

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

### **RESEARCH AND STRATEGY DELIVERY**

#### **CTA Report on Community Transport and NHS Board Compliance with the Transport (Scotland) Act 2019**

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

To present to the Board the key findings of the Community Transport Association's Healthy Communities Scotland (2025) report, with specific reference to NHS Highland, NHS Western Isles, NHS Orkney, and NHS Grampian.

The paper highlights the report's implications for health and transport integration in the Highlands and Islands and identifies areas where HITRANS may wish to engage further.

##### **Background**

The Transport (Scotland) Act 2019 requires NHS Boards to:

- Consider community benefit in non-emergency patient transport contracts.
- Work with Community Transport bodies.
- Report annually on compliance.

The CTA's 2025 research, based on FOI requests to all 14 NHS Boards, finds low compliance, limited collaboration, and a significant reliance on private taxis rather than Community Transport provision.

##### **Key Findings of the CTA Report**

The Key Finding of the report are set out below. These are gathered into information on the wider Scottish picture of compliance with the Act and a section based on the information provided by the NHS Boards in the HITRANS area in response to the CTA freedom of information requests.

##### National Context

- Low compliance: Only half of NHS Boards have community benefit policies; fewer still work directly with Community Transport.
- No transparency: No NHS Board has published the required compliance reports.
- Spending patterns: Over £20.9m spent on taxis in the past five years – six times more than on non-profit Community Transport.
- Sector fragility: More than one in four Community Transport operators fear closure within three years due to rising demand, driver shortages, and lack of sustainable funding.

### NHS Boards in the HITRANS Area

- NHS Highland: Works with several community car schemes; acknowledges the benefit of such schemes, but has not met reporting duties.
- NHS Grampian: A partial positive example through its Health and Transport Action Plan (HTAP), which includes Community Transport as a partner. Demonstrates engagement but still no reporting compliance.
- NHS Western Isles: Denies responsibility for non-emergency patient transport; provided no spending data; no evidence of compliance.
- NHS Orkney: No evidence of engagement with Community Transport; no reporting or spending data; categorised as non-compliant.

Table capturing Highlands and Islands Region NHS Health Board responses to the CTA:

| <b>NHS Board</b> | <b>Community Benefit Duty</b>                     | <b>Work with CT</b>                 | <b>Annual Reporting</b> | <b>Spending Data</b>     | <b>Overall Compliance</b> |
|------------------|---------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|-------------------------|--------------------------|---------------------------|
| Highland         | Limited evidence; some engagement via car schemes | Yes – several community car schemes | None                    | Incomplete               | Partial                   |
| Western Isles    | No compliance                                     | Denied remit                        | None                    | None provided            | None                      |
| Orkney           | No compliance                                     | No evidence                         | None                    | None provided            | None                      |
| Shetland         | No compliance                                     | No action foreseen                  | None                    | None provided            | None                      |
| Grampian         | Partial (via HTAP)                                | Yes – via HTAP                      | None                    | Provided (within totals) | Partial / Better practice |

### Wider Issues Identified

Based on the findings the CTA report suggests the following wider issues as a result of the limited progress on engaging with Community Transport in line with the Transport (Scotland) Act 2019:

- Patients at risk: Without Community Transport, nearly 40% of surveyed passengers would have been unable to travel to health or social care appointments.
- Inefficient spending: Reliance on taxis is less cost-effective than supporting local Community Transport schemes.
- Missed opportunities: Regional Transport Partnerships (RTPs) were noted as occasional funding sources, but their role remains under-utilised.

### Implications for HITRANS

Evidence indicates a serious implementation gap in the region, with several Boards failing to support or collaborate with Community Transport.

There is a risk of worsening health inequalities, particularly in remote and island communities where access challenges are most acute.

With work now underway on a Highlands and Islands Health and Transport Action Plan HITRANS is well placed to:

- Advocate for greater NHS investment in Community Transport.
- Highlight the report's findings in regional and national policy discussions.
- Support collaboration between transport and health bodies to address access gaps.

## **Conclusions**

The CTA report underlines the critical role of Community Transport in ensuring access to health and social care across Scotland, and the extent to which NHS Boards—including those in the Highlands and Islands—are falling short of their legal duties. Without stronger support and partnership, there is a real risk of losing lifeline services.

## **RISK REGISTER**

### RTS Delivery

Impact – Positive

Comment: The CTA findings provide strong evidence of gaps in NHS Board compliance with the Transport (Scotland) Act 2019. Using this evidence positions HITRANS to champion improved integration of health and transport, strengthening delivery of the Regional Transport Strategy.

Comment – The Research and Development Programme is the key mechanism by which HITRANS promotes delivery of the Transport Strategy for the Highlands and Islands

### Policy

Impact – Positive

Comment: The report supports national priorities in the Transport to Health Delivery Plan and the National Transport Strategy. It underlines the need for partnership working between transport and health sectors, aligning directly with Scottish Government policy objectives.

### Financial

Impact – Neutral/Positive

Comment: The report itself has no direct financial impact but provides evidence to support future funding bids and joint resourcing opportunities. There may be potential financial implications if HITRANS chooses to advocate for or support Community Transport operators in partnership with NHS Boards and local authorities.

### Equality

Impact – Positive

Comment: The findings highlight significant inequalities in access to healthcare, particularly for older people, disabled people, and remote island communities. Addressing these gaps through stronger support for Community Transport will help reduce health inequalities and improve accessibility.

## **Recommendations**

The Board is invited to:

1. Note the findings of the CTA's Healthy Communities Scotland (2025) report.
2. Acknowledge the implications of NHS Board non-compliance for communities within the HITRANS area.
3. Agree that HITRANS should use the report's findings to press for stronger collaboration between NHS Boards, local authorities, and Community Transport providers in the region.

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**Date:** 29<sup>th</sup> September 2025  
**Additional Information:** Appendix – CTA Healthy Communities Scotland (2025) report