



HITRANS Equalities Scheme 2025–2029

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1. Accessibility Note and Foreword

Accessibility Note

Accessibility Statement

This document is available in alternative formats and languages upon request.

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Foreword

- 1.1 We are pleased to present the *HITRANS Equalities Scheme 2025–2029*. This document sets out how the Highlands and Islands Transport Partnership (HITRANS) fulfils its statutory responsibilities under the *Equality Act 2010* and the *Public Sector Equality Duty (Scotland)*. It outlines how equality, diversity, and inclusion are embedded in everything we do—from strategic transport planning to delivery on the ground across our vast and varied region.
- 1.2 The HITRANS area covers some of the most remote, rural and island communities in Europe. Providing reliable, accessible and inclusive transport services is critical to sustaining those communities, tackling inequalities, and enabling everyone to participate fully in economic and social life. Equality is therefore not an adjunct to our work – it is central to our purpose.
- 1.3 This new Equalities Scheme builds upon the *Mainstreaming the Equality Duty Report (April 2025)* and aligns directly with the *Regional Transport Strategy 2025–2045*. Together, these documents form our framework for ensuring that all people, regardless of background, geography, or personal characteristics, can benefit from a fair, sustainable and

accessible transport system.

- 1.4 Over the next four years we will continue to work with our constituent councils, transport operators, community organisations and equality partners to make measurable progress. We will monitor our outcomes transparently, report regularly, and keep equality considerations at the heart of every policy and project we undertake.
- 1.5 On behalf of the Partnership Board and staff team, we reaffirm HITRANS' commitment to equality of opportunity and to delivering inclusive transport solutions for every community we serve.

Cllr Uisdean Robertson

Chair, Highlands and Islands Transport Partnership (HITRANS)

Ranald Robertson

Partnership Director, HITRANS

2. Executive Summary

- 2.1 The *HITRANS Equalities Scheme 2025–2029* explains how the Partnership will meet its statutory obligations under the *Equality Act 2010*, including the *Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED)* and the *Equality Act 2010 (Specific Duties) (Scotland) Regulations 2012* as amended. It also sets out how HITRANS responds to the *Fairer Scotland Duty* and the *Islands (Scotland) Act 2018*.
- 2.2 The Scheme has four principal purposes:
1. To demonstrate compliance with the PSED and related legislation.
 2. To embed equality, diversity and inclusion within all of HITRANS' strategic and operational functions.
 3. To present clear and measurable *Equality Outcomes* for the period 2025–2029.
 4. To provide transparency in how HITRANS gathers evidence, engages with communities, and reports on progress.
- 2.3 The document reflects the updated vision and priorities of the *Regional Transport Strategy 2025–2045*, which seeks to deliver transport networks that reduce inequalities, take climate action, enable inclusive economic growth, and improve health and wellbeing. It recognises that accessible and affordable transport is a cornerstone of equality.
- 2.4 Key elements of the Scheme include:
- A detailed explanation of the legislative and policy framework.
 - HITRANS' approach to mainstreaming equality within its governance and operations.
 - Methods for gathering and using equality evidence and conducting Equality Impact Assessments (EqIAs).
 - Specific equality outcomes with measurable indicators for 2025–2029.
 - Provisions for monitoring, reporting, and continuous improvement.
- 2.5 The Scheme demonstrates that equality is both a legal requirement and a moral imperative for HITRANS. In serving some of Scotland's most geographically dispersed populations, ensuring equitable access to transport is essential to tackling isolation, supporting sustainable communities, and promoting fairness.
- 2.6 HITRANS will publish progress updates at least every two years in accordance with the *Specific Duties (Scotland)*, maintaining openness and accountability to the communities of the Highlands and Islands.

3. Introduction and Purpose of the Scheme

3.1 The Highlands and Islands Transport Partnership (HITRANS) is one of seven statutory Regional Transport Partnerships (RTPs) established under the *Transport (Scotland) Act 2005*. Its role is to produce and implement a **Regional Transport Strategy (RTS)** and to co-ordinate strategic transport planning and delivery across a region encompassing some of the most remote and diverse communities in Scotland.

3.2 The HITRANS region includes the local authority areas of:

- The Highland Council
- Argyll and Bute Council (excluding Helensburgh and Lomond)
- Moray Council
- Comhairle nan Eilean Siar (Western Isles Council)
- Orkney Islands Council

This vast geography covers mainland, island, and peninsular communities, with distinctive transport challenges shaped by population sparsity, weather conditions, topography, and dependence on ferry and air services.

3.3 HITRANS' vision, as expressed in the *Regional Transport Strategy 2025–2045*, is that:

“Our transport networks and services will act to realise the economic potential of our region through reducing the actual and perceived impacts of distance, poor resilience and low population density. By doing this, they will facilitate economically and socially valuable activities for all, provide equality of opportunity, enable people to live active and healthy lives and allow our region to contribute fully to the national net zero emissions target.”

3.4 Equality and inclusion sit at the heart of that vision. Access to affordable, reliable, and sustainable transport is a prerequisite for participation in work, education, healthcare, and community life. For many residents of the Highlands and Islands, particularly those with protected characteristics or living in isolated areas, transport can be a determining factor in social inclusion or exclusion.

3.5 The purpose of this *Equalities Scheme 2025–2029* is to:

1. Demonstrate HITRANS' compliance with all relevant equality legislation and duties.
2. Outline the Partnership's strategic approach to embedding equality in decision-making, policy, and project delivery.
3. Present measurable equality outcomes for the 2025–2029 period.
4. Provide a framework for monitoring, evaluating, and reporting progress.

3.6 The Scheme has been prepared in accordance with the *Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) Technical Guidance on the Public Sector Equality Duty (Scotland)* and follows the structure recommended for public authorities. It also reflects the approach adopted in national and local government equalities schemes and aligns with Transport Scotland's statutory reporting standards.

3.7 The document is not a standalone report but part of a suite of HITRANS governance and accountability instruments, alongside:

- The *Regional Transport Strategy 2025–2045*

The *Mainstreaming the Equality Duty Report (April 2025)*

- The HITRANS Business Plan and Annual Reports
- The Equality Outcomes and Progress Reports (published biennially)

3.8 In this way, HITRANS ensures that equality is mainstreamed throughout all areas of its activity, from strategy to delivery, and that equality considerations are visible, measurable, and continually improved.

3.9 The HITRANS Equalities Scheme 2025–2029 has been prepared in accordance with the Equality Act 2010 and the Equality Act 2012 (Specific Duties) (Scotland) Regulations. As a public body listed under the legislation, HITRANS is required to publish a set of Equality Outcomes which it considers will enable it to better perform the Public Sector Equality Duty. These outcomes cover the period April 2025 to March 2029 and form the core of the Partnership’s equality framework.

3.10 In meeting this requirement, HITRANS has taken steps to involve people who share a relevant protected characteristic, and those who represent their interests, in shaping the new outcomes and priorities. Draft Equality Outcomes were developed with input from Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) workshops, as well as through desk-based research and review of national and regional equality evidence. This approach ensured that the outcomes reflect both lived experience and the specific transport-related challenges and opportunities across the Highlands and Islands.

3.11 The Equalities Scheme provides the overarching framework through which HITRANS embeds equality, diversity and inclusion across all its functions and responsibilities. It demonstrates how the organisation fulfils its duties under equality legislation while advancing fairness, accessibility and inclusion in transport planning, delivery and governance. The Scheme builds on progress made since the previous reporting cycle and reflects the evolving policy and social context in which HITRANS operates.

3.12 The objectives of the Equalities Scheme 2025–2029 are fourfold. Firstly, the Scheme demonstrates how HITRANS will meet the requirements of the Public Sector Equality Duty and the associated Specific Duties (Scotland). Secondly, it establishes a clear set of Equality Outcomes designed to address the most significant equality challenges identified through engagement and evidence gathering. Thirdly, it outlines how HITRANS will involve, consult, and collaborate with equality stakeholders throughout the life of the Scheme. Finally, it ensures transparency and accountability by setting out how progress will be measured and publicly reported.

3.13 The Scheme aligns closely with the Regional Transport Strategy 2025–2045 and supports its vision for a sustainable, inclusive and accessible transport system. It ensures that equality is not treated as a standalone obligation but as a guiding principle informing all aspects of HITRANS’ strategic and operational work.

4. About HITRANS and the Regional Context

- 4.1 The Highlands and Islands region covers approximately half of Scotland's landmass but only around 9% of its population. This low population density presents unique challenges for transport provision, including higher per-capita costs, reliance on lifeline ferry and air links, and the need to maintain extensive networks over long distances.
- 4.2 The region's communities range from small island settlements and crofting townships to growing regional centres such as Inverness, Elgin, Oban, and Kirkwall. The diversity of geography and demography means that no single transport model can address all needs — accessibility, affordability, and reliability are therefore key measures of equality of opportunity.
- 4.3 Many residents face compounded disadvantages related to geography, income, age, or disability. Older people and those without access to private cars may experience social isolation, while younger residents can face barriers to education and employment opportunities due to limited public transport options.
- 4.4 The *Regional Transport Strategy 2025–2045* responds to these issues through its twelve strategic themes, which together seek to:
- Reduce inequalities and improve accessibility.
 - Take climate action and support a just transition.
 - Deliver sustainable and inclusive economic growth.
 - Improve health and wellbeing through active and safe travel.
- 4.5 The RTS aligns directly with the four priorities of the *National Transport Strategy 2 (NTS2)*:
1. Reduces inequalities
 2. Takes climate action
 3. Delivers inclusive economic growth
 4. Improves health and wellbeing
- 4.6 Equality, diversity, and inclusion underpin each of these priorities. HITRANS' equalities work therefore contributes not only to statutory compliance but also to achieving Scotland's broader social, economic, and environmental goals.

5. The Legislative and Policy Framework

5.1 HITRANS' equality duties are set within a robust legal framework that underpins all public authority activity in Scotland. This section outlines the principal legislative provisions and guidance that shape our approach to promoting equality, eliminating discrimination, and advancing fairness across all aspects of transport policy and delivery.

The Equality Act 2010

5.2 The *Equality Act 2010* provides the primary legal framework for equality and human rights across Great Britain. It harmonised and replaced previous anti-discrimination legislation, including the *Sex Discrimination Act 1975*, *Race Relations Act 1976*, and *Disability Discrimination Act 1995*.

5.3 The Act identifies **nine protected characteristics** under which discrimination, harassment, and victimisation are unlawful:

1. Age
2. Disability
3. Gender reassignment
4. Marriage and civil partnership
5. Pregnancy and maternity
6. Race
7. Religion or belief
8. Sex
9. Sexual orientation

5.4 Under the Act, discrimination may be **direct** or **indirect**, and public bodies must take positive steps to prevent disadvantage and promote inclusion. The Act also introduces a duty to make *reasonable adjustments* for disabled

people, ensuring they can participate equally in public life and access services without undue barriers.

5.5 (Extract – Equality Act 2010, Section 149: The Public Sector Equality Duty)

“A public authority must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to:

- (a) eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under this Act;
- (b) advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it; and
- (c) foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.”

5.6 The concept of “**due regard**” requires public authorities to think consciously and proactively about equality implications when shaping policy, delivering services, and allocating resources. It is not a one-off exercise, but an ongoing obligation embedded in day-to-day decision-making.

The Equality Act 2010 (Specific Duties) (Scotland) Regulations 2012

5.7 The Scottish Ministers, under devolved powers, have introduced *Specific Duties* to support better performance of the general equality duty by Scottish public authorities. These are set out in the *Equality Act 2010 (Specific Duties) (Scotland) Regulations 2012*, as amended in 2015, 2016, and 2022.

5. The Legislative and Policy Framework

5.8 The purpose of these duties is to enable public bodies to demonstrate how equality is being integrated into governance, decision-making, and outcomes. The duties applicable to HITRANS include requirements to:

- **Report progress on mainstreaming the equality duty** every two years.
- **Publish equality outcomes** and report progress on them every two years.
- **Assess and review policies and practices** (through Equality Impact Assessments).
- **Gather and use employee information**, and publish details on the gender pay gap.
- **Publish statements on equal pay** (for staff and key employment grades).
- **Consider the award criteria and conditions in public procurement** to help further equality.
- **Publish information in an accessible manner.**

5.9 These duties ensure transparency and accountability by requiring evidence-based equality practice and regular publication of results.

5.10 (Extract – Regulation 5: Equality Outcomes)

“A listed authority must determine one or more equality outcomes which it considers will enable it to better perform the equality duty, and must publish a report specifying those outcomes within a period of not more than two years beginning with 27 May 2012 and at intervals of not more than four years thereafter.”

5.11 In practice, this means that HITRANS’ equality outcomes for 2025–2029, presented later in this Scheme, are central to fulfilling our statutory duty to improve performance and demonstrate progress over time.

The Fairer Scotland Duty

5.12 The Fairer Scotland Duty, introduced under Part 1 of the Equality Act 2010, places a legal responsibility on named public bodies in Scotland to actively consider how they can reduce inequalities of outcome caused by socio-economic disadvantage when making strategic decisions. It came into force on 1 April 2018.

5.13 (Extract – Part 1, Section 1 of the Equality Act 2010: Socio-Economic Inequalities)

“An authority to which this section applies must, when making decisions of a strategic nature about how to exercise its functions, have due regard to the desirability of exercising them in a way that is designed to reduce the inequalities of outcome which result from socio-economic disadvantage.”

5.14 This duty complements the Public Sector Equality Duty by addressing the structural inequalities that often underpin social exclusion. For HITRANS, the Fairer Scotland Duty is particularly relevant given the region’s dispersed population, lower average incomes, and reliance on costly or infrequent transport options.

5.15 In applying the Duty, HITRANS ensures that strategic transport policies and investment decisions:

- Consider the potential impacts on low-income and vulnerable communities.
- Seek to improve accessibility and affordability of transport.
- Support inclusive growth and fair access to employment, education, and services.

The Islands (Scotland) Act 2018

5.16 The *Islands (Scotland) Act 2018*

recognises the unique circumstances and challenges of island communities and introduces a duty on public bodies to “have regard to island needs.” This is operationalised through the **Island Communities Impact Assessment (ICIA)** process.

5.17 (Extract – Section 7: Island Communities Impact Assessments)

“A relevant authority must have regard to island communities in carrying out its functions and, in particular, must prepare an island communities impact assessment in relation to a policy, strategy, or service which, in the authority’s opinion, is likely to have an effect on an island community which is significantly different from its effect on other communities.”

5.18 HITRANS applies the ICIA duty as part of its wider equality assessment process, recognising that the intersection between geography and equality characteristics often amplifies disadvantage. The RTS 2025–2045 explicitly commits to equitable transport provision for all island and peninsular communities.

Other Relevant Legislation and Policy Frameworks

5.19 In addition to the equality-specific duties, several related frameworks inform HITRANS’ work:

- *The Human Rights Act 1998* – embedding the European Convention on Human Rights into UK law.
- *The UN Sustainable Development Goals* – particularly Goal 10 (Reduced Inequalities) and Goal 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities).
- *The Transport (Scotland) Act 2019* – enabling regional transport authorities to play a greater role in inclusive and sustainable transport provision.
- *The Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009* – establishing the context for a just transition to net zero, where equality is a core principle.

5.20 Together, these frameworks ensure that HITRANS operates within a holistic equality and human rights environment, integrating legal compliance with proactive efforts to improve wellbeing, inclusion, and accessibility.

6. The Public Sector Equality Duty and HITRANS' Approach

6.1 The *Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED)*, established under Section 149 of the *Equality Act 2010*, requires public authorities to give due regard to three interconnected aims in carrying out their functions. These are to:

1. **Eliminate discrimination, harassment, and victimisation**, and any other conduct prohibited by the Act.
2. **Advance equality of opportunity** between persons who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
3. **Foster good relations** between persons who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.

6.2 The duty applies to all of HITRANS' functions – strategic, operational, policy, procurement, and employment. It covers both the formulation and implementation of the *Regional Transport Strategy (RTS)*, and the projects, funding, and services derived from it.

6.3 The requirement to “have due regard” means that equality considerations must be consciously considered, transparently recorded, and demonstrably influence decisions. The process is not about achieving a particular outcome, but about ensuring that equality is meaningfully and consistently integrated into decision-making.

Eliminating Discrimination, Harassment and Victimisation

6.4 HITRANS recognises that transport systems can unintentionally disadvantage people with protected characteristics through inaccessible infrastructure, lack of information, inflexible services, or affordability barriers.

To address this, we:

- Apply Equality Impact Assessments (EqIAs) to all major policies, funding streams and strategic decisions.
- Work collaboratively with transport operators and local authorities to promote barrier-free design and accessible services.
- Engage with equality organisations, including Disability Equality Scotland and Age Scotland, to identify emerging issues and good practice.
- Require all procurement exercises to include equality compliance clauses aligned with the *Specific Duties (Scotland)*.

6.5 By eliminating barriers and embedding equality into all policy and delivery stages, HITRANS seeks to ensure that discrimination, whether direct or indirect, is identified early and mitigated through design and implementation.

Advancing Equality of Opportunity

6.6 Advancing equality of opportunity means removing or minimising disadvantage, meeting different needs, and encouraging participation by under-represented groups.

6.7 In the context of the Highlands and Islands, this has particular relevance for:

- Disabled people requiring accessible public transport and infrastructure.
- Older people and young people, for whom travel affordability and service availability are critical.
- Women, who may have specific concerns about safety, security and connectivity.

Residents in rural and island communities facing structural disadvantage due to geography and limited modal choice.

6.8 HITRANS advances equality by:

- Promoting affordable and integrated transport through the RTS and local partnerships.
- Supporting flexible and demand-responsive transport services.
- Encouraging innovation in accessible information and ticketing technologies.
- Providing grant support to community-led transport initiatives that address gaps in provision.
- Ensuring equality outcomes are reflected in project evaluation frameworks.

6.9 Our approach recognises that equality is not about treating everyone the same, but about ensuring that policies and investments respond to different needs and enable equitable outcomes for all.

Fostering Good Relations

6.10 The third aim of the PSED — fostering good relations — involves tackling prejudice and promoting understanding between people from different groups. HITRANS contributes to this by:

- Supporting inclusive consultation processes and co-production approaches in developing transport strategies.
- Engaging community and equality groups in policy design and pilot projects.
- Promoting positive representation of diversity in communication materials and public events.

6.11 By facilitating dialogue and shared understanding across sectors, HITRANS helps ensure that transport investment is seen as a shared social good, responsive to the full diversity of people and places within our region.

Due Regard in Practice

6.12 In practical terms, *having due regard* within HITRANS involves:

- Considering equality implications at the earliest stage of policy and project development.
- Documenting those considerations through structured Equality Impact Assessments (EqIAs) and Island Communities Impact Assessments (ICIAs).
- Using evidence, consultation and monitoring to inform decisions.
- Demonstrating, through Board and Committee reports, how equality considerations have influenced outcomes.

6.13 The HITRANS Partnership Board retains corporate responsibility for compliance with the Equality Duty. Operational responsibility rests with the Partnership Director, supported by officers across the organisation. Equality is therefore mainstreamed both strategically and operationally.

Integration with Other Duties

6.14 The PSED interacts closely with other statutory obligations, including:

- The *Fairer Scotland Duty*, which focuses on reducing socio-economic disadvantage.

6. The Public Sector Equality Duty and HITRANS' Approach

- The *Islands (Scotland) Act 2018*, which ensures the needs of island communities are considered equitably.
- The *Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009*, where a just transition requires fairness in environmental and economic policy.

6.15 HITRANS' integrated approach ensures these duties are not addressed in isolation, but within a single equality and inclusion framework underpinning all major programmes.

Accountability and Transparency

6.16 HITRANS demonstrates accountability through regular reporting and publication. In line with the *Specific Duties (Scotland)*, we will:

- Publish a **Mainstreaming the Equality Duty Report** every two years.
- Publish an **Equality Outcomes Progress Report** biennially.
- Make all equality-related reports publicly accessible in plain language and accessible formats.

6.17 These measures ensure transparency and continuous improvement, reinforcing public confidence that equality is embedded in every aspect of HITRANS' governance and operations.



7. Mainstreaming Equality within HITRANS

7.1 Mainstreaming equality means integrating equality considerations into the daily working practices of an organisation rather than treating them as a separate or specialist activity. It ensures that every policy, decision, and service takes account of the diverse needs of the people and communities HITRANS serves.

7.2 The *Equality and Human Rights Commission* describes mainstreaming as “the process by which equality is built into the culture and day-to-day operations of public bodies.” For HITRANS, mainstreaming equality is a continuous journey of improvement, learning, and accountability.

Organisational Commitment

7.3 The HITRANS Partnership Board and senior management provide clear and visible leadership on equality. The Partnership Director is responsible for operational delivery of equality duties, supported by all staff through their respective roles.

7.4 Equality and diversity principles are reflected in:

- The Partnership’s strategic planning and performance framework.
- The preparation of the *Regional Transport Strategy* and supporting delivery plans.
- The development of funding applications, feasibility studies, and pilot initiatives.
- Procurement processes and partnership agreements.
- Internal human-resources policies and training.

7.5 The HITRANS Board receives regular updates on equality progress through its **Mainstreaming the Equality Duty Report** and through periodic strategic reviews. Equality performance is also referenced within the organisation’s annual reporting cycle.

Building a Culture of Equality

7.6 Embedding equality in organisational culture requires both awareness and practical tools. HITRANS promotes a culture that values diversity and inclusion by:

- Providing equality and accessibility training for all staff and board members.
- Encouraging reflection on unconscious bias in policy formulation and stakeholder engagement.
- Incorporating equality considerations into staff objectives and project evaluations.
- Facilitating shared learning through regional and national equality networks.

7.7 Equality is considered a shared responsibility across the organisation. Every member of staff is expected to identify potential impacts on equality in their work and to contribute ideas for improvement.

Integration with the Regional Transport Strategy (RTS)

7.8 The *Regional Transport Strategy 2025–2045* embeds equality at its core. Its themes on connectivity, affordability, decarbonisation, and inclusive access are designed to reduce inequality and enable participation in society for all people, regardless of location or circumstance.

7. Mainstreaming Equality within HITRANS

7.9 Key RTS commitments that support mainstreaming include:

- Developing **accessible transport networks** that enable older and disabled people to travel independently.
- Ensuring **affordable fares and integrated ticketing** for low-income households and those without car access.
- Promoting **safe, inclusive active-travel routes** for walking, wheeling, and cycling.
- Supporting **sustainable island connectivity** through reliable, low-emission ferry and air services.
- Delivering a **just transition to net zero**, ensuring rural and island communities benefit equitably.

7.10 Each RTS delivery plan will include equality and accessibility objectives, monitored through project evaluation and progress reporting. Equality impact assessment will be integrated into all RTS policy reviews.

Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) and Island Communities Impact Assessment (ICIA)

7.11 HITRANS has a structured process for assessing the equality implications of its policies and decisions. The **Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA)** ensures that proposed actions do not create or perpetuate disadvantage and that they promote positive equality outcomes.

7.12 Where a policy or project has the potential to affect island communities differently, an **Island Communities Impact Assessment (ICIA)** is carried out in accordance with the *Islands (Scotland) Act 2018*. This ensures that decisions recognise the distinct needs of island populations.

7.13 EqIAs and ICIAAs are completed at key decision points and are published where appropriate. They are used not only to identify risks but also to highlight opportunities for inclusive innovation and targeted investment.

Evidence, Data and Engagement

7.14 Mainstreaming equality depends on access to reliable evidence. HITRANS uses a range of quantitative and qualitative data sources, including:

- Census and Scottish Household Survey data on travel behaviour and demographics.
- Transport Scotland's *Accessibility Statistics* and *National Transport Strategy Indicators*.
- Equality and inclusion research from partner councils and national agencies.
- Feedback from consultations, community transport groups, and equality organisations.

7.15 Community engagement is a cornerstone of the HITRANS approach. The Partnership ensures that consultation processes are accessible, inclusive, and proportionate. Alternative formats, digital participation tools, and targeted outreach to under-represented groups are used where appropriate.

Staff and Governance Development

7.16 The Partnership's small staff team reflects the size of the organisation but operates within a governance framework that values diversity and representation. Recruitment is conducted in line with equal-opportunities principles, and training opportunities are made available to develop awareness of equality and accessibility issues.

7.17 Board members are appointed by the constituent local authorities and by the Scottish Ministers. HITRANS encourages a balanced representation of gender, geography, and expertise among its members. The Partnership is committed to supporting the **Gender Representation on Public Boards (Scotland) Act 2018** and to reporting publicly on board diversity.

Continuous Improvement

- 7.18 Mainstreaming equality is not static. HITRANS reviews its practices regularly to ensure that equality considerations evolve alongside new transport technologies, policy developments, and community needs. Lessons from project evaluations and feedback are incorporated into future planning cycles.
- 7.19 The Partnership also participates in peer learning with other Regional Transport Partnerships, Transport Scotland, and local authority equality networks to share good practice and innovation.

Publication and Transparency

- 7.20 HITRANS publishes all equality-related documents on its website, including this Equalities Scheme, the Mainstreaming Report, and progress updates. Publications follow accessibility standards, ensuring screen-reader compatibility, plain-language summaries, and alternative formats on request.
- 7.21 This open approach ensures that the public and stakeholders can see how equality is being integrated across HITRANS' work and can hold the organisation to account.



8. Gathering and Using Evidence

8.1 Robust evidence is essential to understanding the impact of transport policies on different equality groups and to designing interventions that effectively reduce disadvantage. HITRANS adopts an evidence-led approach that combines statistical analysis, community engagement, and qualitative research to identify barriers and opportunities across its region.

The Role of Evidence

8.2 The *Public Sector Equality Duty* requires public bodies to base decisions on evidence that demonstrates “due regard” to equality. For HITRANS, this means using data and research to:

- Identify inequalities in access to transport services and infrastructure.
- Understand the experiences of people with protected characteristics.
- Target investment and resources to reduce inequalities of outcome.
- Evaluate whether policies and projects are achieving intended equality benefits.

8.3 Evidence is gathered systematically as part of strategy development, funding applications, and project evaluation. The process ensures that equality considerations are integral to all stages of decision-making — from early concept to implementation and review.

Sources of Evidence

8.4 HITRANS draws on a wide range of national and regional data sources, including:

- **Census of Population (2022):** Provides demographic, socio-economic and geographic data on the protected characteristics across the HITRANS region.

- **Scottish Household Survey:** Offers insight into travel behaviour, access to cars and public transport, and perceptions of safety and reliability.
- **Transport Scotland Accessibility Statistics:** Measures public transport access to key services such as healthcare, employment, and education.
- **Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD):** Highlights areas experiencing socio-economic disadvantage relevant to the Fairer Scotland Duty.
- **Regional and Local Studies:** Data and reports produced by local authorities, NHS Boards, and partner agencies.
- **Community Transport and Equality Organisations:** Qualitative information from engagement with community-led services, accessibility advocacy groups, and rural equality networks.

8.5 The diversity of HITRANS’ geography means that statistical data is often supplemented by community engagement and participatory research to capture the lived experiences of people in small and remote communities.

Using Evidence in Decision-Making

8.6 Evidence gathered through surveys, consultations, and assessments informs policy at multiple stages:

- **Strategic Planning:** Evidence shapes the formulation of the *Regional Transport Strategy* and its thematic priorities.
- **Project Development:** Transport studies and feasibility work incorporate equality datasets and user feedback.
- **Funding Decisions:** Equality evidence informs prioritisation for investment and grant awards.

Monitoring and Evaluation: Data is used to measure progress against equality outcomes and to identify where further action is needed.

- 8.7 The HITRANS Board considers equality evidence as part of its formal decision-making. Equality implications and supporting evidence are summarised in Board reports to demonstrate that equality has been actively considered (“due regard”) in each case.

Engagement as Evidence

- 8.8 Quantitative data alone cannot capture the full complexity of equality issues. HITRANS therefore gives equal weight to engagement-based evidence that reflects lived experience.
- 8.9 The Partnership’s consultation and engagement processes are inclusive and adaptive. HITRANS ensures that equality groups, community organisations, and individuals are able to participate meaningfully by:
- Providing accessible consultation materials in multiple formats.
 - Holding events at varied times and locations, including online options.
 - Working with local partners to reach seldom-heard groups.
 - Using feedback to refine policies and inform Equality Impact Assessments.
- 8.10 This approach aligns with the *Scottish Government’s Participation Framework* and the *National Standards for Community Engagement*, ensuring HITRANS operates to recognised best practice in participatory policymaking.

Data Quality and Gaps

- 8.11 HITRANS acknowledges that equality data for rural and island communities

is sometimes limited or subject to confidentiality constraints due to small population sizes. Where gaps exist, the Partnership seeks to fill them through targeted research or through collaboration with national agencies.

- 8.12 Data improvements planned for the 2025–2029 period include:
- Working with Transport Scotland to improve accessibility mapping data.
 - Encouraging consistent use of equality monitoring frameworks across partner authorities.
 - Developing project-level data collection to capture user demographics and experiences.
 - Sharing evidence through regional equality networks and partnerships.
- 8.13 Continual improvement in the quality and granularity of data will strengthen HITRANS’ ability to demonstrate measurable progress against equality outcomes.

Publication and Transparency

- 8.14 All key evidence used to inform HITRANS policy and strategy is published or referenced within public documents, including the *Regional Transport Strategy*, the *Mainstreaming Equality Report*, and future *Equality Outcomes Progress Reports*.
- 8.15 This transparency ensures that stakeholders and the public can understand the rationale for HITRANS’ decisions and can see the link between evidence, action, and impact.

9. Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) Methodology

- 9.1 Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) is one of the most important tools available to HITRANS for ensuring that equality is integrated into policy and project development. It provides a structured method of examining how proposed decisions, activities, or policies are likely to affect people who share protected characteristics, as well as those facing socio-economic disadvantage or geographic isolation.
- 9.2 Conducting EqIAs allows HITRANS to meet its legal obligations under the *Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED)* and to apply the principle of due regard transparently. EqIAs are carried out not as a procedural exercise but as a mechanism for improving decision quality, identifying opportunities to advance equality, and mitigating potential adverse impacts before implementation.

Purpose and Scope

- 9.3 The purpose of the HITRANS EqIA process is to:
- Identify whether any proposed policy, plan, or project could have a differential impact on people with protected characteristics.
 - Assess whether that impact is positive, negative, or neutral.
 - Recommend changes to remove or mitigate negative impacts and enhance positive ones.
 - Ensure that decision-makers are aware of equality implications when approving proposals.
- 9.4 All new or revised policies, strategies, and major projects are subject to equality assessment. The process applies equally to strategic-level documents such

as the *Regional Transport Strategy* and to operational decisions, funding allocations, and partnership agreements.

Step-by-Step Methodology

- 9.5 HITRANS' EqIA process follows the guidance set out by the *Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC)* and the Scottish Government Equality Impact Assessment Toolkit. The process typically involves the following stages:

Stage 1 – Screening

- 9.6 The initial screening determines whether the policy or project is likely to have an impact on people with protected characteristics or on socio-economically disadvantaged or island communities. If no impact is anticipated, the rationale must be clearly documented.

Stage 2 – Scoping

- 9.7 If potential impacts are identified, the scope of the assessment is defined. This includes which equality characteristics may be affected, the policy's objectives, the evidence to be used, and the stakeholders to be engaged.

Stage 3 – Evidence Gathering and Consultation

- 9.8 Quantitative and qualitative evidence is collected from relevant sources, including national statistics, community feedback, stakeholder engagement, and previous EqIAs. Consultation is used to validate findings and explore potential mitigations.

Stage 4 – Assessment and Analysis

- 9.9 The evidence is analysed to determine the likely nature and extent of impacts on each protected characteristic. Consideration is also given to intersectionality - where individuals

experience multiple, overlapping forms of disadvantage.

Stage 5 – Decision and Mitigation

9.10 Findings from the assessment inform decision-making. HITRANS will amend proposals where negative impacts are identified or will set out clear justification and mitigation measures if change is not feasible.

Stage 6 – Documentation and Publication

9.11 The completed EqlA is documented and summarised in public reports where appropriate. A record of how equality considerations have influenced decisions is included in Board papers to demonstrate compliance with the *Specific Duties (Scotland)*.

Stage 7 – Monitoring and Review

9.12 EqlAs are reviewed periodically to assess whether predicted impacts occurred and whether mitigation measures were effective. Lessons learned are incorporated into future assessments and policy development.

Island Communities Impact Assessments (ICIA)

9.13 In parallel with the EqlA, HITRANS conducts **Island Communities Impact Assessments (ICIAs)** in line with the *Islands (Scotland) Act 2018*. This ensures that the distinct needs and circumstances of island populations are fully considered when developing transport policies and projects.

9.14 The ICIA examines whether a policy, strategy, or service is likely to have a significantly different effect on island communities compared to mainland ones. Key considerations include

connectivity, cost, resilience, accessibility, and the availability of alternatives.

9.15 Where an ICIA identifies differential impacts, HITRANS takes mitigating action such as adjusting service proposals, modifying eligibility criteria, or targeting investment to reduce disadvantage.

9.16 EqlAs and ICIAs are closely aligned and may be undertaken concurrently to ensure that equality and geographic factors are considered together rather than in isolation.

Integration with Other Impact Assessments

9.17 HITRANS integrates equality considerations across all impact assessment processes. EqlAs are often conducted alongside:

- **Strategic Environmental Assessments (SEA)**
- **Health Impact Assessments (HIA)**
- **Fairer Scotland Duty Assessments**

9.18 This integrated approach reduces duplication and ensures that the interconnections between equality, health, environment, and socio-economic wellbeing are fully explored.

Accountability and Governance

9.19 The Partnership Director is accountable for ensuring that all major decisions and strategies are supported by a completed EqlA or ICIA as appropriate. Officers are responsible for carrying out assessments, maintaining records, and incorporating equality analysis into reports.

9. Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) Methodology

9.20 Board papers must include a section summarising equality implications and the outcomes of any completed assessments. This provides transparency and allows members to demonstrate that equality was given due regard during deliberations.

9.21 Training and guidance on EqIA and ICIA are reviewed regularly to reflect new legislation, best practice, and feedback from equality partners.

Publication of Assessments

9.22 HITRANS will publish summaries of completed EqIAs and ICIAAs where these are associated with public strategies or major investment decisions. Publishing these assessments demonstrates openness, enables scrutiny, and helps other organisations learn from HITRANS' experience.

9.23 Completed assessments are stored centrally to allow consistency, comparison, and organisational learning over time.

Continuous Improvement

9.24 HITRANS will continue to refine its EqIA and ICIA methodologies during 2025–2029 by:

- Strengthening links between equality evidence and decision-making.
- Integrating feedback from users and equality groups into assessment reviews.
- Enhancing staff training on intersectional analysis.
- Aligning with the Scottish Government's evolving *Equality Data Improvement Programme*.

9.25 These improvements will ensure that EqIA remains an effective and meaningful tool for advancing equality in all aspects of HITRANS' work.

10. Workforce and Governance Equality

- 10.1 Although HITRANS is a relatively small public body, it recognises that its responsibilities as an employer and as a public-facing organisation are integral to the delivery of equality across the region. The way HITRANS manages its workforce and governance arrangements must reflect the same principles of fairness, respect and inclusion that it promotes externally.
- 10.2 HITRANS seeks to provide a positive, inclusive working environment where all staff and Board members are treated with dignity and are supported to reach their full potential, irrespective of personal characteristics or background. This commitment extends to recruitment, development, remuneration, and representation.

Employment and Equal Opportunities

- 10.3 HITRANS is subject to all aspects of the *Equality Act 2010* as an employer. This includes duties relating to discrimination, harassment, victimisation, equal pay, and reasonable adjustments for disabled employees.
- 10.4 The Partnership maintains fair and transparent employment policies that reflect the principles of equality and diversity. Recruitment is based on merit, using competency-based assessment and ensuring accessibility of job information and interview processes.
- 10.5 HITRANS' size means that formal workforce reporting is proportionate; however, equality monitoring information is collected to inform improvement and to meet the requirements of the *Specific Duties (Scotland)*. Information is treated in strict confidence and used only in aggregated form.

- 10.6 Training and development opportunities are made available to all staff. The organisation promotes flexible working practices and supports a healthy work–life balance in recognition of differing personal circumstances.

Supporting Disabled and Neurodivergent Employees

- 10.7 HITRANS is committed to being a supportive and accessible workplace for disabled and neurodivergent employees. It will make reasonable adjustments to working arrangements, technology, and office environments where required.
- 10.8 The Partnership aligns its practice with the principles of the Scottish Government's *Disability Confident Employer framework*, promoting awareness and inclusivity within recruitment and day-to-day management.
- 10.9 Training on accessibility and disability awareness forms part of HITRANS' staff development programme to ensure that all staff understand their responsibilities and feel confident in supporting colleagues and stakeholders.

Gender, Pay and Representation

- 10.10 While the small size of the organisation limits detailed pay-gap analysis, HITRANS remains committed to the principle of **equal pay for work of equal value** and to eliminating gender bias in recruitment, promotion, and reward structures.
- 10.11 The Partnership supports the objectives of the *Gender Representation on Public Boards (Scotland) Act 2018*, which sets

10. Workforce and Governance Equality

an objective that 50% of non-executive members of public boards should be women.

- 10.12 Board appointments are made by constituent councils and the Scottish Ministers in line with the Public Appointments process. HITRANS works with appointing authorities to encourage gender balance and diversity of skills, experience, and geography across the Board.
- 10.13 HITRANS also seeks to increase awareness among under-represented groups of opportunities to serve on the Partnership Board or in advisory roles. Diversity in leadership is recognised as essential to inclusive decision-making.

Leadership and Accountability

- 10.14 The Partnership Director provides overall leadership for equality within the organisation and reports to the Partnership Board on progress. Equality is a standing consideration in business planning, risk management, and project governance.
- 10.15 Each staff member and project lead is responsible for embedding equality within their area of work. Accountability is maintained through reporting lines, staff appraisal processes, and the publication of equality information in the *Mainstreaming the Equality Duty Report*.
- 10.16 Board members receive periodic briefings on equality duties and good practice to ensure informed decision-making and collective ownership of equality outcomes.

Partnership Board Diversity

- 10.17 The HITRANS Board currently comprises elected members from the five constituent councils, a member nominated by the Scottish Government,

and non-councillor members appointed for their specialist expertise.

- 10.18 While representation inevitably fluctuates with local authority appointments, the Partnership continues to promote balanced representation in terms of gender, geography, and background.
- 10.19 Future Board recruitment and nomination processes will explicitly encourage applicants from diverse communities, reflecting Scotland's population and the transport users HITRANS serves.

Employee Engagement and Feedback

- 10.20 HITRANS values the input of staff in shaping workplace equality. Informal and formal feedback mechanisms are used to identify areas for improvement, and staff are encouraged to raise issues openly.
- 10.21 As a small organisation, HITRANS benefits from close working relationships that foster mutual respect and communication. Equality principles are reinforced through daily interactions and through leadership example.

Publication and Monitoring

- 10.22 Information on HITRANS' workforce composition, gender balance, and equality initiatives will be published biennially in accordance with the *Specific Duties (Scotland)*. Reports will include commentary on progress toward gender balance on the Board and on actions taken to promote inclusion.
- 10.23 As part of continuous improvement, HITRANS will review workforce policies during 2025–2029 to ensure alignment with current Scottish Government guidance and best practice.

11. Procurement and Partnership Duties

- 11.1 HITRANS delivers much of its work through partnerships and externally commissioned projects. This includes studies, infrastructure development, technology trials, community transport support, and funding agreements. Ensuring that equality is embedded within procurement and partnership activity is therefore a central part of fulfilling the *Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED)*.
- 11.2 Under Regulation 9 of the *Equality Act 2010 (Specific Duties) (Scotland) Regulations 2012*, public bodies must have due regard to whether the award criteria and contract conditions in public procurement should include considerations to help the authority better perform the equality duty.
- 11.3 This means that HITRANS must ensure that any goods, services, or works procured — and any partnerships entered into — are delivered in ways that promote equality, prevent discrimination, and support inclusive outcomes.
- Considers accessibility, diversity, and inclusion requirements where relevant.
 - Encourages suppliers to demonstrate their own equality and diversity policies and practices.
 - Includes equality-related evaluation criteria where relevant to the subject matter of the contract.
- 11.6 Where appropriate, contract conditions specify the need for suppliers to comply with equality legislation and to support HITRANS' equality objectives through their work.
- 11.7 For example, a transport infrastructure design commission might require evidence of inclusive design standards, while a data analysis project might include a requirement to collect and report equality-related user data.

Supplier and Partner Expectations

Procurement Principles

- 11.4 HITRANS' procurement practices are governed by the principles of fairness, transparency, and value for money, consistent with the *Procurement Reform (Scotland) Act 2014*. Within this framework, equality is a key consideration at each stage of the procurement cycle.
- 11.5 When planning procurements, HITRANS:
- Identifies potential equality implications of the contract and includes them in tender specifications.
- 11.8 HITRANS expects suppliers, consultants, and delivery partners to:
- Comply with the *Equality Act 2010* and all related legislation.
 - Promote equality of opportunity in their employment and service delivery.
 - Provide accessible services and communications.
 - Take proactive steps to eliminate discrimination and harassment in their operations.
- 11.9 The Partnership works collaboratively with contractors and partners to promote understanding of equality obligations. Guidance and briefings may be provided for contractors new to working within the public sector framework.

11. Procurement and Partnership Duties

11.10 Monitoring and evaluation processes for contracts and partnership projects include consideration of equality performance, ensuring that commitments made at procurement stage are fulfilled in delivery.

Partnership Working

11.11 HITRANS works extensively with local authorities, transport operators, NHS boards, universities, and community organisations. Equality is a shared responsibility across these partnerships.

11.12 Formal partnership agreements, memoranda of understanding, and funding letters incorporate clauses requiring partners to uphold the principles of equality and diversity and to meet the standards set out in the Public Sector Equality Duty.

11.13 HITRANS also engages with equality organisations such as **Disability Equality Scotland, Age Scotland**, and local access panels to ensure that project planning reflects lived experience and best practice.

11.14 Community and voluntary sector partners play an essential role in identifying transport needs for people who experience disadvantage. HITRANS supports community transport initiatives and pilot projects that test innovative solutions to accessibility challenges.

Inclusive Design and Accessibility

11.15 All capital and infrastructure projects supported by HITRANS must adhere to inclusive design standards. This includes compliance with:

- **BS 8300: Design of Buildings and Their Approaches to Meet the Needs of Disabled People**

- **Inclusive Mobility: A Guide to Best Practice on Access to Pedestrian and Transport Infrastructure** (Department for Transport)
- Scottish Government *Designing Streets and Accessible Travel Framework* guidance.

11.16 Accessibility is considered not only in the built environment but also in information, communication, and digital services. HITRANS promotes the use of plain language, accessible web formats, and multi-channel communication for projects it funds or manages.

Evaluating Equality in Contracts and Partnerships

11.17 Equality-related performance indicators are included in contract management where relevant, for example:

- Accessibility compliance in design outputs.
- Inclusion of equality evidence in project reporting.
- Representation of diverse groups in consultation and engagement activities.

11.18 HITRANS reviews these indicators as part of ongoing contract management and reports outcomes in its Mainstreaming the *Equality Duty* and *Equality Outcomes Progress* reports.

11.19 By embedding equality into its procurement and partnership arrangements, HITRANS ensures that external partners contribute directly to delivering inclusive outcomes and to fulfilling the organisation's statutory duties.

12. Equality Outcomes 2025–2029

12.1 The *Equality Act 2010 (Specific Duties) (Scotland) Regulations 2012* require public authorities to set one or more equality outcomes that will enable them to better perform the general equality duty. These outcomes are intended to focus attention on the most significant equality challenges and to demonstrate measurable progress over time.

12.2 The following equality outcomes have been developed based on:

- Analysis of evidence and data (Section 8).

- Findings from equality and accessibility engagement.
- The priorities of the *Regional Transport Strategy 2025–2045*.
- HITRANS' Mainstreaming the *Equality Duty Report (April 2025)*.

12.3 Each outcome is designed to be **Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-bound (SMART)**, and to reflect the realities of the Highlands and Islands context.



12. Equality Outcomes 2025–2029

12.1 Summary Table of Equality Outcomes 2025–2029

Outcome No.	Equality Outcome	Rationale & Baseline Evidence	Performance Measures (2025–2029)
1	Transport services and infrastructure across the HITRANS region are increasingly accessible to disabled people and those with mobility challenges.	Accessibility remains a consistent issue in rural and island areas; barriers include limited step-free access, poor interchange design, and inconsistent information provision.	• Increase in accessible infrastructure projects supported by HITRANS. • Stakeholder feedback from Disability Equality Scotland and access panels. • Improved accessibility scoring in project evaluations.
2	Residents in low-income, rural and island communities have improved access to affordable and reliable transport options.	Socio-economic disadvantage and geography combine to limit access to work, education and healthcare. The Fairer Scotland Duty requires actions that reduce these inequalities.	• Inclusion of affordability metrics in RTS monitoring. • Evidence of improved service integration and coverage. • Case studies from community transport pilots.
3	Women and girls feel safer and more confident using public and active transport.	Engagement indicates ongoing concerns around safety and personal security, particularly in rural and evening travel contexts.	• Safety and confidence indicators in surveys. • Inclusion of gender safety considerations in transport design. • Recorded improvements in user feedback.
4	Transport planning and policy development actively include equality groups and under-represented communities.	Inclusive engagement ensures lived experience informs decision-making; feedback suggests a need for more accessible consultation formats.	• Evidence of equality representation in consultations. • Publication of accessible engagement reports. • Adoption of participation standards in policy development.
5	HITRANS is recognised as an exemplar public body for mainstreaming equality within regional transport planning.	Continuous improvement in equality leadership, reporting, and transparency builds organisational credibility and influence.	• Biennial progress reports published. • Positive feedback from partners and EHRC. • Achievement of internal training and awareness targets.

12.2 Detailed Narrative of Equality Outcomes

Outcome 1: Accessible Transport Infrastructure and Services

12.4 HITRANS will continue to champion accessibility across the region, ensuring that disabled people and those with mobility impairments can travel independently and confidently.

12.5 Key actions include:

- Requiring all HITRANS-funded projects to comply with inclusive design principles.
- Working with local authorities and operators to improve step-free access and accessible waiting facilities.
- Supporting digital tools and wayfinding systems that provide real-time, accessible information.
- Encouraging co-production of designs with access panels and local disability groups.

12.6 Progress will be monitored through accessibility audits, user feedback, and project evaluations. HITRANS aims to demonstrate measurable improvement in accessible infrastructure and inclusive design practices across the region by 2029.

Outcome 2: Inclusive Access for Low-Income, Rural and Island Communities

12.7 Transport is a key enabler of social and economic participation. In the HITRANS region, the high cost and limited frequency of transport options can disproportionately affect low-income and geographically isolated communities.

12.8 To address this, HITRANS will:

- Support pilot projects for affordable, flexible, and demand-responsive

transport.

- Integrate affordability and access measures into RTS delivery and evaluation.
- Collaborate with community transport providers to fill network gaps.
- Advocate for fair pricing structures and integrated ticketing across modes.

12.9 These initiatives align directly with the *Fairer Scotland Duty* and the *Islands (Scotland) Act 2018*, demonstrating commitment to reducing socio-economic and geographic inequalities of outcome.

Outcome 3: Safe and Confident Travel for Women and Girls

12.10 Safety and perception of safety are critical factors in transport equality. Research and engagement indicate that women and girls in rural and island areas can experience unique barriers to travel due to infrequent services, unlit routes, and limited information.

12.11 HITRANS will work with partners to:

- Integrate gender-sensitive design into transport infrastructure and active-travel routes.
- Promote safe and inclusive travel environments, especially at interchanges and waiting areas.
- Collaborate with Police Scotland, local authorities, and community groups to improve personal security initiatives.

12.12 Progress will be tracked through perception surveys, local safety audits, and equality-focused feedback mechanisms.

12. Equality Outcomes 2025–2029

Outcome 4: Inclusive Participation and Decision-Making

12.13 HITRANS is committed to involving equality groups and under-represented communities in decision-making processes. Inclusion ensures that policies and projects reflect the lived experience of those most affected by transport inequality.

12.14 Actions include:

- Using accessible and multilingual formats for consultation materials.
- Conducting engagement sessions in both urban and remote settings.
- Building long-term relationships with equality organisations and community representatives.
- Publishing consultation feedback reports that clearly explain how input has shaped outcomes.

12.15 This approach strengthens democratic accountability and ensures that equality is embedded not only in policy outcomes but also in the way HITRANS makes decisions.

Outcome 5: HITRANS as an Exemplar Equality-Mainstreaming Organisation

12.16 HITRANS aims to be recognised as a regional leader in equality mainstreaming, demonstrating transparency, accountability, and continuous improvement in its equality work.

12.17 During 2025–2029, the Partnership will:

- Maintain comprehensive equality reporting and data collection.
- Deliver periodic staff and Board equality awareness sessions.
- Integrate equality objectives into strategic and operational plans.

- Collaborate with other Regional Transport Partnerships to share best practice.

12.18 Progress will be reflected in biennial *Mainstreaming Equality and Equality Outcomes Progress Reports*, and through evidence of improved stakeholder confidence in HITRANS' leadership on equality and inclusion.

12.3 Reviewing and Updating Outcomes

12.19 Equality outcomes will be reviewed annually and formally updated in 2029. HITRANS may revise outcomes earlier if new evidence, legislative changes, or strategic developments warrant amendment.

12.20 Monitoring will be integrated into HITRANS' overall performance framework, ensuring that equality progress is tracked alongside transport, sustainability, and governance objectives.

13. Monitoring, Evaluation and Reporting

- 13.1 Monitoring and evaluation are essential to ensuring that equality work at HITRANS is effective, evidence-based, and accountable. Regular assessment enables the Partnership to measure progress, identify gaps, and adjust its approach as circumstances change.
- 13.2 The *Equality Act 2010 (Specific Duties) (Scotland) Regulations 2012* require public bodies to report on both **mainstreaming activity** and **equality outcomes** at least every two years. HITRANS integrates this reporting cycle within its corporate governance framework to ensure consistency and transparency.

Monitoring Framework

- 13.3 Equality performance is monitored through a combination of qualitative and quantitative measures, including:
- The indicators set out in the Equality Outcomes summary table (Section 12).
 - Project-level evaluations and accessibility audits.
 - Stakeholder and community feedback gathered through engagement.
 - Internal progress reports to the Partnership Board.
- 13.4 Monitoring is embedded within HITRANS' business planning and performance management processes. Each major project and programme includes equality indicators relevant to its scope and objectives.
- 13.5 The Partnership Director has lead responsibility for ensuring that monitoring data is collected, analysed, and reported. The Partnership Board reviews progress and provides strategic oversight of improvement actions.

Evaluation Methods

- 13.6 Evaluation is both formative (used to improve current practice) and summative (used to measure impact). Methods include:
- **Equality Impact Review:** Follow-up analysis of completed projects to assess real-world effects.
 - **Comparative Analysis:** Benchmarking against other Regional Transport Partnerships and national equality data.
 - **Outcome Tracking:** Measuring progress against baseline data and targets set for each Equality Outcome.
 - **Stakeholder Evaluation:** Gathering perceptions from equality partners and service users on the effectiveness of HITRANS' equality approach.
- 13.7 Findings from evaluation activity are integrated into future planning, ensuring that the organisation continuously learns and adapts.

13. Monitoring, Evaluation and Reporting

Reporting Cycle

13.8 HITRANS follows a biennial reporting cycle that aligns with Scottish Government and *EHRC* expectations:

Reporting Instrument	Frequency	Purpose
Mainstreaming the Equality Duty Report	Every 2 years (next due April 2027)	Demonstrates how equality is being integrated into all aspects of HITRANS' work.
Equality Outcomes Progress Report	Every 2 years (next due April 2027)	Reports progress on achieving Equality Outcomes 2025–2029.
Equal Pay Statement	Every 4 years	Details gender pay gap data and actions to address inequality.
Regional Transport Strategy Review	As required	Evaluates strategic progress on accessibility and inclusion objectives.

13.9 Each report will be approved by the HITRANS Partnership Board prior to publication, ensuring collective accountability for performance.

Publication and Accessibility

13.10 All equality reports and supporting information are published on the HITRANS website in accessible formats. Documents are designed for screen readers and available in alternative languages and formats on request.

13.11 Summaries of key findings will also be shared with partner councils, community groups, and relevant equality networks to encourage shared learning and transparency.

13.12 Publication dates and document links will be promoted through HITRANS' communications channels to maximise accessibility and awareness.

Continuous Improvement

13.13 HITRANS recognises that effective equality monitoring depends on continuous improvement in data collection and analysis. During the 2025–2029 period, the Partnership will:

- Enhance equality data gathering at project level.
- Develop new performance indicators aligned with national datasets.
- Work with other Regional Transport Partnerships to standardise equality metrics.
- Use findings from external audits or reviews to strengthen practice.

13.14 Regular evaluation of internal processes will ensure that equality remains central to how HITRANS measures success, plans strategically, and allocates resources.

Accountability

- 13.15 The Partnership Board retains ultimate responsibility for compliance with equality legislation and for the publication of required reports. Board members are collectively accountable for ensuring that equality duties are met, and for demonstrating that due regard has been given to equality in all key decisions.
- 13.16 The Partnership Director ensures operational compliance and oversees reporting, while staff are responsible for embedding equality considerations into daily practice.
- 13.17 This clear structure of accountability ensures that equality performance is monitored at all levels of the organisation.



14. Future Actions and Continuous Improvement

- 14.1 Equality is not a fixed goal but a continuing process of improvement. As transport technologies evolve, communities change, and new challenges emerge, HITRANS will continue to adapt its policies and practices to ensure that equality remains embedded at the core of its work.
- 14.2 The *Equality and Human Rights Commission* emphasises that public bodies should “strive for continuous improvement” in their performance of the Public Sector Equality Duty. This principle is integral to HITRANS’ approach for 2025–2029 and beyond.

Strategic Priorities for 2025–2029

- 14.3 Over the period of this Scheme, HITRANS will pursue the following strategic equality priorities:

1. Deepening Mainstreaming Integration:

- o Embed equality considerations within all stages of Regional Transport Strategy delivery plans and project evaluation frameworks.
- o Strengthen links between equality, decarbonisation, and just-transition workstreams.

2. Enhancing Accessibility and Inclusion:

- o Collaborate with local authorities, operators, and the third sector to deliver more inclusive and accessible transport networks.
- o Support innovation in technology and data to improve real-time accessibility information.

3. Expanding Engagement and Co-Production:

- o Build lasting relationships with equality groups, access panels, and community representatives.
- o Increase co-production approaches, where equality partners are directly involved in shaping project design and delivery.

4. Strengthening Evidence and Data:

- o Improve the granularity and consistency of equality data, including for island and rural populations.
- o Share learning and insights through collaboration with other Regional Transport Partnerships and Transport Scotland.

5. Promoting Leadership and Culture Change:

- o Continue to provide equality training and awareness sessions for Board members and staff.
- o Encourage leadership behaviours that value diversity and inclusion in all decision-making.

Continuous Improvement in Practice

- 14.4 Continuous improvement will be achieved through a cycle of planning, implementation, evaluation, and review. HITRANS will use the following mechanisms to ensure ongoing development:

- **Annual Internal Review:** To assess progress against equality outcomes and identify areas for targeted improvement
-

- **Biennial Public Reporting:** As required by the Specific Duties (Scotland), ensuring transparency and accountability.
 - **Feedback Loops:** Incorporating stakeholder input from equality partners and users into each stage of the project life cycle.
 - **Learning Networks:** Participating in joint workshops and knowledge exchanges with national equality forums and public sector partners.
- 14.5 HITRANS will also draw on national initiatives such as the *Equality Data Improvement Programme*, the Accessible Travel Framework, and the *Just Transition Plan for Transport* to inform its evolving practice.

Responding to Emerging Issues

- 14.6 The transport landscape is changing rapidly, driven by digitalisation, decarbonisation, and demographic shifts. HITRANS recognises that these changes may introduce new forms of inequality or risk. Over the next four years, the Partnership will:
- Monitor developments in digital access and ensure transport information remains inclusive for people without digital connectivity.
 - Ensure that the move toward low-emission and electric transport supports equitable access for rural and island areas.
 - Consider the equality implications of new mobility models such as shared and demand-responsive services.
 - Engage with national and local initiatives addressing gender safety, accessibility, and inclusive active travel.

- 14.7 By proactively identifying and responding to emerging issues, HITRANS will ensure that equality remains an integral part of sustainable transport development rather than a reactive consideration.

Building Organisational Capability

- 14.8 Sustaining improvement in equality performance requires strong organisational capacity. HITRANS will continue to build capability through:
- Ongoing staff development and training on equality, diversity, and human rights.
 - Strengthening governance systems for tracking equality progress.
 - Allocating sufficient resources to maintain compliance and innovation in equality work.
 - Integrating equality performance indicators into internal and external audit processes.
- 14.9 The Partnership will periodically review its equality governance arrangements to ensure they remain fit for purpose and proportionate to organisational scale and resources.

Long-Term Commitment

- 14.10 This Scheme represents the next step in HITRANS' long-standing commitment to fairness and inclusion. Its success depends on collaboration — across councils, communities, operators, and individuals — to ensure transport serves everyone equally and effectively.
- 14.11 By 2029, HITRANS aims to demonstrate tangible progress in reducing transport-related inequalities, strengthening

14. Future Actions and Continuous Improvement

representation in decision-making, and embedding equality throughout the organisation and its partnerships.

Preparing for the Next Equality Scheme (2029–2033)

14.12 As this Scheme approaches its conclusion, HITRANS will begin work on the next cycle (2029–2033). Preparation will include:

- Comprehensive evaluation of the 2025–2029 equality outcomes.
- Consultation with equality partners and communities to shape new priorities.
- Alignment with the next Regional Transport Strategy review and national policy frameworks.

14.13 This forward planning will ensure continuity, build on lessons learned, and sustain momentum in delivering equality and inclusion for the Highlands and Islands.

15. Appendices

Appendix A – Key Legislative Excerpts

15.1 The following excerpts summarise key provisions of the legislation that underpins this Equalities Scheme. These are reproduced or paraphrased from publicly available sources to ensure accessibility and clarity.

A.1 Equality Act 2010 – Section 149: The Public Sector Equality Duty

- (1) A public authority must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to—
 - (a) eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under this Act;
 - (b) advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it; and
 - (c) foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.
- (3) Having due regard to the need to advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it involves, in particular—
 - (a) removing or minimising disadvantages suffered by persons who share a relevant protected characteristic that are connected to that characteristic;
 - (b) taking steps to meet the different needs of persons who share a relevant protected characteristic; and

- (c) encouraging persons who share a relevant protected characteristic to participate in public life or in any other activity in which participation by such persons is disproportionately low.

A.2 Equality Act 2010 (Specific Duties) (Scotland) Regulations 2012

Regulation 3: Duty to Report Progress on Mainstreaming the Equality Duty

A listed authority must publish a report on the progress it has made to make the equality duty integral to the exercise of its functions so as to better perform that duty.

Regulation 5: Duty to Publish Equality Outcomes

A listed authority must determine one or more equality outcomes which it considers will enable it to better perform the equality duty, and must publish a report specifying those outcomes within a period of not more than four years thereafter.

Regulation 9: Duty in Relation to Public Procurement

In making decisions about how to exercise its functions in relation to procurement, a listed authority must have due regard to whether award criteria and conditions should include considerations to enable it to better perform the equality duty.

15. Appendices

A.3 The Fairer Scotland Duty (Equality Act 2010, Part 1, Section 1)

- (1) An authority to which this section applies must, when making decisions of a strategic nature about how to exercise its functions, have due regard to the desirability of exercising them in a way that is designed to reduce the inequalities of outcome which result from socio-economic disadvantage.
- (2) In carrying out this duty, an authority must publish a written assessment (Fairer Scotland Duty Assessment) to demonstrate how the requirement has been considered.

A.4 Islands (Scotland) Act 2018 – Section 7: Island Communities Impact Assessments

- (1) A relevant authority must have regard to island communities in carrying out its functions.
- (2) In particular, a relevant authority must prepare an island communities impact assessment in relation to a policy, strategy or service which, in the authority's opinion, is likely to have an effect on an island community which is significantly different from its effect on other communities.
- (4) An island communities impact assessment must describe the likely significantly different effect of the policy, strategy or service and set out the authority's assessment of the extent to which it can be mitigated or improved.

Appendix B – Glossary of Terms

15.2 Accessibility – The extent to which transport systems and infrastructure are usable by all people, regardless of ability or circumstance.

Discrimination – Unfair treatment of a person because of a protected characteristic.

Due Regard – The need to consciously consider the aims of the equality duty when exercising public functions.

Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) – A systematic process used to assess how a policy or decision will affect people with different protected characteristics.

Fairer Scotland Duty – The duty placed on certain public bodies to reduce inequalities of outcome caused by socio-economic disadvantage.

Gender Representation on Public Boards (Scotland) Act 2018 – Legislation setting an objective that 50% of non-executive members of public boards should be women.

Island Communities Impact Assessment (ICIA) – An assessment required to consider the impact of policies on island communities.

Mainstreaming Equality – The integration of equality considerations into everyday work and decision-making.

Protected Characteristics – Attributes covered under the Equality Act 2010: age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, and sexual orientation.

Appendix C – Key Evidence Sources

15.3 The following evidence sources have informed the HITRANS Equalities Scheme 2025–2029 and will continue to guide monitoring and evaluation:

- **Census of Population 2022 (National Records of Scotland)** – demographic data for equality analysis.
- **Scottish Household Survey (2023)** – travel behaviour and accessibility insights.
- **Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD 2024)** – socio-economic data for Fairer Scotland Duty analysis.
- **Transport Scotland Accessibility Statistics (2023)** – data on public transport access to services.
- **HITRANS Mainstreaming the Equality Duty Report (April 2025)** – baseline evidence and equality performance to date.
- **Regional Transport Strategy 2025–2045** – strategic alignment and policy context.
- **National Transport Strategy 2 (Scottish Government, 2020)** – national policy framework.
- **Disability Equality Scotland and Access Panel Feedback Reports** – qualitative evidence on accessibility barriers and progress.
- **Community Transport Association Reports** – evidence on community-led transport models and inclusion.

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