

Progressing a Health & Transport Action Plan

Date: 2 September 2025

1. Introduction

In late 2024, HITRANS commissioned an independent scoping review from to determine whether a Regional Health & Transport Action Plan (HTAP) may be able to provide benefits for the Highlands & Islands and Shetland region¹. This followed several discussions on the topics between HITRANS and regional partners, and the Scottish Government's Transport to Health Delivery Plan², notably including its Commitment 19: *"The Scottish Government will support Regional Transport Partnerships to develop their own plans around Transport to Health. An example of this will be the development of a Health and Transport Action Plan for the Highlands and Islands region."*

The scoping review identified that, subject to a number of prerequisites, an HTAP could add value in the Highlands & Islands and Shetland (the process, recommendations and prerequisites of the scoping review are summarised in the appendix to this note).

HITRANS subsequently convened a workshop of predominantly public sector partners from both health and transport sectors on 23 June 2025 in order to discuss the findings of the scoping review, assess support for the concept of a regional HTAP, and identify priorities and constraints to action.

The workshop was attended by representatives of:

- HITRANS;
- NHS Shetland, NHS Orkney, NHS Western Isles, NHS Highland;
- ZetTrans/Shetland Islands Council, Orkney Islands Council, Comhairle Nan Eilean Siar, Highland Council, Argyll & Bute Council.

Attendees agreed with the scoping review's findings that an HTAP for the region could add value over and above other activities, with a widely-recognised potential for an HTAP to help with improving partnership working and knowledge sharing, including improving the evidence base on which decisions are made.

In terms of priority topic themes, the group identified that improving access to healthcare should be the key focus of an HTAP, with NHS staff travel also being considered. Additionally, it noted that promoting active and sustainable travel is an important aspiration for communities throughout the region and something to which an HTAP could add value. The discussion also reinforced that care is needed to ensure that there is appropriate governance and resource to deliver an HTAP, to ensure that it realises its value and complements other structures and initiatives already in place.

This note outlines a recommended approach to achieving an effective governance structure for an HTAP, building on lessons learned in the development and delivery of similar plans elsewhere.

¹ <https://hitrans.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/04/Item-14-Appendix-A-HTAP-Scoping-Review-Feb-2025.pdf>

² <https://www.gov.scot/binaries/content/documents/govscot/publications/strategy-plan/2024/10/transport-health-delivery-plan/documents/transport-health-delivery-plan/transport-health-delivery-plan/govscot%3Adocument/transport-health-delivery-plan.pdf>

2. HTAP Governance

The final scoping review (February 2025) noted that "*The development and implementation of the HTAP should be subject to a clear governance structure comprising, as a minimum, senior representatives of every partner organisation, and this structure should have clear terms of reference*".

The June workshop noted amongst the prerequisites of success for an HTAP in the Highlands & Islands:

- Cooperation from full range of partners, including the Scottish Ambulance Service;
- Strong regional governance and guidance, with more localised project action groups as appropriate;
- Well connected to existing structures, including Community Planning Partnerships;
- Resources to coordinate and contribute to actions;
- Commitment to support from partners.

2.1 Outcome recommendation

HITRANS recommendation is that if there is to be a regional HTAP it should have one clear regional governance structure. This should have:

1. Committed input from key partners (with these partners as a minimum being HITRANS, Local Authorities, Health Boards and the Scottish Ambulance Service) to support the aims and process of the HTAP as set out in clear terms of reference;
2. Acknowledged links to other partners, groups and structures (including Community Planning Partnerships, Health & Social Care Partnerships and third sector delivery organisations) and a willingness to work with them where appropriate;
3. Clear responsibilities for HTAP delivery setting out how partners will collectively:
 - a. Identify priority actions and monitor their progress towards delivering agreed outcomes;
 - b. Identify budgets and monitor investment/expenditure;
 - c. Advocate the work of the HTAP and investment in it;
4. Senior level representation of partner organisations with progress on HTAP delivery and implementation reported on within members respective governance structures;
5. A coordination/secretariat function.

Given the number of potential partners and their differing priorities (across the Highlands & Islands and Shetland region, there are two Regional Transport Partnerships, five Health Boards, and six Local Authorities), it is not considered essential that commitment is achieved from every one of them before an HTAP is formally constituted. However, it would be beneficial to have at least the commitment of partners which represent the same geographies (for example NHSWI & CnES), in order that they can work to support HTAP initiatives that are of relevance to the communities they serve.

It is also recommended that HITRANS will on behalf of partners approach the Scottish Government and seek their support towards progressing the commitments in the Transport to Health Delivery Plan by contributing to HTAP discussions and providing some financial contribution at least to coordination and secretariat activities.

2.2 Interim recommendation

Experience shows that:

- Achieving formal commitment from organisations to support a new initiative can take many months; but that
- Some of the benefits of improved coordination of health and transport delivery can be achieved without a formal HTAP in place.

The latter of these has been proven within the region by the recent work to improve transport to healthcare in the Western Isles. In that, a range of partners came together to share information on community needs and on opportunities and constraints to changes to both transport and healthcare services. It led to several specific actions being identified and work is underway to deliver them. This provides a good model for the identification and delivery of specific actions which could be used as a template for HTAP activity once formal governance structures are in place.

However, it is recommended that all partners consider whether there are specific locations and/or topics on which they would support priority actions and, if other appropriate partners are also willing to support, then activity is prioritised on during the period during which an HTAP is being formally constituted .

3. Inputs from and benefits to partner organisations

In order to facilitate the effective governance and delivery of a regional HTAP, partners should expect to need to:

- Dedicate staff time in order to:
 - Attend HTAP planning/governance meetings;
 - Advocate HTAP issues/opportunities within their organisations and externally;
 - Provide evidence to support improved decision making by other partners;
- Consider whether and how changes to their own programmes or practices could aid the delivery of wider regional outcomes.
- Report on their organisations progress against relevant commitments set out in the Scottish Governments Transport to Health Action Plan (October 2024)

The primary benefits to partner organisations of participating in an effective HTAP are listed below. These are drawn from experience of HTAPs elsewhere, of recent experience of activity to improve coordination of healthcare and transport delivery within the region (notably in the Western Isles) and from comments made by partners at the June workshop.

- Improved evidence base of relevant issues for decision making, leading to better decisions being made and improved outcomes;
- Improved efficiency of service delivery, resulting in potential cost savings and/or better outcomes;
- Potential to access increased funding for delivery of good value projects.

Wider benefits to patients, carers and other members of communities from improved service delivery can also be delivered.

Appendix: Regional Health and Transport Action Plan Scoping Review

Purpose and process

The scoping review:

- Provided the context of the interactions between transport and health;
- Summarised experience from elsewhere and the transferable lessons learned from that experience;
- Identified the topic areas in which a new Action Plan for the Highlands & Islands region could (and could not) add additional value in comparison with business-as-usual activity, which in summary are:
 - **For transport and public health:** there is limited potential for an HTAP to add additional value;
 - **For promoting active travel:** a regional plan could increase focus as there is potential for improved joint working between organisations to lead to better outcomes;
 - **For access to healthcare:** the lack of coordination between transport and health for access has long been recognised and, whilst there are many local initiatives which have sought to make improvements, access to healthcare remains poorly coordinated at a regional level and the potential for improved outcomes is significant;
 - **For NHS staff travel:** the opportunities and constraints for change are anticipated to largely fall within the NHS's remit; as such, the scope for additional benefit to be realised by a cross-sectoral HTAP may be limited, but may remain worthy of more detailed consideration;
- Engaged with key regional stakeholders to collate their views on the concept of a regional plan, of the topics to which they felt a new plan could add value, and the constraints which would challenge its effectiveness.

Recommendations

At the conclusion of the review, the report's authors makes the following recommendations to HITRANS and partners in relation to an HTAP:

- Recommendation 1: There is, subject to certain prerequisites outlined below, potential for an HTAP to add value to shared objectives and improved outcomes in the Highlands & Islands, so it is recommended that HITRANS leads the exploration of the opportunity in more detail in conjunction with potential partners;
- Recommendation 2: As both ZetTrans and NHS Shetland are interested and there are many common issues, there is merit in expanding the scope of a Highlands & Islands HTAP to cover Shetland;
- Recommendation 3: An HTAP should take improving access to healthcare as its dominant theme, but this should take a broad-ranging view of the topic, covering access to primary, secondary and tertiary care, a full range of transport modes, and all communities across the region before determining priorities for action. It should then initially focus efforts on a realising an achievable number of specific interventions, rather than seeking to address all identified problems from the outset;
- Recommendation 4: It is also worth considering whether an HTAP could add value to efforts to promote active travel and to reduce the requirements for NHS staff travel;
- Recommendation 5: It is unlikely that an HTAP would add value to efforts to reduce the adverse impacts of transport on public health, so this should not be expected to be a core topic;
- Recommendation 6: Work to collate a stronger evidence base of the outcome problems relating to access to healthcare in the region and their root causes should be a key priority action of any HTAP;

- Recommendation 7: As it may be difficult to secure commitment to the HTAP from all potential regional partners (all Local Authorities, NHS Boards and others) in the short term, an HTAP could be developed initially just for those parts of the region where there is partner interest. However, it should be progressed only in geographic areas in which there is commitment from both the NHS and Local Authority (e.g. The Highland Council and NHS Highland, CnES and NHSWI), and it would be a further benefit to have formal approval from relevant Health & Social Care Partnerships.

It was also recommended that the following are prerequisites for an HTAP, and that efforts to develop a plan are not pursued if they cannot be met:

- Prerequisite 1: Progress only with partners where there is committed senior level buy-in, an appointed internal champion that can coordinate activities, and a commitment from partners to report progress and outcomes to their respective boards;
- Prerequisite 2: Progress only if there is to be some staff resource dedicated to the HTAP in order to, as a minimum, coordinate partners' actions. It is suggested that each partner organisation should make a commitment of financial investment or of staff time to facilitate this;
- Prerequisite 3: If an HTAP is to be developed, it should have a recognised leadership team drawn from all partner organisations, which should have clearly defined responsibilities for plan development, implementation and progress monitoring.

Additionally, it was suggested that HITRANS:

- Request Scottish Government assistance with an HTAP, especially with respect to encouraging potential partners to participate and with match funding for financial input;
- Work with Nestrans to share lessons and build a wider body of evidence of the benefits of joint planning of transport and health delivery, and also determine whether other RTPs are interested in supporting joint working.