

Report to Partnership Board Friday 7th November 2025

RURALITIES UPDATE

PURPOSE OF REPORT

To provide Members with an update on the RURALITIES Project.



Overview

HITRANS are a SIMSES partner and Work Package leader of the Horizon Europe project: Climate smart, ecosystem-enhancing and knowledge-based rural expertise and training centres (RURALITIES), which started in October 2022 and runs to September 2027. HITRANS is one of more than 50 partners from across Europe and Africa included in the project.

The HITRANS area is one of six “Simplified rural socio-ecological systems” or SIMSES which is a pilot area for the project.

“Ruralities creates and enables resources to empower rural people and agents of change in the 6 SIMSES and assists in the exploitation of innovative knowledge and technologies for the benefit of rural communities. The lessons learned through the project lifetime will be shared in other rural communities and resources created to leave the legacy of best practices in innovation and policy change.”

HITRANS now has a confirmed second role in the project as a Work Package leader, after taking over from a previous partner no longer involved. This required a full amendment to the project which came through earlier this year.

Our aim is to enhance regional transportation, promote economic growth, and reduce barriers to participation in employment, learning, social, leisure, health and cultural activities that the region has to offer.

HITRANS is working on a data mapping collaboration to build a real time model of journey making to show supply and demand across the year. The model will be used to generate scenarios to improve local connectivity and better integrate transport solutions. The model will facilitate funding applications for innovative, lower-carbon transport solutions, possible mobility hubs and further work in these areas to share the learning and impact.

Progress

Robert Gordon University was successful with their bid to join the project as an academic partner for Smart Mobility Solutions for Rural and Island Transport Optimisation. Trackers and data plans have been purchased to map journeys across selected Orkney Islands. Cohorts have been recruited through partners in the isles.

Work has started on journey tracking in Stronsay and Westray with volunteers carrying small trackers either in their vehicle or on their person if their journey is multi modal. A proportion of trackers will soon be redeployed to Rousay. Data will continue to be collected to at least March 2026.

A fixed tracker (LIDAR) is being investigated and tested to map all movement from a fixed location to be confirmed. This will allow analysis of all traffic and movement through one point which will expand the data already being collected from the individual trackers being used.

Data

An overview can be seen below of the 117,853 data samples that have been collected to September 2025.



Orkney Islands



Stronsay

117,853 GPS pings
(data samples)

68 MB in total



Westray



Sanday & North Ronaldsay



Mainland Orkney



Kirkwall

Engagement & working with Partners

We continue to work with partners in Orkney to facilitate data gathering. Once the data has been analysed, the outcomes will be disseminated to contributors and interested parties.

Ruralities engages over 50 partner organisations as the project consortium. Each of these partners' role includes dissemination and communication about the project and learnings to share innovation across other rural areas. Best practices and models can then be replicated by rural actors for effective change which in turn can drive policy change to support rural communities. The main goal of Ruralities is to have a bank of available resources from across the consortium that rural communities can access and use to learn from and build upon along with accessible expertise centres.

Funding & Resource

Budget for this project has increased following HITRANS appointment as Work Package leader, the full amendment procedure with the European Commission and subsequent UKRI project change request. The original budget totalled £311,111.95 and has increased by £121,191.46 to the new total of £432,303.42.

The Ruralities project continues to September 2027. We are currently investigating another Horizon Europe call to see if we can extend the project's work and look at enhancing rural multi modal transport solutions to create strategy and solutions for rural/urban transport.

Recommendation

Members are asked to note this report. Please contact Katy with any questions.

Risk Register

RTS delivery

Impact - Positive

Policy

Impact - Positive

Equality

Impact - Positive

Financial

Impact - Positive

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