

## **Report to Partnership Meeting 7 November 2025**

### **Research and Strategy Delivery**

#### **Future Flight Challenge – HITRANS Success in Securing New Funding**

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

To inform Members of HITRANS' success in securing new UK Government funding through Innovate UK's Future Flight Challenge, with HITRANS confirmed as the lead partner in the project *SATE: Highlands & Islands Regional Pathway to Sustainable Aviation* and participating as a partner in the Advanced Logistics BVLOS UAV Mission (ALBUM) project.

##### **Background**

The Future Flight Challenge is delivered by UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) to develop greener and more efficient ways of flying. It supports projects that bring together aviation, energy, regulatory, and digital expertise to deliver low-carbon, resilient air transport services.

On 29 September 2025, the UK Government announced more than £4 million of new funding to support the next generation of aviation technology projects. This funding is split between two competitions, Regional Demonstrator and Strategic Growth – both of which HITRANS was successful in. This latest round of awards builds on earlier phases of Future Flight, including the HITRANS-led Sustainable Aviation Test Environment (SATE) project, which established the UK's first operational low-carbon aviation test centre at Kirkwall Airport

##### **HITRANS Projects**

###### Project 1 - HITRANS-Led Project – *SATE: Highlands & Islands Regional Pathway to Sustainable Aviation*

HITRANS has been awarded funding to lead a major new project that will:

- Extend the achievements of the original SATE initiative, creating a clear regional pathway for sustainable aviation across the Highlands & Islands.
- Trial and demonstrate zero-emission aircraft, airport infrastructure innovations, and integrated logistics solutions.
- Deliver tangible benefits to island and rural communities by improving connectivity, resilience of lifeline services, and opportunities for local businesses.
- Provide evidence and operational learning to inform both Scottish and UK Government policy on regional decarbonisation of aviation.
- This leadership role confirms HITRANS as a national pioneer in applying aviation innovation to the unique challenges of rural and island transport.



## Project 2. HITRANS Partner Project – *Advanced Logistics BVLOS UAV Mission (ALBUM)*

HITRANS will also act as a delivery partner in the ALBUM project, which will:

- Advance the use of uncrewed aerial vehicles (UAVs) operating beyond visual line of sight (BVLOS) to support cargo and logistics operations.
- Develop mission planning, safety, and integration procedures for UAVs into existing regional transport and freight networks.
- Create use cases relevant to island supply chains, including medical supplies, freight consolidation, and last-mile logistics.
- HITRANS' participation ensures that the distinct needs of the Highlands & Islands are embedded into this national-level innovation programme.

### **Wider Programme Context**

The 2025 awards include funding for projects covering:

- Development of hydrogen and electric aircraft for short-haul routes.
- Uncrewed aviation systems supporting logistics, freight and emergency response.
- Work on airport infrastructure and airspace integration to enable safe deployment of zero-emission aircraft.
- Cross-sector partnerships to address supply chain, regulatory and environmental challenges.

HITRANS' dual role—both as a leader and as a partner—positions the Partnership at the forefront of the UK's efforts to decarbonise aviation and demonstrates the national importance of the Highlands & Islands as a living testbed for next-generation transport.

## Budget

HITRANS' leadership of the SATE: Highlands & Islands Regional Pathway to Sustainable Aviation project has secured 100% intervention funding, with the total project value confirmed through Innovate UK as being £199,912 of which HITRANS will receive £35,164.

Participation in the ALBUM project will also be fully funded in line with Innovate UK rules for local authority bodies. HITRANS budget for this project is £77,780.

This represents a continuation of the strong financial return already achieved through SATE Phase 1 and Phase 2, where HITRANS secured over £1 million in direct funding.

## RISK REGISTER

### RTS Delivery

Impact – Positive

### Policy

Policy Impact – Positive:

Comment – Positions Highlands & Islands as a global leader in net zero aviation, supporting the Scottish Government's ambition for the world's first net zero aviation region.

### Financial

Impact – Positive

Comment – High intervention rates mitigate financial risk for HITRANS while delivering significant leverage of UKRI funding.

### Equality

Impact – Neutral

## RECOMMENDATION

Members are asked to:

1. Note HITRANS' success in securing new Future Flight funding.
2. Recognise the strategic importance of HITRANS' leadership role in *SATE: Highlands & Islands Regional Pathway to Sustainable Aviation* and partnership role in *ALBUM*.
3. Support continued engagement in the UKRI Future Flight programme as a platform for advancing sustainable aviation solutions for the Highlands & Islands.

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