

## **Report to Partnership Meeting 12<sup>th</sup> September 2025**

### **RESEARCH AND STRATEGY DELIVERY**

#### **Health and Transport Action Plans Update**

##### **Purpose of Report**

To provide an update on progress made to establish a Health and Transport Action Plan (HTAP) for the Highlands and Islands since the last report, and to set out the next areas of focus for this work.

To provide updates on other transport to health-related work that HITRANS are leading or supporting.

##### **Progress Update**

Following the scoping review and previous reporting to CoHI, work on developing a Health and Transport Action Plan (HTAP) for the Highlands and Islands has progressed significantly. Given the close alignment between the two current CoHI actions relating to HTAP, this is a combined update covering both.

A dedicated workshop was held on 23 June 2025, bringing together representatives from NHS Boards, Local Authorities, HITRANS, and ZetTrans to consider the opportunities for a regional HTAP. The discussion explored how a regional approach could support more coordinated and complementary working across different geographies and governance structures, including Community Planning Partnerships (CPPs) and Health & Social Care Partnerships (H&SCPs).

As a result of the workshop, HITRANS has undertaken work to scope potential governance models for a Highlands and Islands HTAP. A copy of the proposed approach is attached as Appendix A to this report. This proposes that the HTAP should be overseen by a single, clear regional governance structure, with:

- Committed input from key players, including Local Authorities and NHS Boards.
- Acknowledged links to other relevant bodies, such as Community Planning Partnerships and Health & Social Care Partnerships.
- Clearly defined responsibilities.

It is proposed that HITRANS writes to all Health Boards, Local Authorities and Regional Transport Partnerships that cover the HITRANS and Shetland Islands seeking their support for this approach to governance arrangements and progressing a Highlands and Islands HTAP ahead of the Convention of the Highlands and Islands (CoHI) in October.

In parallel, a joint RTP (Regional Transport Partnerships) group has been established to share best practice and align efforts on Health and Transport across different regions. This group will

support learning, collaboration, and the transfer of effective models between areas, ensuring that regional work — including the Highlands and Islands HTAP — is informed by wider experience and innovation in the field.

### **Summary - Next Areas of Focus**

The HTAP should be designed to deliver against a clear final goal of establishing one regional governance structure with:

- Committed input from key players (at least NHS Boards, Local Authorities and RTPs).
- Acknowledged links to other partners/groups (e.g. CPPs, H&SCPs).
- Clearly defined responsibilities, including:
  - Identifying and monitoring actions towards delivering priority outcomes.
  - Identifying budgets and monitoring investment/expenditure.
  - Advocating for the work of the HTAP and investment in it.
  - Providing a coordination/secretariat function.

While it is not essential to secure the involvement of every stakeholder from the outset, it will be particularly beneficial to ensure representation is balanced across shared geographies (e.g. NHS Western Isles and Comhairle nan Eilean Siar together).

Importantly, it is recommended that action should not wait until a formal governance structure is fully in place. The experience of the Western Isles work undertaken to support improved access from Uist and Barra to Stornoway for health travel demonstrates that progress can be made now, and tangible projects should be initiated in parallel with the development of the more formal structures and approvals process.

### **Western Isles Transport to Health Working Group**

The task and finish group chaired by HITRANS will meet for the final time on 29<sup>th</sup> September 2025 to review progress against the recommendations set out in March 2025 (<https://shorturl.at/ddr4l>). There has been significant progress made against a number of the recommendations including securing capital funding from the Scottish Government that will enable the current operator to introduce a new aircraft on the PSO between Benbecula and Stornoway. This aircraft will increase the capacity on the route and improve a number of other aspects including accessibility and storage. However, severe challenges in accessing healthcare in the Western Isles remain. This is most acute in Barra, where the absence of a direct air service, means patients can face a journey of over 9hrs to access services at Western Isles Hospital in Stornoway.

### **Recommendations**

Members are invited to:

1. Note the progress update since April 2025.
2. Endorse the approach to developing governance arrangements for the HTAP
3. Agree that HITRANS writes to all Health Boards, Local Authorities and Regional Transport Partnerships that cover the HITRANS and Shetland Islands seeking their support for this approach to governance arrangements.
4. Agree that early actions and projects should be progressed in parallel with the formalisation of governance structures.

## **RISK REGISTER**

### RTS Delivery

Impact – Positive

Comment: Establishing an HTAP is a key action within the RTS Delivery Plan. Progressing governance discussions while also delivering early actions demonstrates momentum and commitment.

### Policy

Impact – Positive

Comment: Supports national priorities in the Transport to Health Delivery Plan and National Transport Strategy and strengthens local partnership working across health and transport.

### Financial

Impact – Neutral/Positive

Comment: Resources have supported initial scoping and workshops. Future costs will depend on governance model and agreed actions, with opportunities for joint resourcing across agencies.

### Equality

Impact – Positive

Comment: HTAP development directly supports improved access to healthcare for communities most disadvantaged by geography, age, and inequality of provision.

**Report by:** Neil MacRae  
**Designation:** Senior Partnership Manager  
**Date:** 1<sup>st</sup> September 2025