

Report to Partnership Meeting 7 November 2025

RESEARCH AND STRATEGY DELIVERY

Minimum Mobility and Just Transition – Policy Implications

Purpose of Report

To provide an overview of the findings from the paper *Quantifying Minimum Mobility* and outline their implications for the Highlands and Islands region and Scotland more broadly.

The report sets out what constitutes ‘decent mobility’, lessons from case studies, and the links to transport poverty. It aims to support discussion on the policy and delivery implications for HITRANS as part of Scotland’s just transition away from reliance on private cars.

Background and Authorship

The report *Quantifying Minimum Mobility* was authored by Marlin Arnz et al. and published in the peer-reviewed journal *Energy Research and Social Science*. The study investigates the concept of a minimum mobility baseline as a foundation for equitable transport systems, situating the discussion within wider debates on transport poverty, social exclusion, and just transition policy.

The research combines case studies, policy analysis, and theoretical framing to argue that mobility should be treated as a social right, akin to housing or healthcare, with a guaranteed baseline of provision established before further considerations such as safety, accessibility, or comfort are addressed.

The report has particular relevance for rural and peripheral regions, such as the Highlands and Islands, where dispersed populations and long distances exacerbate challenges of access and car dependence.

The report from the Journal is included as an Appendix.

Key Findings of the Report

The following key points are drawn from the paper:

- **Decent Mobility:** Defined as a minimum baseline of transport availability that enables people to access essential services, employment, education, healthcare, and social participation without requiring a private car. This baseline must be reliable, affordable, and inclusive, ensuring dignity for all groups.
- **Case Study Insights:** Evidence shows that locally tailored, community-led provision (such as flexible buses) and integrated multimodal systems (combining public transport with active travel) can significantly reduce dependence on private cars. Success relies on tailoring, integration, and community involvement.

- **Transport Poverty:** The paper argues that poverty in transport terms arises when people cannot reliably and affordably access essential opportunities. A baseline of availability is required before factors such as safety, accessibility, and quality can be addressed.

Implications for the Highlands and Islands

The findings are particularly relevant to the Highlands and Islands, where dispersed populations and long travel distances make private car dependence acute. The lessons emphasise the need for hybrid models (demand-responsive services alongside conventional rail and bus) and the importance of integration with active travel. At a national level, the findings support Scotland's just transition ambitions by clarifying that equity depends first on ensuring a guaranteed minimum level of service.

This report is very relevant in the context of HITRANS regional transport strategy as we move forward with the Regional Bus Strategy. It captures key challenges that are present in our region and offers an input on ways these can be addressed. It also usefully relates the impact of transport poverty and the difference this means in a rural context when compared with this term being applied to urban contexts where greater availability to public transport exists

Summary – Next Areas of Focus for HITRANS

With particular relevance to the Regional Bus Strategy but also linking to our work on Health and Transport and People & Place Behaviour Change the next areas that HITRANS should focus on in terms of a decent standard of mobility choice are:

- Define and adopt a regional baseline standard of 'decent mobility', applicable across the Highlands and Islands.
- Identify opportunities to pilot hybrid service models (e.g., combining demand-responsive with fixed-route provision).
- Strengthen integration of transport modes, particularly bus, rail, walking, and cycling.
- Embed community engagement in the design and delivery of mobility services.
- Advocate nationally for minimum mobility guarantees as a foundation of transport policy.

Risk Register

RTS Delivery

Impact – Positive

Comment: Supports the Regional Transport Strategy commitment to equitable mobility provision, and aligns with the just transition agenda.

Policy

Impact – Positive

Comment: Strengthens national and regional efforts to reduce car dependence, and supports the National Transport Strategy priorities of equity and inclusion.

Financial

Impact – Neutral/Positive

Comment: Initial work can be progressed within existing resources. Future costs will depend on the scale of pilots, with potential for joint resourcing across partners.

Equality

Impact – Positive

Comment: A minimum mobility guarantee would particularly benefit disadvantaged groups, including rural residents, older adults, disabled people, and those on low incomes.

Recommendation

Members are invited to:

1. Note the findings of the paper Quantifying Minimum Mobility.
2. Endorse the principle of a guaranteed minimum baseline of transport availability as a foundation for policy.
3. Agree that HITRANS should develop proposals for projects that demonstrate community-led and integrated models of delivery.
4. Support engagement with Transport Scotland to advocate for embedding minimum mobility in national frameworks.

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Date:	29 th September 2025
Additional Information:	Appendix – Quantifying Minimum Mobility by Arnz et al.