# HITRANS Regional Transport Strategy 2025-2045

**Highlands and Islands Transport Partnership**

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# RTS Foreword – HITRANS Chair – Cllr Uisdean Robertson

The Highlands and Islands Regional Transport Strategy 2008-2022 (RTS) was approved by Scottish Minsters in 2008. It was informed and influenced by widespread public and stakeholder consultation. The RTS, projects and themes from the associated Delivery Plan, set out the key policies and proposals required to deliver our vision for transport in the region. Much of the core policy framework and strategic direction of the RTS and its vision and objectives remain valid today with a focus on a prosperous economy and on inclusive, connected and healthy communities. However, there have been several changes to the policy, economic, societal and environmental contexts within which our Partnership now operates, and these are reflected in our updated RTS.

The Scottish Government published its second National Transport Strategy (NTS2)[1] in 2020, which defined its national vision as:

*"We will have a sustainable, inclusive, safe and accessible transport system, helping deliver a healthier, fairer and more prosperous Scotland for communities, businesses and visitors".*

NTS2 set out four priorities to support this national vision: reducing inequalities; taking climate action; helping deliver inclusive economic growth; and improving our health and wellbeing. At its heart is the *Sustainable Investment Hierarchy* which is now being used to inform future investment decisions and ensure transport options that focus on reducing inequalities and the need to travel unsustainably are prioritised. It also highlights a need to focus on maintaining and safely operating existing assets, taking due consideration of the need to adapt to the impacts of climate change.

It is in this context that HITRANS and other Regional Transport Partnerships have been updating their Regional Transport Strategies. Our RTS seeks to ensure that these national outcomes are supported whilst also reflecting the local opportunities and challenges in our region. Our overarching Vision underpinning the Strategy is that 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.**

In developing the Strategy and through an initial public consultation on the Case for Change Report, we initially agreed a series of objectives against which our transport problems and options for addressing them were assessed. The final Strategy on which we undertook statutory consultation considered the options identified in the Preliminary Options Appraisal under **11 Strategy Themes, with each theme containing a set of individual policies.**

Feedback received through the consultation was supportive of both the approach we have adopted and the policies outlined in the draft version of the Strategy.

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[1] https://www.transport.gov.scot/media/47052/national-transport-strategy.pdf

# RTS Introduction

The original Regional Transport Strategy (RTS) was published in 2008. We refreshed the Strategy in 2018 but following the publication of the second National Transport Strategy in 2020, our Members considered it appropriate that we undertake a full update of our own RTS to ensure it reflected the current policy landscape and wider regional priorities.

The development of the RTS has followed a staged process that has included a public consultation on the *Case for Change* that sought initial views on our proposed Vision and Strategy Objectives. Subsequently, we undertook a *Preliminary Options Appraisal* report that appraised a long-list of options that had been identified to address the transport problems in our region. Each stage has also been informed by a multi-stage Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA), Equalities Impact Assessment (EqIA) and embedded Island Communities Impact Assessment (ICIA).

This was followed by a statutory public consultation on the draft Strategy document in early 2024, with an updated final version then submitted to Scottish Ministers for approval. The Strategy was finally adopted by the HITRANS Partnership Board in June 2025.

The RTS has placed shortlisted options into 11 themes with each containing a set of policies to address the transport challenges and problems in the Highlands and Islands. The adopted Strategy provides the strategic framework for the development of transport in our region for the next 20 years. It is necessarily a comprehensive document relevant to both immediate issues but also those medium to longer term challenges that will take many years to address.

In tandem to the adoption of the RTS, we have published our first Delivery Plan, which sets out immediate and longer-term actions for implementing the Strategy. The Delivery Plan will be updated regularly (following the formation of each new HITRANS Board after local government elections), providing an opportunity to reset or realign priorities to the changing political, social, environmental and economic landscape.

Our work to date and early engagement with key stakeholders has highlighted a number of priority areas that the Regional Transport Strategy seeks to address.

Firstly, the challenge of ensuring the reliability and resilience of our existing transport networks and services let alone an improvement is increasingly evident. Severe weather events have closed or disrupted our transport services with closures impacting the strategic network not just at known areas of weakness such as the Rest and Thankful on the A83 but at multiple locations throughout the region and with an increasing frequency. Our RTS highlights the need for all levels of government to work collaboratively and innovatively to better address and mitigate these challenges.

Similarly, we have seen increasing pressures on our publicly supported ferry networks. The introduction of Road Equivalent Tariff (RET) has seen significant success in growing demand for travel on the Clyde and Hebrides Ferry Services (CHFS) network. Frequency on several routes was enhanced to meet the growth in traffic, but the additional demand has outstripped the additional supply in many places. Overall, however, the success of RET has not been reinforced with the timeous replacement of new vessels to replace life expired tonnage or to increase frequency and has left a perception that this increased demand for travel on the network is a bad thing. The impact of the eagerly anticipated five new major vessels into the CHFS fleet will help address many of the recent resilience challenges that have so heavily impacted the lives of island residents across our region.

However, there are many wider challenges impacting ferry services beyond the need for new tonnage on the CHFS network. We have recently produced a report on the severe capital and revenue pressures faced by those local authorities - Argyll and Bute, Highland, Orkney and Shetland – that operate ferry services. We have also recently responded to the consultation on the CHFS3 contract and met with Officials, highlighting a number of strategic changes which we and our local partners feel are required to ensure that the future investment and

operation of services delivers for the communities it serves. The opportunity to fundamentally change how we provide and operate services to our islands (and remote peninsular communities) must be grasped.

The RTS reiterates our support for the early delivery of several committed transport improvements in our region. These include the dualling of the A9 and A96. We responded to the A96 Corridor review highlighting our Board's support for the early prioritisation of the Inverness to Auldearn section and bypasses of Nairn, Elgin and Keith that will provide an opportunity to transform the centres of these towns with the removal of the congestion and heavy goods traffic that it currently has to accommodate. Investment in these key arteries and other sections of the strategic network that are still not constructed to a suitable standard for the function they perform is essential for addressing issues relating to road safety, driver frustration, journey reliability and perceptions of remoteness, and in doing so, will help realise the economic potential of the Highlands and Islands. The A82 and A83 perform similar functions for the West Highland and islands economies, transporting the goods and visitors to this region but also providing the connectivity necessary for our residents and businesses to thrive. We would like to see the designed scheme for Tarbet to Inverarnan progressed and a solution found for the negative economic and environmental impacts that heavy strategic traffic is having on both Fort William and Oban. To this end, we are currently leading work to develop an Integrated Transport Plan for Fort William in partnership with Transport Scotland and The Highland Council.

Recent work has highlighted the value of the goods transported on our regional strategic network to the Scottish and UK economies. We would like to see an expansion of support for projects that enable the transfer of freight movements from road to rail and sea such as those funded through the Timber Transport fund and Tesco in Inverness, but in many areas the road network remains the only viable means of transporting heavy goods.

In addition to these traditionally successful exports, the Highlands and Islands is well placed to benefit from a number of recent economic developments. The huge potential to be realised from ScotWind Leasing – the process of making seabed available for commercial-scale offshore wind projects – is only starting to be realised but has the potential to benefit businesses and communities in the region for decades to come as well as providing a major boost to national clean energy production. With strategic oversight and collaboration there is an opportunity to harness this and other renewable energy in the region to provide a 'Just Transition to Net Zero' that will enable all aspects of the region's economy to benefit from decarbonising.

The success of Inverness and Cromarty Firth Green Freeport securing Freeport status offers a generational opportunity for the wider region to maximise the local benefits from a pipeline of renewable energy projects that will create business opportunities and employment, attract inward investment, research and development, and position the Highlands at the heart of the country's commitment to becoming a net-zero economy.
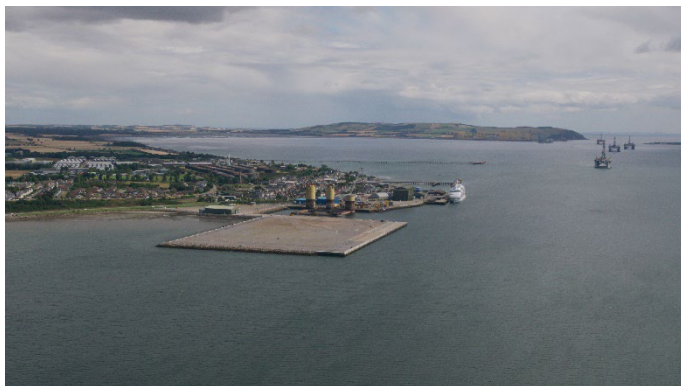


When operational, it is estimated that the Green Freeport will attract 10,000 jobs and £3billion of investment. Meanwhile, Highlands and Islands Enterprise (HIE) has commissioned research to understand the current and future nature and scale of transformational economic opportunity in the region. Assessing the aggregate impact of live and planned major projects over the period 2025-2040, it estimates that there will be £100bn of investment across the area through over 250 projects. To facilitate and realise the full potential of this investment, HITRANS and other partners in the region, require the levers and funding to deliver the

supporting infrastructure of which the strategic transport network and services are so essential.

There is now a recognition across public and private stakeholders that transport networks and services need to urgently decarbonise, and we have been at the forefront of projects to realise the benefits of the region's renewable energy surplus. We are the lead partner of the Sustainable Aviation Test Environment (SATE) project. SATE, which was originally based at Kirkwall Airport but has now expanded across the region. The Kirkwall centre is the UK's first low carbon test location at an operational airport. The



project and its partners show emerging technologies along with real-world potential scenarios that seek to highlight the environmental, social and economic contribution sustainable aviation can make. Similarly, with the FASTER ERDF project, and now through securing over £3million for the North and West Scotland EV Infrastructure Fund project we are working with partner local authorities to secure private sector investment to help expand the public electric vehicle provision in Sheltand Islands, Orkney Islands, Comhairle nan Eilean Siar and Argyll and Bute Council areas. We will also continue to work with public and private partners to develop electric, hydrogen and other innovative alternative fuelled options that can decarbonise all modes of transport in our region.

Our consultation and engagement to date has highlighted the increasing challenge our residents face in accessing healthcare within our region. On a number of transport services including some air links, passengers accessing healthcare can make up the majority of passengers. The centralisation of healthcare provision into a number of specialised facilities has resulted in increased journeys and increased cost of accessing healthcare for both patients and their families. We will continue to work with the NHS, local authorities and transport providers to improve the options available to patients and reduce the need to travel wherever possible.

While the expansive geography and low population density of our region can involve travelling longer distances to access employment and key services, the vast majority of trips are, even in most rural areas, within walking or cycling distance. Indeed, our region has the highest cycle to work rates of any region in Scotland, with settlements such as Elgin and Inverness having the highest levels for any large town or city in Scotland respectively. We welcome the Scottish Government's recent move to provide more direct funding for active travel infrastructure to our local authority partners and the funding of Regional Transport Partnerships to encourage people to travel sustainably through the use of behaviour change funding.

Working in partnership with local authorities and community anchor organisations HITRANS oversees a wide range of projects improving access to walking, cycling and public transport across the region. This includes our award winning e-bike share scheme, Hi-Bike, which currently operates in Inverness and Fort William and we are expanding into Elgin.

HITRANS see the successful introduction of this programme providing an accountable devolved delivery model that could be developed across other areas of transport such as active travel and bus infrastructure

We have highlighted the increasing challenge to the resilience of our railway network from climate change but there are also significant opportunities for rail to tackle many of the underlying transport challenges in our region. Transport Scotland's policy statement on "Achieving Car use Reduction in Scotland" highlights that a small number of longer journeys account for a



disproportionate percentage of total car kilometres. Enhanced, reliable and affordable rail services and reduced journey times on key inter-urban routes offer an opportunity to encourage significant modal shift on journeys both within our area but also improved connectivity to the major urban centres in Scotland and the rest of the UK. For this to be realised we need to see continued investment in expanding the electrification of the network into our region. We will publish a Regional Rail Strategy as a daughter document to the RTS. This will set out investment priorities for rail over the lifetime of the RTS.

We were a key enabler of the new Inverness Airport Station and will continue to make the case for investment in the redevelopment of Inverness Station (under Recommendation 43 (Major Station Masterplans) of Strategic Transport Projects Review 2) in terms of improving the station's operational functionality, as well as integrating the station better with the bus station and city centre so as to ensure it acts as an effective Regional gateway.

Improving the integration of transport services is another consistent theme that public consultation for the RTS reinforced. Integration covers a myriad of different issues but at its heart is the need for the public to have both confidence to undertake public transport journeys with multiple legs and assurance that they will reach their destination on time and, when there is disruption, information on alternative arrangements is available. Improving transport Integration is also about addressing the ease and cost of purchasing multi-modal journeys.

We have developed and made available the demand responsive app Moove Flexi, which allows passengers to book journeys on flexible services and track their progress in real-time. This has seen passenger numbers grow on each service where it has been deployed, including in Moray where, under the successful m.connect brand, it



offers the first council wide demand responsive transport service in Scotland. We have also provided and operate over 150 real-time information displays at key interchanges and bus stops and produce static at-stop information for over 2,000 stops across the region. We are

working to expand the provision of these services in partnership with local authorities and operators.

The most effective way to improve integration is often by increasing the frequency of services which reduces the waiting time and pressure on connecting services. Our paper on Rural Bus Service Support and Funding identifies some of the challenges that have led to a sharp decline in local bus services across Scotland for the last 15 years or so. Frequency of bus use is, as expected, higher in urban areas where more bus services operate. Much of rural Scotland continues to rely on supported local bus services, and communities are dealing with the reduction and demise of many routes in their areas. The national funding schemes for local bus services in Scotland all favour urban areas and areas operating with commercial services. We will continue to articulate the need for dedicated national funding streams for rural transport.

Tourism and visitors to our region have been and remain a linchpin of the local economy. However, recent growth and the changing way in which people visit has placed severe pressure on local communities and the natural environment in a number of areas. The RTS seeks to promote policies which enable us to provide infrastructure and public transport services that both reduce the impact of visitors but also provide improved connectivity for local residents.



This introduction covers just a small selection of some of the fundamental transport challenges in the Highlands and Islands which we are looking to address through our RTS and with local, regional and national partners in the years ahead.

# Executive Summary

## Overview

This Regional Transport Strategy (RTS) has been prepared by the Highlands and Islands Transport Partnership (HITRANS), the statutory Regional Transport Partnership (RTP) for much of the Highlands and Islands covering the entire council areas of Comhairle nan Eilean Siar, Moray Council, Orkney Islands Council, The Highland Council and Argyll and Bute Council (Helensburgh and Loch Lomond excepted, which are covered by Strathclyde Partnership for Transport, SPT). A map of our region is provided below:



Figure ES1: Our RTP area

As an RTP, our core function under the Transport (Scotland) Act 2005 is to produce an RTS for our region. The RTS sets out the transport needs of our region, identifies the practical means of addressing these needs and sets out how transport will be provided, developed, maintained, improved and operated. This Strategy has been prepared to fulfil this requirement and replaces our previous RTS which was published in 2008.

**Our new RTS sets the strategic framework for the development of transport in our region over the next 20 years**. Its aim is to deliver a transport system that contributes to the priorities of the National Transport Strategy 2 (NTS2) through reducing inequalities, taking climate action, delivering inclusive economic growth and improving our health and wellbeing.

## How have we approached the preparation of our new RTS?

Our new RTS has been prepared in accordance with the Transport Scotland RTS development guidance (2006), the revised (2022) Scottish Transport Appraisal Guidance (STAG) and all relevant legislative and policy requirements. The RTS itself marks the final step in a three-stage process which involved the delivery of a:

- **Case for Change Report**, published in early 2023, which detailed the transport problems that need to be considered in the RTS and the RTS Strategy Objectives which will underpin it

- **Preliminary Options Appraisal Report**, produced in summer 2023, which generated, developed, packaged and appraised options which could address the identified transport problems

The outputs from the Case for Change and Preliminary Options Appraisal have been directly incorporated into this RTS, as shown in the figure below:



| Project commences • March 2022 | → | Case for Change Report • February 2023 | → | Preliminary Appraisal Report • August 2023 | → | Draft Regional Transport Strategy • April 2024 |

Strategic Environmental Assessment, Equalities Impact Assessment and Island Communities Impact Assessment
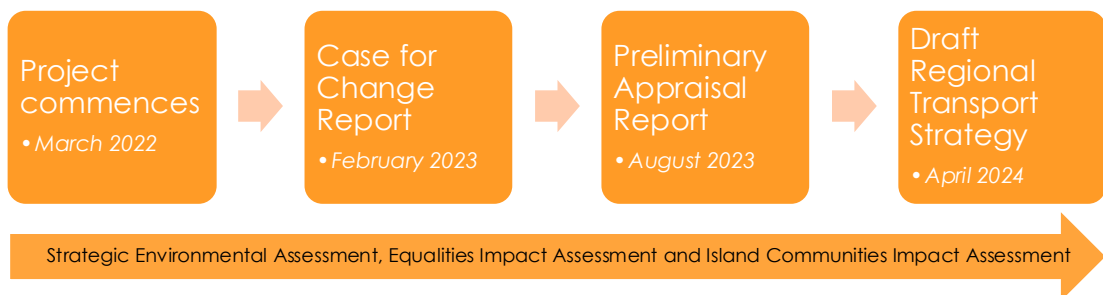
RTS development process and timeline

The preparation of our new RTS has also been informed by a multi-stage **Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA), Equalities Impact Assessment (EqIA) and Island Communities Impact Assessment (ICIA)**. These standalone and independent processes set out how relevant environment, equalities and islands considerations were considered within the RTS development process. SEA, EqIA and ICIA assessments of the RTS accompany this document. A Health Impact Assessment (HIA) and workshop was also undertaken during the statutory public consultation period with the outputs reflected in the RTS where appropriate.

## Our RTS Vision and Strategy Objectives

### Vision

Our RTS Vision is an expression of the type of region that we want the HITRANS region to be and how transport can contribute to achieving that for everyone. It has been developed to reflect national policy and legislation, most notably the commitment to net zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2045, but at the same time reflects the very distinctive character of our region. The Vision provides an overarching context within which our RTS Strategy Objectives can sit and provides a long-term focus for HITRANS and our constituent members.

**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.**

### RTS Strategy Objectives

The RTS Strategy Objectives: (i) provide the bridge between the transport problems in our region and the outcomes that we are seeking to achieve through our RTS; and (ii) express how our RTS Vision will be realised. In order to ensure that the process of setting RTS Strategy Objectives was both systematic and rigorous, a seven-step bottom-up approach was adopted. The RTS Strategy Objectives are:

**Strategy Objective 1: To make a just transition to a post-carbon and more environmentally sustainable transport network.**

*Why?* – Scotland has a target to achieve net zero carbon emissions of all greenhouse gases by 2045 and transport is a key sector in terms of such emissions, accounting for 20% of territorial emissions ($CO_2$e) across the region[2]. The transport networks and services in our region must adapt to fulfil this target in a fair and equitable way whilst also being developed in as environmentally sustainable a way as possible. The process must also recognise the needs of all groups through a 'Just Transition'.

**Strategy Objective 2: To transform and provide safe and accessible connections between and within our city, towns and villages, to enable walking, wheeling and cycling for all.**

*Why?* – to allow everyone to walk, wheel and cycle more, leading to more local living patterns, greater inclusion, affordable transport, healthier lifestyles, and reduced car use, the latter leading to reduced emissions and noise pollution.

**Strategy Objective 3: To widen access to public and shared transport and improve connectivity within and from / to the region.**

*Why?* – to give people in our region new travel choices, allowing them to: (i) use accessible and affordable public or shared transport options to make journeys they previously could not make; or (ii) to use public or shared transport instead of the car - this will lead to lower levels of car use, delivering reduced emissions and noise pollution, reduced congestion at network pinch points and reduced wear and tear on the regional road network. This objective is also important in encouraging inclusive economic growth by widening labour markets and providing improved accessibility to employment opportunities by public transport.

**Strategy Objective 4: To improve the quality and integration of public and shared transport within and from / to the region.**

*Why?* – to make public and shared transport in our region more attractive and competitive with car-based travel and to ensure the accessibility needs of all groups are accommodated. This will improve the travel experience for existing public transport users and encourage people to use public or shared transport instead of the car, leading to lower levels of car use (leading to reduced emissions and noise pollution) and will support the social benefits associated with shared transport.

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[2] Derived from https://www.data.gov.uk/dataset/723c243d-2f1a-4d27-8b61-cdb93e5b10ff/uk-greenhouse-gas-emissions-local-authority-and-regional

**Strategy Objective 5: To ensure reliable, resilient, affordable and sustainable connectivity for all from / to our island, peninsular and remote communities.**

*Why?* – some of our island and peninsular communities have suffered from pronounced connectivity difficulties in recent years. This has had wide-ranging impacts on these communities and this objective recognises the need to tackle this issue, in tandem with Strategy Objective 4. Delivering this objective will provide the foundation for the long-term sustainability and success of these vulnerable communities, including through helping meet the needs of people with protected characteristics and by tackling socio-economic disadvantage.

**Strategy Objective 6: To improve the efficiency, safety and resilience of our transport networks for people and freight and adapt to the impacts of climate change.**

*Why?* – our transport systems must be efficient, safe and able to adapt to changing demands (e.g., tourism patterns, trade etc) and be resilient in the face of climate change. This objective is important in allowing the society and economy of our region to prosper and to reduce inequalities of outcome associated with socio-economic disadvantage.

## RTS Themes and Policies

Following the completion of the Preliminary Options Appraisal, the shortlisted options were aggregated into **11 Strategy Themes**. The RTS Themes have been used to shape the content of the RTS, with each theme containing a set of individual policies therein.

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Strategy Theme 1: Transforming our communities and reducing the impact of transport upon them | Strategy Theme 2: Connecting our communities | Strategy Theme 3: Enhancing public transport connectivity to / from: (i) Inverness; (ii) our sub-regional centres; and (iii) Scotland's other cities and beyond |
| Strategy Theme 4: Improving the integration, quality of and access to public and shared transport | Strategy Theme 5: Providing connectivity that supports our island and peninsular communities | Strategy Theme 6: Improving the efficiency of transport networks and supply-chains and reducing their impact on our communities |
| Strategy Theme 7: Improving the safety, reliability and resilience of our road and rail networks | Strategy Theme 8: Facilitating sustainable visitor travel demand | Strategy Theme 9: Decarbonising our transport, mitigating the effects of climate change |
| Strategy Theme 10: Embracing new technologies | Strategy Theme 11: Reducing the cost of travel, particularly for those most in need | |

The Strategy Themes are summarised below, together with the inherent policies.

| Strategy Theme 1: Transforming our communities and reducing the impact of transport upon them | |
|---|---|
| *Improving the public realm and mobility within settlements by reducing the dominance of the private car and maximising opportunities for walking, wheeling and cycling.* | |
| **Policy ST1a** | The RTS supports the principle of **reallocating road space**, including parking, from general traffic. This should support placemaking to shape improved walking, wheeling and cycling opportunities in our communities as a means to promote safe active travel and encourage use of active travel modes. Reallocation of road space should avoid any negative impacts on bus services. |
| **Policy ST1b** | Where traffic in settlements is reduced by investment in road infrastructure, **road space reallocation** should be undertaken as an integral component of that investment. |
| **Policy ST1c** | The RTS supports the principle of **traffic calming and speed limit reductions** and enforcement where they are appropriate, including on the Trunk Road network. |
| **Policy ST1d** | The RTS supports measures to **reduce road-based severance** in our communities. |
| **Policy ST1e** | The RTS recognises the challenges presented by the impacts of increasing **abnormal load movements** across the region. It calls for a coordinated approach to be taken to ensure that appropriate planning and mitigation is put in place as part of the planning process for new developments that will generate such movements. |
| **Policy ST1f** | Parking management is the responsibility of partner local authorities. The RTS supports **the development of a consistent approach (in 'like-for-like' locations) to parking management across our region**, including payment mechanisms, parking information and enforcement. |
| **Policy ST1g** | The RTS supports the principle of improving the management and enforcement of **traffic and parking around schools**, including *School Streets* (a road outside of a school with a temporary restriction on motorised traffic at school drop-off and pick-up times). |
| **Policy ST1h** | The RTS supports the prioritisation of **new development** in locations that are in proximity to key services and already well-served by active travel and public transport. |
| **Policy ST1i** | The RTS supports the **local delivery of public services**, including health and education, and other day-to-day retail and personal services (e.g., banking) which minimise the need to travel. |
| **Policy ST1j** | The RTS supports the integration of active travel, public transport and shared mobility into the **planning of all new developments**. Proposers of new developments should be required to outline how they will deliver connections into the local active travel and public transport networks. |
| **Policy ST1k** | The RTS supports the concept of '**infrastructure first**' in relation to developments across our region. |
| **Policy ST1l** | The RTS recognises the centrality of **environmental considerations**, particularly biodiversity enhancements and nature networks, within the planning and decision-making process. |

| Strategy Theme 2: Connecting our communities | |
|---|---|
| *Facilitating walking, wheeling and cycling within settlements and improving active travel connections between them.* | |
| **Policy ST2a** | The RTS supports transformational investment in the improvement of our existing **active travel networks** to make these accessible to all. |
| **Policy ST2b** | The RTS supports the reinstatement and expansion of a network of **strategic and local traffic free / quiet walking, wheeling and cycling routes** to connect communities across and beyond our region. |
| **Policy ST2c:** | The RTS supports the expansion of the **National Cycle Network** to all parts of the region. |
| **Policy ST2d** | Our active travel infrastructure should be designed to a high standard in accordance with the most up-to-date **best practice and regionally appropriate design standards** (as this evolves) to meet the needs of all users. |

| Strategy Theme 2: Connecting our communities | |
|---|---|
| **Policy ST2e** | The RTS supports the **integration of active travel and public transport connections** within our communities. |
| **Policy ST2f** | The RTS promotes the adoption of measures outlined in the *Sustainable Travel to Stations Strategy* with respect to access to railway stations. |
| **Policy ST2g** | The RTS seeks the implementation of initiatives which widen **access to bicycles and e-bicycles**, including e.g., promoting ownership, expansion of bicycle share and hire and provision of new 'first mile, last mile' cycling opportunities. |
| **Policy ST2h** | The RTS supports the upgrade and new provision of **bicycle parking and facilities** at all public buildings, transport interchanges and key on-street locations within the region as well as the provision of bicycle storage for residents. |
| **Policy ST2i** | Our **active travel network** should be developed, presented and promoted in a more coherent, recognisable and integrated way for regular, occasional and new users of the network, including visitors. |

| Strategy Theme 3: Enhancing public transport connectivity to / from: (i) Inverness; (ii) our sub-regional centres; and (iii) Scotland's other cities and beyond | |
|---|---|
| *Distance, topography, geography and low population density currently limit public transport connectivity within much of the region. This Strategy Theme is focused on improving public transport connectivity for journeys within, to and from the region through expanding the transport network, providing additional connections and making journeys quicker.* | |
| **Policy ST3a** | The RTS supports measures to reduce **social exclusion** for those without access to a car. It supports the principle of the entitlement to minimum levels of connectivity reflecting settlement types and geographies. |
| **Policy ST3b** | The RTS recognises that the **decline in bus passenger numbers in the region needs to be reversed** and supports measures to extend service coverage, improve frequencies, lengthen the operating day and make the network more integrated. |
| **Policy ST3c:** | The RTS supports measures to **reduce bus journey times** both between and within settlements in the region, including through the provision of bus priority measures. |
| **Policy ST3d** | The RTS supports innovative **alternatives to fixed route bus services** where these can be affordably provided. |
| **Policy ST3e** | The RTS recognises the role which **community transport and Demand Responsive Transport (DRT)** plays in our most rural communities and supports its expansion and integration with timetabled services. |
| **Policy ST3f** | The RTS supports measures to widen the **awareness and use of community transport, DRT and Enhanced Demand Responsive Transport (EDRT)** amongst all members of society. |
| **Policy ST3g** | The RTS recognises the **role of taxis** as a key element of transport provision in the region where community transport, DRT and EDRT services are not provided. |
| **Policy ST3h** | The RTS recognises that **rail journey times** to, from and within the region are typically longer than elsewhere in Scotland and therefore supports measures to reduce these journey times. |
| **Policy ST3i** | The RTS supports the commitment to **electrify the Highland Main Line** and **Aberdeen to Inverness Line** as an opportunity to reduce rail journey times and improve reliability as part of the overall decarbonisation of the network. |
| **Policy ST3j** | The RTS recognises that very low rail service frequency often makes rail uncompetitive with the car and therefore supports measures which would facilitate **increased rail service frequency**, particularly between Inverness and Aberdeen, Edinburgh and Glasgow. |
| **Policy ST3k** | The RTS promotes and supports the development of **additional local rail services** focused on our regional centres. |
| **Policy ST3l** | The RTS supports **infrastructure measures** which would enable increased service frequency, such as the electrification of the Highland Main Line and Aberdeen to Inverness and improvements to the signalling system. |

| Strategy Theme 3: Enhancing public transport connectivity to / from: (i) Inverness; (ii) our sub-regional centres; and (iii) Scotland's other cities and beyond | |
| --- | --- |
| **Policy ST3m** | The RTS supports the planning and delivery of **new railway stations**, including innovative solutions proportionate to the location, subject to the development of an appropriate business case. |

| Strategy Theme 4: Improving the integration, quality of and access to public and shared transport | |
| --- | --- |
| *Addressing the barriers to travel by public transport, including interchange within and between modes, physical barriers for those less able and poor-quality facilities and travel information.* | |
| **Policy ST4a** | The RTS supports measures that will improve **integration within and between modes of transport** at key locations and transport interchanges in order to provide new travel options and alternatives to the private car, recognising the constraints within which this is possible (e.g., delivering school bus services). |
| **Policy ST4b** | The RTS supports **integrated ticketing measures** to simplify travel and improve the passenger experience, which will supplement the affordability and inclusivity benefits offered. |
| **Policy ST4c:** | The RTS supports the adoption of contract conditions for tendered and supported services that **encourage operators to work in partnership** to improve integration, timetable planning and coordination. This includes the provision of multi-operator tickets. |
| **Policy ST4d** | The RTS supports the provision and enhancement of **mobility hubs** across the region, in line with a hierarchy reflecting local requirements. |
| **Policy ST4e** | The RTS supports measures which will enable people to **leave their bicycles in a secure environment** at a bus stop / station, railway station, ferry terminal or airfield. |
| **Policy ST4f** | The RTS supports, where practical, the provision of increased **bicycle capacity on public transport** services within the region. |
| **Policy ST4g** | The RTS supports the simplification of the process of **taking a bicycle** both to and onto a bus or train. |
| **Policy ST4h** | The RTS supports more widespread journeys which **combine bicycle and public transport**. |
| **Policy ST4i** | The RTS supports the provision of consistent standards of **facilities at bus stations and bus stops** reflecting location and usage. |
| **Policy ST4j** | Our bus network should be **safe, secure and fully accessible** to all. |
| **Policy ST4k** | Our bus network should provide a high-quality and consistent **onboard experience**. |
| **Policy ST4l** | Travel on buses to, from and within the region should, where possible, **enable meaningful working time**. |
| **Policy ST4m** | The RTS supports the provision of **more consistent standards** of facilities at railway stations, reflecting station usage. |
| **Policy ST4n** | Our railway network should be **safe, secure and fully accessible** to all. |
| **Policy ST4o** | The RTS supports the continuation and expansion of the *Scotland's Railway* **Station Adoption Programme** and other measures to enhance the station environment. |
| **Policy ST4p** | Our ferry network should be **safe, secure and fully accessible** to all. This includes both shore-to-vessel access and movement around the vessel itself. |
| **Policy ST4q** | In partnership with key public stakeholders and operators, we will continue to explore solutions which improve the accessibility of inter-Island air services in Argyll and Bute, Orkney and the Western Isles. We will also keep abreast of developments in technology and **new aircraft types**. More widely, the RTS supports improved accessibility for all to commercially operated aircraft. |
| **Policy ST4r** | The RTS supports sufficient provision and better enforcement of **Blue Badge parking** across the region. |
| **Policy ST4s** | The RTS recognises the important role of **taxis** as part of the overall transport mix in the region. It supports partnership working with licencing authorities and taxi providers to |

| | Strategy Theme 4: Improving the integration, quality of and access to public and shared transport |
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| | raise standards of provision where required and to facilitate the expansion of the network. |
| **Policy ST4t** | The RTS supports the provision of **taxi services** which are fully accessible in terms of booking and vehicle access. |
| **Policy ST4u** | A key component of making travel accessible to all, the RTS supports measures to **remove barriers to travel**, including increased staff training, passenger chaperones and the provision of physical and online travel information in accessible formats. |
| **Policy ST4v** | The RTS supports the maintenance and expansion of at-stop / at-station multi-modal **real-time information**. |
| **Policy ST4w** | The RTS promotes the **simplification and consolidation of travel planning** and in-journey information to make travel easier for less frequent users. |
| **Policy ST4x** | The RTS supports the provision of up-to-date **physical travel information** at bus stops, and the removal of out-of-date information. |
| **Policy ST4y** | The RTS calls for improved **cross-provider digital connectivity** across the region to facilitate access to travel information for all (including in-car information), enabling meaningful working time when travelling by public transport and to help reduce the need to travel where possible. |

| | Strategy Theme 5: Providing connectivity that supports our island and peninsular communities |
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| | *Improving the connectivity and reducing the peripherality of island and peninsular communities through improved ferry and air services, and potentially fixed links.* |
| **Policy ST5a** | The RTS supports the provision of longer **daily time on-mainland and on-island** where this is required for the long-term sustainability of a community. |
| **Policy ST5b** | The RTS supports the provision of services which minimise the requirement for one or more **overnight stays**. |
| **Policy ST5c:** | Where practicable, the RTS supports the operation of **additional sailings** on supported ferry networks within the region where these address identified needs and provide value for money |
| **Policy ST5d** | The RTS supports the principle of year-round **seven-day connections** for island and peninsular communities where this is required for the long-term sustainability of a community and enjoys public support. |
| **Policy ST5e** | The **booking and ticketing** arrangements for ferry services in the region should support the convenience and efficiency of travel for all. |
| **Policy ST5f** | The RTS calls for the earlier opening of **ferry booking systems** and increased transparency around the release and management of vehicle deck space. |
| **Policy ST5g** | The RTS supports the principle of **Road Equivalent Tariff (RET)**. However, where service frequency permits, controlled use of peak pricing could be used to help manage demand, recognising that this would need to be at no net detriment to the connectivity of island and peninsular communities. |
| **Policy ST5h** | The RTS supports operational measures which maximise the efficient management of **vehicle deck space** on sailings. |
| **Policy ST5i** | The RTS supports measures to improve **door-to-door journeys** through enhancing active travel, public transport and shared mobility connections to and from ferry terminals, combined with other measures to reduce the need to take a car onboard. |
| **Policy ST5j** | The RTS recognises the long-term underfunding of vessels and infrastructure in the region and strongly calls for fleet and **infrastructure modernisation** to address issues of reliability and resilience. |
| **Policy ST5k** | The RTS calls for the development of a regularly maintained *Vessels and Infrastructure Planning Pipeline* (supplementing the Transport Scotland *Vessels and* |

| | Strategy Theme 5: Providing connectivity that supports our island and peninsular communities |
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| | *Ports Plan for the Clyde and Hebrides and Northern Isles networks*) across all publicly supported ferry networks in Scotland. |
| **Policy ST5l** | The RTS supports an increase in the overall **fleet size** and the **inter-operability** of that fleet and supporting infrastructure to strengthen resilience. |
| **Policy ST5m** | The RTS supports the principle of **increasing capacity** through frequency rather than larger vessels. |
| **Policy ST5n** | The RTS calls for an objective consideration of the **design characteristics of future vessels** for all routes, including hull form and the provision of crew accommodation. |
| **Policy ST5o** | The RTS supports the introduction of new **low or zero emissions vessels** to replace life-expired tonnage. This should be done in line with the NTS2 *Sustainable Investment Hierarchy*. |
| **Policy ST5p** | Within the vessel and infrastructure replacement cycle, the RTS supports measures to **reduce journey times** for our island communities. This includes providing direct sailings rather than via another island (where this is the preference of the local community) and consideration of new ferry terminal locations that reduce crossing distances. |
| **Policy ST5q** | The RTS supports **harbour infrastructure** improvements ahead of life expiry where this could contribute to a material improvement in reliability. |
| **Policy ST5r** | The RTS supports the principle of **converting the remaining Lo-Lo routes** in the region to Ro-Ro where there is community support. |
| **Policy ST5s** | The RTS supports the further development of the Highlands and Islands' **air network** in terms of both services and supporting infrastructure. |
| **Policy ST5t** | The RTS supports the further development of **commercial external routes**, particularly to London Heathrow and other international hub airports, which support the economic competitiveness of the region. |
| **Policy ST5u** | The RTS supports the retention of the **PSO air network** within the region and, where alternative travel choices are inadequate, its further expansion. 'Adequate' in this context refers to the ability to achieve an affordable daily return to / from a national centre. |
| **Policy ST5v** | The RTS supports the operation of **additional connections and flights** on the PSO air networks within the region, whether delivered by existing, additional or new low emission aircraft. |
| **Policy ST5w** | The RTS supports more **direct flights** rather than via another island. |
| **Policy ST5x** | The RTS supports the adoption of **technological and infrastructure solutions** which would improve the reliability and frequency of inter-island air services. |
| **Policy ST5y** | The RTS supports the principle of **fixed links** - including the three proposed fixed links identified in STPR2 - where they represent value for money and are supported by the island or peninsular community. Any fixed link should be implemented in conjunction with improved public transport connectivity and incorporate provision for active travel. |
| **Policy ST5z** | The RTS supports the consideration of **tolling** where this would assist in making the case for a **fixed link**. The use of vehicle number plate recognition technology could allow local residents to travel for free. |

| | Strategy Theme 6: Improving the efficiency of transport networks and supply-chains and reducing their impact on our communities |
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| | *Many supply-chains in the region are marginal and face challenges not found elsewhere in Scotland, working around ferry connections for example. This Strategy Theme is focused on enhancing the efficiency of supply-chains and identifying means for improving their environmental sustainability.* |
| **Policy ST6a** | The RTS supports the principle of new dedicated or high-capacity **freight vessels** on freight intensive routes, delivered either by contracted or commercial operators. |
| **Policy ST6b** | The RTS supports the formalisation and extension of the carriage of **unaccompanied trailers** to a wider range of routes. |

| Strategy Theme 6: Improving the efficiency of transport networks and supply-chains and reducing their impact on our communities | |
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| **Policy ST6c:** | The RTS supports the operation of dedicated **freight sailings**, either by contracted or commercial operators where there is demand and it is operationally deliverable. |
| **Policy ST6d** | The RTS supports moves towards greater simplification and consistency in the setting of **ferry freight fares** across the region, recognising that this would be achieved over the medium to long-term. |
| **Policy ST6e** | The RTS supports **infrastructure measures** which will enable the growth of rail freight to and from the region. |
| **Policy ST6f** | The RTS supports infrastructure investment and funding initiatives which will enable the growth of **waterborne and air** freight to, from and within the region. |

| Strategy Theme 7: Improving the safety, reliability and resilience of our road and rail networks | |
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| *Weather, geological instability and very limited diversion opportunities make resilience a key issue in the region, whilst safety is a primary concern on many of the main road routes. This Strategy Theme is therefore focused on improving the safety, reliability and resilience of transport networks within the region.* | |
| **Policy ST7a** | The RTS restates our support for the full **dualling of the A9 and A96**, with early prioritisation of the Elgin and Keith bypasses to dual carriageway standards, following the already committed Inverness to Wester Hardmuir scheme. |
| **Policy ST7b** | The RTS calls for incremental improvements to our **road network** where there are safety, efficiency and environmental benefits, including in relation to single track roads. |
| **Policy ST7c** | The RTS supports the expansion of **50mph HGV speed limits** across the Trunk Road network in the region where it is safe to do so. |
| **Policy ST7d** | The RTS supports the provision of improved **overtaking opportunities** on our roads, especially where there are known problems with vehicle platooning which can cause driver frustration. |
| **Policy ST7e** | The RTS calls for investment in our regional road network where there are regular and sustained **periods of disruption** due to weather and / or geological instability. |
| **Policy ST7f** | The RTS recognises the increasing vulnerability of our region's **road network** to severe weather events linked to **climate change** and supports capital and revenue measures to mitigate this. |
| **Policy ST7g** | The RTS recognises the increasing vulnerability of the **railway network** to severe weather events linked to **climate change** and supports capital and revenue measures to mitigate this. |
| **Policy ST7h** | The RTS supports the continued provision and expansion of **real-time travel information** for motorists and public transport users through existing and emerging platforms. |
| **Policy ST7i** | The RTS recognises that many parts of our region's road network are in poor condition. It calls for **enhanced preventative and remedial road maintenance** to ensure the safe, reliable and efficient movement of people and goods and the delivery of services across our region. |
| **Policy ST7j** | Investment in our road network should continue to have an overarching focus on **safety** with a view to reducing road traffic casualties in accordance with *Scotland's Road Safety Framework to 2030.* |
| **Policy ST7k** | To address **risks which are particular to roads in our region**, the RTS supports: enhanced advisory signage; ongoing public information campaigns around the use of single-track roads; provision of additional safe motorist services and HGV rest areas; and information campaigns for visitors driving left-hand drive vehicles. |
| **Policy ST7l** | The RTS specifically supports the improvement or removal of **priority junctions on higher speed trunk roads**, especially for right-turning traffic. |
| **Policy ST7m** | The RTS calls for increased provision of **level boarding at stations** across the region, which will reduce station dwell times. |

| Strategy Theme 7: Improving the safety, reliability and resilience of our road and rail networks | |
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| **Policy ST7n** | The RTS supports the provision of additional **sections of double track** (or static or dynamic passing loops where double track does not represent value for money) to improve punctuality. |
| **Policy ST7o** | The RTS supports infrastructure and timetable improvements external to the region which will improve the **reliability of services** to / from Inverness, Fort William, Oban and Mallaig. |

| Strategy Theme 8: Facilitating sustainable visitor travel demand | |
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| *Responding to the challenges arising from the significant seasonal influx of tourists to the region, often in the areas least well-placed to accommodate it.* | |
| **Policy ST8a** | The RTS supports the further development of **long-distance walking, wheeling and cycling** routes (including the National Cycle Network), recognising the visitor, economic and local benefits offered. |
| **Policy ST8b** | The RTS supports the development of **active travel connections** to our ports, airports and regionally important railway stations. |
| **Policy ST8c** | The RTS supports the development of **active travel connections** to our key tourism destinations where this would be a realistic option for some visitors. |
| **Policy ST8d** | Where there are concentrations of international tourists, including cruise passengers, the RTS supports the provision of enhanced local travel information and coordination to **improve visitor experience** and reduce impacts on local networks. |
| **Policy ST8e** | The RTS supports the operation and promotion of **additional local rail services** to key tourism destinations. |
| **Policy ST8f** | The RTS supports in the longer term the provision of **additional rail carriages** on existing services in peak season, where feasible. |
| **Policy ST8f** | The RTS supports the principle of **flexible timetabling** where this can co-exist with regular services for local residents. |
| **Policy ST8g** | The RTS supports the principle of expanded **open access rail services** where these can be accommodated at no disadvantage to scheduled services. |
| **Policy ST8h** | The RTS supports the principle of **sustainably accommodating visitor demand** whilst maintaining or increasing visitor numbers. |
| **Policy ST8i** | The RTS supports the introduction of increased **parking management measures** at tourist honeypots as a tool to encourage improved access to these locations by public transport or active modes and to address indiscriminate and dangerous parking. |
| **Policy ST8j** | Where new or increased **parking charges** are introduced, the RTS encourages that this should be done in combination with improved facilities for those accessing via sustainable modes. |
| **Policy ST8k** | The RTS supports measures to ensure that **motorhome and campervan-based tourism demand** is sustainably accommodated so that any negative impacts on communities are mitigated. |
| **Policy ST8l** | Whilst recognising the benefits of **cruise tourism** in our region, the RTS recognises that catering for this demand can negatively impact on our communities. The RTS therefore supports measures to ensure that this demand is more sustainably accommodated. |
| **Policy ST8m** | The RTS supports measures which would allow the benefits of **cruise tourism** to be more evenly distributed around the region. |
| **Policy ST8n** | The RTS supports the principle of **bespoke bus services** aimed at tourists to address excessive car-based demand at honeypot locations. |
| **Policy ST8o** | The RTS recognises that high volumes of tourist traffic are impacting the **condition of some roads** in our region and that increased central government funding is required that reflects this increased pressure on local transport infrastructure, to support an enhanced repair and maintenance programme. |

| Strategy Theme 8: Facilitating sustainable visitor travel demand | |
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| **Policy ST8p** | The RTS recognises that **high volumes of tourist traffic** can lead to slow and inefficient journeys and therefore supports measures to address this. |

| Strategy Theme 9: Decarbonising our transport, mitigating the effects of climate change | |
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| *Supporting the decarbonisation of transport through the adoption of zero emission vehicles, vessels, and aircraft.* | |
| **Policy ST9a** | The RTS supports the implementation of measures which facilitate the **decarbonisation of the public transport vehicle fleet** within the region, including commercial vehicles, buses and community transport, rail rolling stock, aircraft and ferries. |
| **Policy ST9b** | The RTS recognises the opportunities brought about by the **availability of renewable energy** in our region, including locally produced green hydrogen. The transport fleet mix and associated infrastructure should reflect this. |
| **Policy ST9c:** | The RTS supports the development of **vehicle pooling and vehicle sharing services** across the region to reduce the need for personal car ownership. |
| **Policy ST9d** | The RTS calls for the **expansion, standardisation and maintenance of EV charging infrastructure** to support the decarbonisation of all vehicle based travel in our region. |
| **Policy ST9e** | The RTS recognises the challenges of distance, topography, climate and short winter daylight hours to the rollout of battery electric powered commercial vehicles and seeks **low or zero emission solutions appropriate to our region**, and which capitalise on the surplus energy production within our region. |
| **Policy ST9f** | The RTS supports the roll-out of other **alternative fuels** to promote the decarbonisation of our transport networks, ports, ferry terminals, airports and airfields. |

| Strategy Theme 10: Embracing new technologies | |
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| *Capitalising on innovations in new technology.* | |
| **Policy ST10a** | The RTS embraces the opportunities provided by **new technologies** to improve the provision of transport infrastructure and services across the region. |
| **Policy ST10b** | The RTS supports consideration of the provision of future **innovative personal transport** within the design of our active travel network and mobility hubs. |
| **Policy ST10c:** | The RTS supports the principle and further development of **Mobility-as-a-Service** as the technology evolves. |
| **Policy ST10d** | The RTS supports opportunities for the more widespread adoption of **Connected and Autonomous Vehicles** and autonomous buses, whilst recognising the challenges posed in our region. |

| Strategy Theme 11: Reducing the cost of travel, particularly for those most in need | |
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| *Reducing the cost of travel for residents of the region, which is a primary contributor to 'transport poverty'.* | |
| **Policy ST11a** | **Transport poverty** is a complex, dispersed and often hidden problem in our region. The RTS commits to define and evidence this problem and identify appropriate actions to be delivered by HITRANS and our partners. |
| **Policy ST11b** | Recognising that, for many in our region (and especially those living in our island communities), transport costs account for a high proportion of household income, the RTS supports a **reduction in public transport fares** and the introduction of payment plans for multi-journey tickets. |
| **Policy ST11c:** | The comparative costs of public transport mean that residents and visitors to our region often **choose to travel by car**. The RTS therefore supports a reduction in the cost differential between travelling by public transport and car. |
| **Policy ST11d** | The RTS supports in principle the roll-out of **Road Equivalent Tariff** to any ferry routes on which it does not currently apply, including local authority services. |

| Strategy Theme 11: Reducing the cost of travel, particularly for those most in need | |
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| **Policy ST11e** | The RTS calls for greater cross-industry partnership working and regulatory reform to reduce the **cost penalty for interchange** within or between modes of transport. |
| **Policy ST11f** | The RTS calls for the extension of the **National Concessionary Travel Scheme** and **Under-22s Concessionary Travel Scheme** to rail, ferry and air services where these are the main or only mode of public transport in an area. |
| **Policy ST11g** | The RTS calls for the retention and expansion of the **Air Discount Scheme**, including to businesses in the region. |
| **Policy ST11h** | **National road pricing proposals** may emerge in response to the reduction in fuel duty and Value Added Tax as a result of the mass adoption of electric vehicles. If this eventuality materialises, the RTS calls for a road pricing system that recognises the unique characteristics of our region. |

## Draft RTS Consultation

The Draft RTS was consulted on for an eight-week period from 19th April 2024 to 14th June 2024. This involved an online public consultation and questionnaire and writing to statutory stakeholders to obtain their views.

The consultation responses expressed strong support for the RTS Vision, Strategy Objectives, Strategy Themes and Policies overall. Minor amendments to the Draft RTS were made to reflect specific comments, whilst comments from statutory stakeholders were incorporated and responded to in the Strategic Environmental Assessment Report.

## RTS Delivery Plan

A **Delivery Plan** has been developed to accompany the adoption of this RTS. This states the actions that we will take to progress the RTS and the timeframes within which each action will be progressed. The Delivery Plan contains a combination of proposed appraisals / business cases, research studies, projects and programmes. It focuses on **actions that are regionally significant in nature** - i.e., those which are large scale or cross-boundary, either between authorities within our region or between our region and other RTP areas. Local issues are a matter for the Local Transport Strategies of our constituent members.

Unlike the RTS itself, which provides a circa 20-year strategic framework, our **Delivery Plan will be regularly reviewed and updated** to reflect the changing status of projects, their differing stages in the project lifecycle and the need for new or amended actions to support a policy (e.g., in response to the emergence of new technology).

## Governance

An early action we will seek to pursue is to undertake a regional governance review, in partnership with our constituent local authorities, Transport Scotland and other key regional partners. This will build on our submissions to the Local Governance Review and consider both how we deliver the RTS and how funding is allocated to the region and disbursed. Once complete, we will submit our analysis to Scottish Ministers for consideration and, subject to approval, seek to implement the recommendations over the first RTS Delivery Plan period.