



Minute of Meeting held in the Orkney Islands
Council Chamber, school Place, Kirkwall and
virtually through MS Teams on Friday 12
September 2025 at 9.30am

PRESENT

Uisdean Robertson, Comhairle nan Eilean Siar (Chair)
Amber Dunbar, Moray Council (Vice-Chair)
Kristopher Leask, Orkney Islands Council
Michael Green, Highland Council
Naomi Bremner, Non-Councillor Member
Shona MacLennan, Non-Councillor Member
Robert Andrew, Non-Councillor Member

APOLOGIES

Caroline Pieraccini, The Highland Council
Jayne Golding, HITRANS
Derek Mackay, CnES
John Armour, Argyll and Bute Council
Gareth Waterson, Orkney Islands Council
Grant Campbell, Prosper
Linda Cunningham, Comhairle nan Eilean Siar
Nicholas Sobey, HIE
Malcolm Maceod, Highland
Ken Gowans, The Highland Council

IN ATTENDANCE

Ranald Robertson, Partnership Director
Frank Roach, Partnership Manager
Neil MacRae, Senior Partnership Manager
Jennifer Johnstone, The Highland Council
Gordon Blair, Argyll and Bute Council
Fergus Murray, Argyll and Bute Council
James Buck Orkney Islands Council
Laura Cromarty, Orkney Islands Council
Colm Fraser, Comhairle nan Eilean Siar
Timothy Mackay, Moray Council
Vikki Trelfer, HITRANS
Gemma Robinson, HITRANS
Katy Beasley, HITRANS
Robert Wilson, HITRANS
John Ross, HITRANS
Jayne Gourley, HITRANS
Shona Hadwen, Comhairle nan Eilean Siar
Tracey Urry, Highland Council
David Fraser, Audit Scotland
Pamela Morrison, Audit Scotland

Declaration of Interests Mr Robert Andrew declared that he had retired as Stagecoach Scotland Regional Director in June 2020 and acted as an advisor to Scottish Citylink on a very limited basis.

MINUTES

Minute of Meeting of 25 April 2025 1 The Minute of Meeting of 25 April 2025 was **approved**.

Matters Arising 2 There were no matters arising.

FINANCE

Revenue Budget Monitoring Report – 1 April 2024 to 31 March 2025 3 With reference to item 3 of the Minute of Meeting of 25 April 2025, Ms Jennifer Johnstone, Partnership Treasurer, submitted a Report setting out the final outturn revenue position for the year ended 31 March 2025 and detailing the current position, year end projection, and major issues and variances.

It was agreed to approve the information in the Report and the attached schedule showing the final outturn revenue monitoring position for the year ended 31 March 2025.

Revenue Budget Monitoring Report – 1 April 2025 to 31 August 2025 4 With reference to item 3 of the Minute of Meeting of 25 April 2025, Ms Jennifer Johnstone, Partnership Treasurer, submitted a Report setting out the revenue monitoring position for the period 31 August 2025 and the projected year end position.

It was agreed to approve the information in the Report and the attached schedule showing the revenue monitoring position for the period to 31 August 2025.

RESEARCH AND STRATEGY DELIVERY

Research/Strategy Development Programme for 2025/26 5 With reference to item 7 of the Minute of Meeting of 25 April 2025, Mr Ranald Robertson, Partnership Director submitted, a Report providing an update on progress with delivery of the Research and Strategy Development programme and sought approval of amendments to the programme to reflect commitments made and changing priorities and funding opportunities identified since approval of the 2025/26 Business Plan at the Partnership meeting on 25 April 2025.

It was agreed to note the amendments to the Research and Strategy Development Programme 2025/26 as detailed in the Appendix to the Report.

Regional Transport Strategy Delivery Plan 6 With reference to item 12 of the Minute of Meeting of 25 April 2025, Mr Neil Macrae, Senior Partnership Manager, submitted a Report introducing the 1st Regional Transport Strategy (RTS) Delivery Plan. The Report stated that HITRANS updated RTS was adopted by Partnership Members following confirmation of Ministerial approval on 13 May 2025 and that a formatted version of the document was being developed for the Parliament reception on 23 September 2025.

The Report detailed an updated summary of some of the key actions set out in the draft which HITRANS would seek to implement over the timeframe of the 1st Delivery Plan covering the period up to Summer 2027. These actions, and others set out in the 1st Delivery Plan complemented a wide range of ongoing work that HITRANS would continue to undertake in support of objectives and policies set out in the updated RTS.

It was agreed to:

- (1) note the Report; and**
- (2) approve the 1st Delivery Plan as attached at the Appendix to the Report.**

Rail Roundup	7	With reference to item 8 of the Minute of Meeting of 25 April 2025, Mr Frank Roach, Partnership Manager, submitted a Report providing an update on the following current rail matters across the area: • Inverness Station Masterplan • Viaduct via Rail (Feasibility Study re additional timetable paths on the West Highland Line was provided at Appendix 1 to the Report) • Oban (Integration Summary Report produced by Ove Arup & Partners Ltd was provided at Appendix 2 to the Report) • Rail Development Strategy Route and Branch • Peak Fares • Faslane • Power to Rail • Altnabreac • Alcohol on Trains
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It was agreed to:

- (1) note the Report; and**
- (2) approve the recommendation to resubmit the Oban scheme to the Active Travel Infrastructure Fund Tier 2, and to outline our reasons to Transport Scotland.**

Active Travel Update	8	With reference to item 9 of the Minute of Meeting of 25 April 2025, Ms Vikki Trelfer, Active Travel Team Leader, submitted a Report providing an update on the delivery of the People and Place Programme funded by Transport Scotland, and other Active Travel projects in which HITRANS and Partner Local Authorities are involved.
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The Report provided information on the key Themes of 2025-26

- Active Schools and Young People
- Active Workplaces
- Capacity & Capability Building
- Accessibility & Inclusion
- Sustainable Transport

The Active Travel Team Leader has begun work on a revised and updated Active Travel Strategy, with the intention of bringing a draft to the Board in the Spring.

It was agreed to note the Report.

People and Place Programme 2024/25 Evaluation Report	9	With reference to item 9 of the Minute of Meeting of 25 April 2025, Ms Vikki Trelfer, Active Travel Team Leader, submitted a Report providing a preview of the Evaluation Report for the 2024-25 People and Place Programme, which was submitted to Transport Scotland at the end of July and would be published on the HITRANS website in the People & Place section. The full Evaluation Report was provided as an Appendix to the Report.
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It was agreed note the Report.

Fort William Integrated Transport Plan 10 With reference to item 15 of the Minute of Meeting of 25 April 2025, Mr Neil Macrae, Senior Partnership Manager submitted a Report providing an update on progress to undertake an Integrated Transport Plan for Fort William in accordance with Recommendation 32 of the second Strategic Transport Projects Review (STPR2).

The Report stated that the consultants were currently working with the client delivery group to develop robust wider evidence as well as undertaking work to review and validate previous work ahead of detailed appraisal that would detail public and stakeholder consultation both later this year and early in 2026.

Every effort had been made to ensure that this work aligns with other work streams and projects in and around Fort William that may have a material impact on the ITP such as the new Belford Hospital. Central to this is the Fort William 2040 Steering Group which is an ongoing project to co-ordinate and deliver a shared vision for the future of Fort William and Lochaber.

It was agreed to note the Report.

EV Infrastructure Shared Service Report 11 With reference to item 17 of the Minute of Meeting of 25 April 2025, Ms Gemma Robinson submitted a Report providing an update on regional activity by a project management shared service under the Electric Vehicle Infrastructure Fund (EVIF). The shared fund covered Comhairle nan Eilean Siar, Orkney Islands Council, Shetland Islands Council and Argyle and Bute Council. The Report covered an update on funding; Phase 1: de-risking the existing charging network; and Phase 2: expansion strategy.

It was agreed to note the Report.

Health and Transport Action Plan 12 With reference to item 9 of the Minute of Meeting of 8 November 2024, Mr Neil Macrae, Senior Partnership Manager submitted a Report providing an update on progress made to establish a Health and Transport Action Plan (HTAP) for the Highlands and Islands and setting out the next areas of focus for this work.

The Report stated that the HTAP should be designed to deliver against a clear final goal of establishing regional governance structure with:

- Committed input from key players.
- Acknowledge links to other partners/groups.
- 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.

A copy of the proposed approach to governance was provided as Appendix A to the Report.

The Report further provided updates on other transport to health-related work that HITRANS were leading or supporting.

It was agreed 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; and**
- (4) agree that early action and projects should be progressed in parallel with the formalisation of governance structures.**

Kirkwall Autolink /
UK Government
Consultation

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Mr Ranald Robertson, Partnership Director, submitted a Report which provided an update on developments in the Kirkwall Autolink project, a Connected and Automated Mobility (CAM) Pathfinder Feasibility Study funded by Innovate UK. The Report also shared a consultation response submitted by officers in response to the UK Government consultation on the Automated Passenger Services (APS) permitting scheme under the AV Act 2024.

The Report provided background information noting that the project explores the feasibility of deploying an autonomous zero-emission shuttle service in Orkney, connecting key transport hubs—Kirkwall Harbour and Kirkwall Airport. As a rural and remote location, Orkney presented a compelling testbed for understanding how autonomous mobility solutions could support connectivity in non-urban environments. The Report stated that the Highlands and Islands Transport Partnership (HITRANS) was contributing to the project by ensuring that the outcomes aligned with regional transport priorities, and that community engagement reflected the local transport needs and aspirations.

The Report indicated that the project officially commenced in July 2025 following a public announcement on 21 July 2025. The Key activities currently underway included:

- Stakeholder engagement to identify local priorities, constraints, and aspirations for the service.
- Technical scoping and route analysis between Kirkwall Harbour and Kirkwall Airport to assess operational viability of an autonomous shuttle.
- Development of a business case for the future deployment of autonomous services tailored to rural environments.
- Integration of social and environmental considerations to ensure responsible innovation.

The Report highlighted that while the project was at the feasibility stage, early discussions and assessments had highlighted the potential for autonomous shuttles to support sustainable, cost-effective, and inclusive transport in Orkney and similar regions.

It was agreed to note the Report.

Audit Scotland
Performance Audit
– MV Glen Sannox /
MV Glen Rosa

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Mr Ranald Robertson, Partnership Director, submitted a Report which advised Members on Audit Scope published in May 2025 into the Delivery of MV Glen Sannox and MV Glen Rosa. The Report stated that the audit would review the Scottish Government, Caledonian Maritime Assets Ltd (CMAL), and partners' performance in delivering two dual-fuel ferries—the MV Glen Sannox and MV Glen Rosa—initially contracted in 2015. The Report further stated that the audit aimed to assess causes behind considerable delays, cost escalations, governance and oversight weaknesses, and to identify public-sector lessons for large-scale infrastructure delivery. The Report noted that the formal audit scope was scheduled for publication in September 2026.

The Report noted that the audit was expected to cover:

- Governance and Oversight Failures
- Project Management and Controls
- Financial Oversights and Cost Escalation

- Strategic Future of the Shipyard

The Report highlighted that given the significant and ongoing impact of ferry delays on west coast communities, HITRANS and our partner Councils should actively seek opportunities to contribute to Audit Scotland's upcoming performance audit on the delivery of MV Glen Sannox and MV Glen Rosa. Officers recommended that HITRANS:

- Formally engage with Audit Scotland to offer input into the audit process and request clarity on how communities directly affected by ferry service disruption would be consulted.
- Highlight the value of local perspectives on the social and economic consequences of the delays, including island economies, healthcare access, tourism and logistics.
- Offer to facilitate consultation and feedback through our established Ferry Stakeholder Groups, which provide direct access to local authority representatives, community councils, business groups and transport users.

It was agreed to:

- (1) note the Report; and**
- (2) approve the formal engagement by HITRANS Officers with Audit Scotland to support the Audit Scope/Planning as outlined within the Report.**

Low Volume Air
Route – Historical
Analysis

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Mr Randal Robertson, Partnership Director, submitted a Report to share with Members the findings of a historical analysis of selected low volume air services in the Highlands and Islands region between 2014 and 2024. The Report, prepared by Reference Economic Consultants, aimed to provide insight into usage trends, capacity, and operational characteristics on a number of key routes which support regional connectivity. The analysis was intended to inform strategic decision-making around future air service development, investment, and policy engagement. The Report stated that the routes analysed in the current Report were:

- Benbecula – Stornoway
- Inverness – Birmingham
- Stornoway – Inverness
- Aberdeen – Stornoway
- Wick – Aberdeen
- Wick – Edinburgh
- Benbecula – Glasgow
- Glasgow – Islay
- Inverness – Manchester

The Report noted that further work was planned to expand the analysis to cover additional low volume routes which were also significant in the regional network. These would include:

- Kirkwall – Inverness
- Stornoway – Edinburgh
- Barra – Glasgow
- Campbeltown – Glasgow
- Tiree – Glasgow

The Report identified a range of trends that highlighted both resilience and volatility in low volume air services. Those insights would support HITRANS and partners in shaping future business cases, engaging with operators and funders, and advocating for rural and island connectivity in national aviation policy.

It was agreed to note the Report and support the ongoing work to expand the analysis.

CONSULTATION

CHFS 3 – Ferry Stakeholder Group Submission	16	With reference to item 10 of the Minute of Meeting of 7 February 2025, Mr Ranald Robertson, Partnership Director, submitted a Report providing an update on the formal submission made to transport Scotland by Ferry Stakeholder Groups outlining key community priorities and areas of concern for reflection in the proposed direct award of the Clyde and Hebrides Ferry Services (CHFS3) Contract to CalMac Ferries Ltd. The Report stated that the submission followed limited engagement by Transport Scotland at Stakeholder Group meetings in June 2025 and was subsequently submitted to both the CHFS3 procurement team and the Cabinet Secretary for Scotland. The full consultation submission was included as Appendix A to the Report.
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It was agreed to:

- (1) note the submission made by Ferry Stakeholder Groups to Transport Scotland and the Cabinet Secretary for Transport; and**
- (2) support ongoing advocacy for stakeholder priorities to be embedded in the final CHFS3 contract.**

NIFS 4 Consultation	17	Mr Ranald Robertson submitted a Report providing an update on the public consultation announced by Scottish Ministers on 22 July 2025 regarding the future of the Northern Isles Ferries Services Contract (NIFS4), and presenting the draft HITRANS response to the consultation questions (included as Appendix A) for Board consideration and agreement. The 12-week public consultation would close on 13 October 2025. The Report stated that the contract would replace the current ferry services arrangements linking Orkney and Shetland with mainland Scotland, which were considered essential for supporting the economic, social and cultural wellbeing of the Northern Isles.
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It was agreed to:

- (1) note the publication of the Northern Isles Ferry Services Contract 4 public consultation;**
- (2) review and endorse the draft HITRANS response to the consultation questions (Appendix 1); and**
- (3) delegate authority to the Chair and Partnership Director to finalise and submit the HITRANS response, allowing partner Councils more time to develop their own responses and enabling late comments to be incorporated before the consultation deadline.**

PARTNERSHIP

Programme of Meetings 2026	18	Mr Ranald Robertson, Partnership Director submitted a Report detailing the proposed dates for Partnership Board and Permanent Advisors meetings in 2026.
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It was agreed that the HITRANS Partnership Board meetings in 2026 on the following dates and locations, subject to confirmation that there were no clashes with partner Council meetings:

Date	Partnership Meeting	Advisors Meeting	Location
15 January 2026		Morning	Virtual
6 February 2026	Partnership Board Meeting		Virtual/ Inverness
26 March 2026		Morning	Virtual
24 April 2026	Partnership Board Meeting		Virtual/ Inverness
20 August 2026		Morning	Virtual
10 and 11 September 2026	Evening Meeting followed by Full Partnership Meeting on Friday Morning		Western Isles
22 October 2026		Morning	Virtual
5 and 6 November 2026	Evening Meeting followed by Full Partnership Meeting on Friday Morning		Argyll and Bute

RTS Parliamentary Event 19

Mr Neil Macrae, Senior Partnership Manager submitted a Report advising members of arrangements for the forthcoming HITRANS Partnership Reception at the Scottish Parliament. The event, sponsored by Liam McArthur MSP, would provide an opportunity to highlight the priorities of the updated Regional Transport Strategy (RTS) and engage with Members of the Scottish Parliament, key regional stakeholders, operators, and business representatives.

During the meeting Mr Macrae notified members that the HITRANS Partnership Reception had been cancelled due to a Stage 3 Vote due to take place in the Scottish Parliament on the evening of 23 September 2025.

It was agreed that Mr Neil MacRae would notify all members of the cancellation of the event by email and would discuss with members an alternative date and venue for the Partnership Reception to be held.

Future of Regional Empowerment in Scotland 20

Mr Ranald Robertson, Partnership Director submitted a Report providing an update on the Scottish Government's current engagement on the future of Regional Empowerment in Scotland, and outlining the response submitted by HITRANS officers reflecting the role of Regional Transport Partnerships (RTPs) in any future regional governance and delivery landscape.

The Report stated that, as set out in the new Regional Transport Strategy, HITRANS believed that empowering RTPs to lead on transport planning and delivery offered a practical and achievable model for regional empowerment. This approach built on existing statutory structures and governance and enabled place-based, locally accountable delivery that supported the broader ambitions of the Regional Economic Partnership and the Scottish Government.

It was agreed to note the Report.

- 21 Mr Ranald Robertson, Partnership Director submitted a Report seeking approval to: regrade two existing posts to reflect increased responsibilities and workload; remove the vacant Business Manager post following the retirement of the postholder in Summer 2024; and extend the contract of the Public Transport Support Officer (Infrastructure and Information), which remained fully externally funded. The Report gave background information, detailed the proposed changes, and set out the financial implications.

It was agreed to:

- (1) note the contents of the Report;**
- (2) approve the regrading of the Project Officer (Finance) to Business Support Manager and the Business Support Assistant to Business Support Officer, subject to HR Assessment;**
- (3) approve the removal of the vacant Business Manager Pors from the structure; and**
- (4) approve the extension of the Public Transport Support Officer (Infrastructure and Information) contract for a further 24 months, with salary remaining at the current grade.**