITRANS during 2024-2026 to support delivery of the Regional Transport Strategy is detailed in Appendix 3 to this Plan.

Risk

HITRANS financial position requires stringent management and at times difficult decisions over resource priorities. It is important, therefore, that the maximum amount of resources is channelled into achieving HITRANS's objectives. There are, however, risks to us achieving these objectives. Risks are inevitable and, in practice, cannot be avoided. Risks, therefore, must be managed, understood and controlled if we are to meet our objectives.

Risk management is about managing the Partnership's exposure to risk, the probability of it occurring and the impact it would have. It involves identifying the risks, assessing them and responding to them. Risk management is not restricted to limiting adverse outcomes and it can be used to achieve desirable outcomes.

Consequently, HITRANS needs to be pro-active and prepared in the way we manage our risk portfolio. Incorporating a more formal approach to risk management in our day to day operations will enable us to deliver our responsibilities and work towards achieving our objectives. In fact, management of risks is fundamental to ensuring that we fulfil our objectives. The Partnership operates a Risk Management Strategy with a Risk Register which is reviewed regularly. This strategy is firmly embedded in the work of the Partnership and is subject to annual review through the Partnership board meeting process.

REVENUE

The Research/Strategy Development Programme for 2024/25 and the programme for delivery are as detailed in Appendix 3.

MARKETING & COMMUNICATIONS

The objective of HITRANS' marketing & communications strategy and Action Plan, is to increase awareness of our role and objectives among the travelling public within the Highlands and Islands of Scotland, engender change in public behaviour towards transportation, and indicate to our partners and other stakeholders that HITRANS is achieving its aims.

Our communications objectives through 2024/25 will be to:

- Provide Newsletters following Partnership Meetings to publicise the decisions taken at the Meeting and the actions currently being taken by HITRANS to promote delivery of the RTS.
- Launch the new HITRANS Website with content to make it more informative and accessible.
- Continue to make people aware of what we are doing and why, explained in terms of the high level aims of the RTS, what HITRANS aims to deliver as described in the RTS and the benefits that will accrue to business and the population of the region.
- Encourage behavioural change among the public in line with the objectives laid out in the RTS – e.g. making “smart travel choices” including: greater use of public transport, car sharing, personal travel plans, alternative and active transport options, etc, through highlighting the advantages, practical benefits and needs which these address.
- Promotion and marketing of the GO-HI MaaS Platform.
- Promotion and marketing of the MOOVE Flexi Digital DRT Platform.
- Delivery of the Regional People and Places Behaviour Change programme.

Establishment

With effect of 1st April 2024, HITRANS will employ 15 staff:

Ranald Robertson	Partnership Director
Neil MacRae	Partnership Manager
Frank Roach	Partnership Manager (0.6 FTE)
Katy Cunningham	Business Manager
Matthew Glennon	Project Manager (FASTER)
Vikki Trelfer	Active Travel Officer
Leah Mackay	Business Support Assistant
Robert Wilson	Project Officer (Public Transport Information)
Jayne Golding	SATE Manager
Jayne Groundwater	SATE Project Coordinator
Katy Beasley	Scottish Islands Passport Project Manager (part time)
Rachael Fraser	Project Officer (Finance) on maternity leave
Gemma Robinson	Project Manager (EVIF)
Chris Finlay	Project Officer (Mobility Hubs)
Rebecca Purvis	Project Officer (Digital and DRT)
Lukas Princ	SATE Business Manager
Rebecca Wallace	Project Officer (SATE)
Clare Harper	Business Support Assistant

The specific areas of engagement and activities of each employee in 2024/25 are detailed in HITRANS Partnership Approach to Delivery in Appendix 1.

Consultants will be engaged as and when required to support strategy, research and project requirements, in line with our ongoing practice.

Permanent Advisors

The Partnership invites input from a few Key Stakeholders at officer level on a regular basis through Permanent Advisor Meetings and ad hoc contact on specific issues. As well as a senior transportation officer from each of the 5 constituent Councils a representative from the following organisations participates on an on-going basis in our Advisory arrangements:

- Highland and Islands Enterprise
- Scottish Council for Development and Industry

Accommodation

The Partnership employees are located in 4 offices, at Kirkwall, Inverness, Jura and Lairg. One staff member has a work base provided by Comhairle nan Eilean Siar in Stornoway.

Equipment / IT Resources

To maintain efficiency and effectiveness HITRANS practice has been to replace PCs on a 3-year cycle. The redundant units are kept as standby units where serviceable.

Microsoft Teams is used to support video conferencing by Partnership officers both for internal and external meetings and to participate in conference calls. The Partnership officers aim to utilise these systems to minimise the need for unnecessary travel and produce efficiency gains.

HITRANS RESPONSE TO THE CLIMATE EMERGENCY – WHAT WE CAN / ARE DOING

The Committee on Climate Change has reported that the Scottish Parliament's target to reduce emissions by 75% by 2030 will be extremely challenging to meet, and must immediately be backed up by steps to drive meaningful reductions in emissions. Transport accounts for 37% of all carbon emissions in Scotland, and emissions from transport are now at the highest level since the Climate Change (Scotland) Act was passed in 2009. Cars, vans and heavy goods vehicles (HGVs) account for 65% of total transport emissions.

Addressing the climate emergency demands urgent action; a change of mode and mindset, not just fuel, is required. Huge benefits will result from a transport revolution which allows us all to shift to active and sustainable options, and improves all modes of transport. People using public transport are more likely to be active, which in turn improves physical and mental health and well-being. Affordability of passenger transport should also be a feature of this focus and it is important that a price competitive alternative to the private car is available to everyone.

Scottish Government have updated the Climate Change Plan to provide clear targets to ensure a coordinated approach is taken and set Scotland on the path to a Green Recovery from COVID-19. The Plan emphasises bold action to be taken now before the next full update of the Plan in 2025. The update commits to reduce average car kilometres in Scotland by 20% by 2030 and phase out new petrol and diesel cars and vans by the same year.

The changes to working practice during the Coronavirus / COVID-19 lockdown have demonstrated the potential to increase agile working and a more flexible approach to working time and travel to and for work. HITRANS will continue to support officers to work flexibly and engage with partners on supporting a reduction in the need to travel.

HITRANS works to improve transport services and infrastructure in the north of Scotland and on routes to the Highlands and Islands, and has a role to play in delivering the urgent action required to respond to the climate emergency.

Active Travel

Walking and cycling, particularly for everyday journeys, have a wide range of benefits; walking is the most accessible form of travel, and both walking and cycling can be quick, low-cost, convenient and enjoyable ways to travel.

The Scottish Government's Active Travel Framework brings together key policy approaches to improve the uptake of walking and cycling: "More people choosing to walk and cycle will reduce pollution and emissions from motorised travel and so help tackle climate change."

HITRANS' work in active travel can help reduce transport emissions by encouraging modal shift to replace short car journeys with walking or cycling, and linking active travel with sustainable modes for longer journeys.

Encouraging and enabling more people to travel through active modes; this will contribute to reducing emissions:

- Work with bus companies to enable carriage of cycles on buses
- Provision of cycle parking at bus stops / transport interchanges to integrate cycling with other transport modes for 1st/last mile of journeys
- Develop a series of active travel maps highlighting safe walking and cycling routes within and between communities
- Work with partners to develop walking and cycling friendly roads in rural areas
- Promote Traveline Scotland as a planning tool for sustainable travel

Ensure high quality active travel infrastructure is available to all; this can accelerate the desired shift in travel behavior for shorter journeys:

- Updating active travel audits for key towns in the HITRANS area into deliverable masterplans
- Funding for design of high quality active travel infrastructure and small interventions to remove barriers to active travel

Ensure that walking, cycling and wheeling is available to all:

- Pilot project to make ebikes available in Cairngorms National Park and Fort William
- Implement a public bike share scheme in Inverness
- Promote and support active travel through a broad range of partners, to foster a culture that enables and encourages walking and cycling:
- Working with 5 Local Authorities, CNPA, local community groups and Development Trusts, and businesses

HITRANS also host and promote Hltravel Liftshare, a platform which connects people offering a lift with those wanting a lift across the Highlands and Islands, with the aim of reducing single occupancy car journeys and therefore reducing carbon emissions.

Bus

While bus accounts for the large majority of all trips made by public transport, bus kilometres and passenger numbers continue to decline. Figure 6 below from the National Transport Strategy highlights the factors which result in the decline of bus and the interventions required to reverse this cycle.

Much of the Highlands and Islands, like other parts of rural Scotland, need increased support for operating basic levels of bus services that enable people to access employment, education and social opportunities in their local area as well as high quality supporting infrastructure (park and ride, high quality information and waiting shelters). With the right infrastructure and support, local bus services also offer an excellent focus to help communities transition to Electric Vehicles.

Things HITRANS could do / are doing:

- Support transition from diesel to electric buses
- Manage the real-time public transport Information system and on-street displays across HITRANS area with the roll out of an enhanced service.
- Continue to manage the public transport information database on behalf of HITRANS partner Local Authorities and produce at stop information displays for over 2000 bus stops in our region.
- Deliver the Highlands and Islands regional People and Places Programme to support increased active and sustainable travel across the region.
- Use funding from HITRANS participation in EU, UK and SG funding programmes to pilot innovative public transport solutions across the HITRANS area such as Digital Demand Responsive Transport.
- Lead implementation of MaaS pilot in Highlands and Islands.
- Established the Bus Taskforce Regional Steering Group to help initiate Bus Service Improvement Partnerships in each area that can be a focus for delivering measures to deliver the 'Circle for growth' and work towards Regional Transport Strategy aspiration of a minimum 3 daily public transport journeys in each area to / from the nearest regional centre.

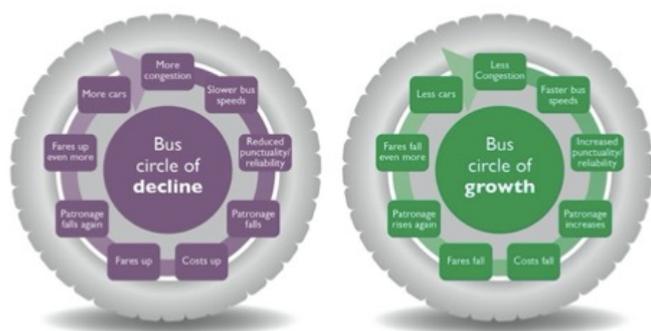


Figure 6: The bus circles of decline and growth

Whatever the causes of the decline in bus use, reducing passenger numbers risks driving down revenues and making some services unviable, resulting in their cancellations and, in some cases, communities becoming isolated⁶¹.

HITRANS RESPONSE TO THE CLIMATE EMERGENCY – WHAT WE CAN / ARE DOING

Rail

Scottish Government plans to decarbonise rail by 2035. HITRANS is keen to support this objective, and we already have a track record in promoting electrification (Inversparkie) and alternatively powered trains (Wick-Thurso Feasibility Battery Trains).

HITRANS has made the case for continued improvements on the Highland Main Line, through pre STPR1 Room for Growth in 2007. Later reports Pre-ten O Clock and Inversparkie demonstrated the need for the railway to be available for longer periods and electrified to reduce emissions, noting through HML Unfazed that STPR1 outputs have not significantly reduced journey time or enhanced capacity and capability. The aged, thirsty diesel HST fleet has a limited shelf life. An early decision is required on electrification for Inverness-Perth-Dunblane, and for proposals to be considered for Inverness-Aberdeen, in order for procurement to begin; delays will result in a suboptimal bi-mode fleet being deployed.

We have developed proposals (Platform4Change) for our largest station, Inverness, based on research into passengers' experiences and an understanding of the impact on operations of growth to 2043, noted in Network Rail's Scotland Route Study(2016). We began a masterplanning exercise on the creation of an integrated transport interchange in 2020, with co-located bus, taxi and active travel facilities alongside a maintenance depot that can fuel hydrogen trains, buses and trucks.

On our rural routes we seek alternatively powered trains that are lightweight, comfortable, with large windows for scenic viewing. We have examined battery trains for Wick-Thurso, using renewable energy in Caithness that is often constrained from going into the grid, and considered tram-train technology for the Kyle line.

All services must have full accessibility matched by accessible stations, recognising that this can be a challenge with island platforms, while cycle facilities on and off the trains must be enhanced for regular commuters and visitors alike.

Having pioneered low-cost stations (Beauly, Conon Bridge) we will support further new stations where the emphasis will be on carless access to places of employment and education.

Rural stations should receive derogations from mainline standards on platform length, height, illumination etc, while developments in signalling capability will allow more functions to be delivered electronically, including

remote monitoring of structures, and control of points and level crossings- all areas that have arisen from the Points North work undertaken by us since 2015.

Freight transfer to rail will be encouraged by rail electrification, and the possibility of last mile delivery by electric cart, and the payload gain of rail over higher tare-weighted hydrogen/battery HGVs.

Through Branchliner we will continue to develop the case for state involvement in freight wagon procurement as an alternative to funding expensive and potentially speculative infrastructure enhancement.

Ferries

Ferry services will have an important contribution to make to decarbonising the Scottish transport system. The introduction of the hybrid diesel electric Loch Class ferries (Hallaig, Lochinvar and Catriona) represented a significant step towards reducing the emissions from ferry services. However, these vessels still require a fossil fuel source and create emissions albeit on a reduced basis from earlier Loch Class vessels. Similarly the progress made towards reducing emissions from large ferries has seen a move towards a dual fossil fuel approach that supplements MDO (Marine Diesel) with LNG (Liquid Natural Gas).

The short term need to invest in modernizing the Scottish ferry fleet following decades of underinvestment is such an imperative that island areas cannot wait for technology to catch up and allow new major ferries on long routes to our islands to be zero carbon. The Small Vessels Replacement Project is an important step towards more battery electric ferries on shorter crossings. Also, consideration can be given to investing in reduced carbon emission ferries that could at a later stage be retrofitted with new engine technology as Hydrogen (and other sources) become a practical option.

HITRANS will continue to support efforts to decarbonise our ferry services by:

- Support R&D of hydrogen ferries.
- Continue to look at the development of fixed links to replace short ferry crossings which will support transport system decarbonization.
- Potential for Scotland / Highlands to become world leader on hydrogen fuel (lots of water resource & renewable energy potential)



Roads

In working with partners to deliver a Low Carbon Region, HITRANS continues to highlight that the Highlands and Islands still requires significant investment in our trunk road network and other locally significant Local Authority managed routes. This investment is primarily not required to increase the capacity of the network as in other areas but rather to bring our strategic road network up to basic design standards for the traffic which they currently cater for. This includes our continued support for the upgrade of the A82, in particular the section between Tarbert and Inverarnan and through Fort William and sustainable solutions on the A83 at the Rest and Be Thankful and at Stromeferry on the A890. We also continue to support the transformational A9 and A96 upgrades for which design and now delivery of initial sections is underway. Targeted safety improvements are also required on other key routes including several junctions on the A9 north of Inverness and on other key routes including the A95 and the main routes through Mull and the Western Isles.

Investment in this strategic network will: improve the regions competitiveness by reducing journey times, improving journey reliability and road safety and tackling perceptions of remoteness and peripherality.

There is also a major opportunity to ensure that the investment in committed road improvements to the A9, A96 and A82 can act as a catalyst to transitioning both freight and private traffic to electric, hydrogen and Connected and Autonomous Vehicle (CAV) alternatives.

In updating our Regional Transport Strategy and developing the first regional EV Strategy, we have set out how HITRANS will support the transition to ultra low carbon / carbon neutral road transport.

- Support improvement of existing road infrastructure, and addition of active travel routes, particularly where trunk road presents a barrier to active travel between communities.
- Ensure non motorised user needs are fully addressed in new road building programmes.
- Recognise the sustainable travel hierarchy at the heart of NTS2

Aviation

The First Minister set out Government's ambitions on reducing the carbon impact of aviation in the 2019 Programme for Government which set a path towards decarbonise flights within Scotland by 2040. This could see the Highlands and Islands become Europe's first net zero aviation region. HITRANS were already engaged with partners in support of reducing the carbon impact of aviation through our work on SPARA 2020 and working with HIAL, OIC and others to support projects that will see a move to the electrification of planes operating our internal aviation network. As lead partner in the Sustainable Aviation Test Environment (SATE) project we are now on the second successful round of UKRI Future Flight funding.

Through our business plan HITRANS will work with partners to:

- Support R&D of fleet conversion to electric for short-distance flights (eg. inter-island, island – mainland and Highland mainland to national centres)
- Seek funds to decarbonize airports and airside surface activity,
- Support low carbon surface access strategies for travel to and from airports.
- Deliver real change in the journey to sustainable aviation through SATE.

APPENDIX 1: THE PARTNERSHIP APPROACH TO DELIVERY

Summary

HITRANS is committed to working with all sectors and interests within transport in adding value to the transport services delivered across the region. This note indicates the structures HITRANS has put in place to achieve this aim.

Involvement in each area of policy development and delivery

The partnership has identified eight areas in which it would aim to work towards improving service provision as follows

Objectives

HITRANS wishes to ensure maximum effective involvement of all groups and will devise, in each service area, mechanisms and structures that will ensure that each group's views are heard and their input valued in ensuring the Partnership delivers improved transport services across the region. HITRANS has formed and will continue to develop advisory and consultative groups both within and between linked transport areas, to promote improved integration across the Highlands and Islands. Regular meetings of these groups are arranged to obtain valuable input and provide information on developments and proposals and updates will be provided on the HITRANS website.

Area	Description
Active travel	Walking, cycling, accessibility
Community and health transport	Third sector transport, social and health transport, car sharing schemes, accessibility
Bus	Supported and commercial bus services, and taxis. Accessibility.
Rail	Passenger and freight rail services. Accessibility.
Transport Infrastructure	Roads (both trunk and local), Rail Infrastructure, Airports, Ports, Harbours, and Ferries. Access / accessibility for all.
Freight	Cross modal, road, rail, ferry, air and sea
Ferry	Supported and commercial ferry services, national and local. Accessibility.
Air	Supported and commercial air passenger services, including charter and freight. Accessibility.

In each area HITRANS will seek active participation from the 5 constituent Councils, our Community Planning Partners, Stakeholders, Operators, Permanent Advisors and the Board. HITRANS will encourage its Community Planning Partners, Stakeholders and Operators to participate in policy development and delivery options appraisal. Operators will be encouraged to interact not only within their individual area of expertise but across the 8 areas and will be given the opportunity individually to discuss issues with Board Members. This will allow HITRANS the greatest opportunity to learn from their knowledge and experience.

Engagement with Stakeholders and Operators

The following are the HITRANS proposed arrangements for engagement and consultation in 2024/25.

Area	Proposed action
Rail	Users and A+C Groups Meet 2x Stakeholders 1x
RTIG	Stakeholders – meet 1x
Bus, Community and Health Transport	Meet Health Boards, and engage with Community Transport Operators
Active Travel	A+C forum Meet 2x
Air	Stakeholder meeting 1x
Ferry	Ferry Stakeholder Group Meetings
Freight	Meetings of Freight Quality Forum
Transport Infrastructure	Operator meetings, trunk, rail, air, meet each 1x
Equality Issues Development	Feedback from Council Permanent Advisors
Public Transport co-ordination	Meeting of public transport officers of each Council

APPENDIX 1: THE PARTNERSHIP APPROACH TO DELIVERY

Delivery Areas – Lead officer

Area	Administration	Development	Stakeholder Engagement
Rail	KC	FR	KC/FR
Bus, Community and Health Transport	PTI/RP	PTI/RP	PTI/RP/NM
Active Travel	VT/CF	VT/CF	VT/CF
Air	CH	JG	JG/NM
Ferry	KC /CH	RR/NM	KC/NM/RR
Electric Vehicle Infrastructure	GR	GR	GR
Mobility as a Service	PTI/RP/RF	RP/RF/RR	PTI/RP/RF/RR
Transport Infrastructure	CF	RR/NM/FR/VT/CF	RR/NM/FR/VT/CF
Equalities	JG	JG	JG
Integration of Services	CF	CF/VT/NM/FR	CF/VT
Public Transport Information and Coordination	PTI	PTI/NM/LC	SA/NM/LC

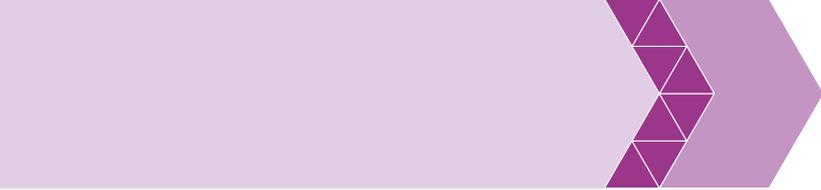
Other Areas of Partnership Activity

Area	Lead	Comment
RTS Development - Monitoring and evaluation	RR, NM	RTS approved by Government. Framework and targets produced to assess success in achieving outcomes linked to governments objectives
Community Planning – engagement in CPPs	RR, Council Advisors and Board member for each CPP areal	Critical that the development and implementation of SOAs and cross sector agreement of priorities reflects the importance of transport in all public and private sector delivery areas
Learning from European Best Practice – Working with partners in EU	JG	Intention to identify opportunities for working with partners to develop best practice, and investigating opportunities for engagement
RTPs – joint working	Chair and RR	Joint working to support government in achieving its Purpose and key national outcomes
Working to support Councils	Individual Council Board Members and Council Permanent Advisors	Engage with Councils to support the development of their SOAs and to support optimum development of best practice throughout the H+I
Joint Working between Councils	RR / NM / FR	Delivery of working arrangements between the 5 Councils to encourage sharing of resources and expertise and to support Government in delivering IIP and Regional priorities.
North West Europe Project	RF/ CF / JG / RR	Provide HITRANS input to North West Europe Region Programme.
Smart Cities ERDF	RF/ NM / RR / JG	HITRANS input to Smart Cities ERDF project.
North Sea Region Projects	CF / RF / NM / JG / RR	Provide HITRANS input to North Sea Region Programme.
Horizon Europe Projects	JG / NM / RR	HITRANS input to the three Horizon Europe projects and submissions made by HITRANS.
Travel Planning	NM / VT / CF / PTI	KC supporting in promoting sustainable transport arrangements by public and private sector employers and employees
Development Planning	NM	Inputting into the development of Council's Development Plans, and engaging in pre-consultation during development of large scale projects within and across Council areas

HITRANS General and Support Activities

In meeting its aims and objectives the Partnership is involved in a wide area of general and support activities. These are identified below with details of the roles of both employees and support service providers during 2023/24.

Function	Sub function/description	Lead Officer
Revenue budget management	Overall budget management THC Internal systems plus inputting to THC Individual budget line management	CM KC RR/FR/NM/VT/JG
Equalities issues management	Implementation of HITRANS approach to Equalities	JG
Board administration	Overall administration by WI Distribution of papers and local admin	DM KC
HR and Legal support	HR – CNES support Legal – CNES advice and support	HR/RR AM/RR
Travel Planning	Promote Travel Planning by Employers and monitor success	VT/CF with external support
Press Relations/ Promotion	Establish delivery mechanisms to best meet the Partnership's needs, including Newsletters	RR/FR/NM/JG with external support
Integration of Public Transport	Improve linkages between transport modes and service providers	FR/NM/CF/PTI/RP/VT
Community Planning	Engage in Community Planning across the Highlands and Islands	RR supported by KC
Study Management	Delivery of research programme	RR/FR/NM/VT/JG with external support
Project Management	Delivery of individual projects	VT/JG/NM/FR/RR
IT and Website Management	Support by external supplier RR/FR/NM/KC input to website	RR/KC
Meetings, Events and Diary Management	Organisation/management of events and Board Meetings	KC
Member/Officer/Advisor Travel arrangements	Organisation, management and arrangements for payment	KC
Employee Development	Complete Personal Development Reviews for each employee	RR/NM



Key		
A+C	Advisory and Consultative	
RR	Ranald Robertson	Partnership Director
NM	Neil MacRae	Partnership Manager
FR	Frank Roach	Partnership Manager
KC	Katy Cunningham	Business Manager
VT	Vikki Trelfer	Active Travel Officer
PTI	Robert Wilson	Public Transport Information Officer
JG	Jayne Golding	SATE Manager Manager
CF	Chris Finlay	Project Officer (Mobility Hubs)
GR	Gemma Robinson	Project Officer (FASTER / EV Infrastructure)
RP	Rebecca Purvis	Project Officer (Digital and DRT)
RF	Rachael Fraser	Project Officer (Finance)
SIP	Katy Beasley	Project Manager, Scottish Islands Passport
CH	Clare Harper	Business Support Officer
CM	Carolyn Maxwell	Finance Manager (THC)
DM	Derek Mackay	Partnership Secretary (CNES)
LC	Laura Cromarty	HITCOG Chair
HR	Gillian Morrison	HR support (CNES)
AM	Allan MacDonald	Legal (CNES)

APPENDIX 2: REVENUE BUDGET FOR 2024/25 AND INCOME FORECAST TO 2027/28 (DRAFT)

Budget Heading	Budget 2023/24	Budget 2024/25	Budget 2025/26	Budget 2026/27	Budget 2027/28
INCOME		Recommendation	Forecast	Forecast	Forecast
Argyll and Bute	26,200	26,200	26,200	26,200	26,200
CnES	18,600	18,600	18,600	18,600	18,600
Highland	90,900	90,900	90,900	90,900	90,900
Moray	46,800	46,800	46,800	46,800	46,800
Orkney	17,500	17,500	17,500	17,500	17,500
Scottish Government - Core	200,000	200,000	200,000	200,000	200,000
Scottish Government - Non-Core	322,750	322,750	322,750	322,750	322,750
SUSTRANS - Active Travel	100,000	0	0	0	0
Regional People and Place Programme		1,736,000	1,736,000	1,736,000	1,736,000
Active Travel Infrastructure Fund	1,055,000	500,000	700,000	800,000	900,000
European and Other Project Grants	188,000	1,117,000	1,000,000	1,000,000	1,000,000
Total Income	2,065,750	3,965,918	4,222,750	4,322,750	4,422,750

RUNNING COSTS					
Staff Salary Costs	449,500	400,759			
Staff/Member/Advisors Travel/Subsistence	14,000	14,000			
Partnership/Consultation Meetings	6,000	11,000			
Office Costs - Property	22,000	17,000			
Office Costs - Administration	25,000	25,000			
Total	516,500	467,750			

Budget Heading	Budget 2023/24	Budget 2024/25	Budget 2025/26	Budget 2026/27	Budget 2027/28
PROGRAMME COSTS					
Publicity	10,000	10,000			
Research and Strategy Development	293,000	185,000			
Specific Ring-fenced Project Costs	1,055,000	1,736,000			
European and Other Project Salary Costs	151,250	1,117,000			
Total	1,602,630	3,048,250			

FINANCE/HR/LEGAL/ADMIN					
	40,000	60,000			
Total	40,000	40,000			

Total Costs	2,065,750	3,575,750			
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(Under)/Overspend	(127,689)	0			
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Reserves at the start of the year	(64,000)	(191,689)			
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APPENDIX 3: RESEARCH/STRATEGY DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME FOR 2024 – 2026

Area	Project	2024/25	2025/26
Active Travel	CnES LADA (formerly SCSP) Programme	50000	50000
	Active Travel Infrastructure Funding	500000	700000
	Regional People and Places Programme	1626168	1800000
Aviation	Zero Carbon Aviation Region Opportunities	5000	5000
	SATE Project	300000	
External Funding	ERDF Smart Mobility	100000	0
	RURALITIES	50000	100000
	ERDF / INTERREG / SG Bid Project Support	3000	3000
Travel Information	Intelligent Transport Systems	15000	15000
	Real Time Information Development	15000	15000
RTS	Regionally Significant Scheme Development	30000	30000
	Local Authority Ferry Capital Investment	15000	15000
	Climate Adaptation Study	20000	
	EV Infrastructure Fund Shared Service	145000	145000
	EV Strategy	6000	6000
Rail	Rail Policy Development	30000	30000
	Inverness Station Masterplan	10,000	10,000
Bus / DRT	Bus Service Development, Bus Partnership Fund support	30,000	30,000
	Total Identified Project Expenditure	2950168	2954000
	Current Estimated Budget (R&D)	250000	350000
	Current Estimated Budget (External - EU, Sustrans, Transport Scotland Ring Fenced Project Support)	2,936,000	3,000,000



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