



Minute of Meeting held in the Council Chamber, Elgin and virtually through MS Teams on Friday 7 November 2025 at 9.30am

PRESENT

Uisdean Robertson, Comhairle nan Eilean Siar (Chair)
Amber Dunbar, Moray Council (Vice-Chair)
Kristopher Leask, Orkney Islands Council
Ken Gowans, The Highland Council
Naomi Bremner, Non-Councillor Member
Shona Maclennan, Non-Councillor Member
Robert Andrew, Non-Councillor Member

APOLOGIES

Michael Green The Highland Council
Fergus Murray, Argyll and Bute Council
Gordon Blair, Argyll and Bute Council
Moya Ingram, Argyll and Bute Council
Linda Cunningham, Comhairle nan Eilean Siar
Malcolm Macleod, The Highland Council
Julie Cromarty, The Highland Council

IN ATTENDANCE

Ranald Robertson, Partnership Director
Frank Roach, Partnership Manager
Neil MacRae, Senior Partnership Manager
Carolyn Pieraccini, The Highland Council
Jennifer Johnston, Partnership Treasurer
Tracey Urry, The Highland Council
Gareth Waterson, Orkney Islands Council
Laura Cromarty, Orkney Islands Council
Colm Fraser, Comhairle nan Eilean Siar
Nicola Moss, Moray Council
Timothy Mackay, Moray Council
Grant Campbell, Prosper
Nicholas Sobey, HIE
Vikki Trelfer, HITRANS
Gemma Robinson, HITRANS
Robert Wilson, HITRANS
John Ross, HITRANS
Dawn Gillies, HITRANS
Derek Mackay, Partnership Secretary
David Fraser, Audit Scotland
Pamela Morrison, Audit Scotland

The Chair ruled items 3, 4 and 23 as Urgent Items to allow them to be considered prior to the next scheduled meeting of HITRANS.

Declaration of Interests

There were no declarations of interest.

MINUTES

Minute of Meeting of 12 September 2025

The Minute of Meeting of 12 September 2025 was **approved**.

Matters Arising

2

Mr Ranald Robertson provided the following updates:

12 The Scottish Government had invited HITRANS to submit proposals for a Health and Transport Action Plan. The proposed Parliamentary event had been cancelled and would be rearranged following the Scottish Parliament Election.

14 The audit scope of the Audit Scotland report in relation to the delivery of Glen Sannox and Glen Rosa was due for publication in September 2026.

It was agreed to note the updates.

FINANCE

HITRANS Annual Audited Accounts 2024-25/ Annual Audit Report

3

Pamela Morrison and David Fraser, Audit Scotland, provided an update in relation to the Annual Audited Accounts 2024-25. It was indicated that the Audit was substantially complete and an update on the key messages, findings and adjustments was provided. It was indicated that the recommendations from the 2023/24 Audit were completed.

It was agreed to:

- (1) note the update on the Annual Audit Report 2024-25; and**
- (2) approve the Annual Accounts 2024-25 for signing.**

Revenue Budget Monitoring Report 1 April to 30 September 2025

With reference to 4 of the Minute of Meeting of 12 September 2025, Ms Jennifer Johnston, Partnership Treasurer, submitted a Report setting out the revenue monitoring position for the period 1 April 2025 to 30 September 2025 and the projected year end position.

It was agreed to approve the information in the Report together with the schedule showing the revenue monitoring position for the period to 31 August 2025.

RESEARCH AND STRATEGY DELIVERY

Research/Strategy Development Programme for 2025/26

5

With reference to item 5 of the Minute of Meeting of 12 September 2025, Mr Ranald Robertson, Partnership Director, submitted a Report providing an update on progress with delivery of the Research and Strategy Development programme and sought approval for amendments to the programme to reflect commitments made, changing priorities and funding opportunities identified since approval of the 2025/26 Business Plan.

It was agreed to note the amendments to the Research and Strategy Development Programme 2025/26 as detailed in the Appendix to the Report.

Regional Bus Strategy 6	<p>Mr Neil Macrae, Senior Partnership Manager, submitted a Report which sought approval for the preparation of a Regional Bus Strategy (RBS) as recommended in the Regional Transport Strategy (RTS) Delivery Plan, and to outline the purpose, governance, scope and resource requirements for this work.</p>
	<p>The Report stated that the RBS would establish a coherent policy and delivery framework for improving bus and coach services across the Highlands and Islands. The Strategy would define regional priorities, guide investment and partnership activity, and act as a foundation for influencing future national policy and funding. The Strategy would also embed the principle of Decent or Minimum Mobility as a core benchmark for equitable access across the Region.</p>
	<p>It was agreed to:</p>
	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li data-bbox="552 680 1511 743">(1) note the legislative and policy context, including the UK Government's Bus Services Bill and relevant academic research on Decent Mobility. <li data-bbox="552 777 1511 840">(2) approve the proposed purpose, governance, scope and budget for the Regional Bus Strategy. <li data-bbox="552 873 1511 936">(3) endorse inclusion of the <i>Decent/Minimum Mobility</i> principle within the Strategy; and <li data-bbox="552 970 1511 1073">(4) agree that HITRANS establish a Steering Group and procure specialist support to guide development of the case for change, stakeholder engagement and drafting of the final Strategy.
Your Bus Journeys 7	<p>Mr Neil Macrae, Senior Partnership Manager, submitted a Report detailing the interim findings from the Your Bus Journey (YBJ) Survey 2025, undertaken by Transport Focus, which gathered evidence from passengers across Scotland on their experiences of bus travel. The Report summarised the emerging Scotland-wide results and set out their implications for policy and delivery. Detailed results for the Highlands and Islands had been compiled separately and were detailed in the Appendix to the Report.</p>
	<p>It was agreed to:</p>
	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li data-bbox="552 1432 1511 1466">(1) note the interim findings of the Transport Focus Your Bus Journey Survey 2025; <li data-bbox="552 1500 1511 1563">(2) consider the detailed HITRANS results contained in the Appendix to the Report; and <li data-bbox="552 1596 1511 1657">(3) endorse the integration of the interim findings into the Regional Bus Strategy and related policy areas.
Minimum Mobility Standards 8	<p>Mr Ranald Robertson, Partnership Director, submitted a Report which provided an overview of the findings from the Quantifying Minimum Mobility Report and outlined their implications for the Highlands and Islands Region and Scotland more broadly. The Report set out what constitutes 'decent mobility', lessons from case studies, and the links to transport poverty. The Report 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.</p>
	<p>It was agreed:</p>

- (1) to note the findings of the Quantifying Minimum Mobility Report;
- (2) to endorse the principle of a guaranteed minimum baseline of transport availability as a foundation for policy;
- (3) that HITRANS should develop proposals for projects that demonstrate community-led and integrated models of delivery; and
- (4) to support engagement with Transport Scotland to advocate for embedding minimum mobility in national frameworks.

Community Transport 9
and NHS Board
Compliance with the
Transport Act

Mr Ranald Robertson, Partnership Director, submitted a Report detailing 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 highlighted the Report's implications for health and transport integration in the Highlands and Islands and identified areas where HITRANS may wish to engage further.

It was agreed:

- (1) to note the findings of the Community Transport Association's Healthy Communities Scotland (2025) Report.
- (2) to acknowledge the implications of NHS Board non-compliance for communities within the HITRANS area.
- (3) to use the Report's findings to press for stronger collaboration between NHS Boards, local authorities, and Community Transport providers in the Region.

Active Travel Update 10

With reference to item 8 of the Minute of Meeting of 12 September 2025, Ms Vikki Trelfer, Active Travel Team Leader, submitted a Report which provided an update on the delivery of the People and Place Programme funded by Transport Scotland, and other Active Travel projects in which HITRANS and Partner Local Authorities are involved.

The Report provided information on the key Themes of 2025-26

- Active Schools and Young People
- Active Workplaces and Communities
- Accessibility & Inclusion
- Capacity & Capability
- Sustainable Transport

It was agreed to note the Report.

Renewable Energy 11
Transport
Opportunities

Mr Frank Roach, Partnership Manager submitted a Report to raise awareness of potential transport impacts arising from the increased activity in the renewables sector across the Highlands and Islands. The Report stated that it had become apparent that the transport network would be heavily impacted by an increase in activity in the renewables sector, particularly with a number of developments occurring at the same time.

It was indicated that HITRANS would be meeting with Transport Scotland officials and other public sector agencies on 6th November to discuss Transport and Renewables. It

was suggested that the Board consider directing some resource into studying the cumulative impacts of the various projects, and interventions that may be required.

It was agreed:

- (1) to note the Report;**
- (2) that officers would develop a scope for a study into the cumulative impacts of renewable developments on transport networks; and**
- (3) to seek funding towards the cost of the study from Scottish Government, SSEN and developers.**

Demand Responsive Transport App = 'Moove Flexi/m.connect' 12 Mr Robert Wilson, Public Transport Information and Digital Officer submitted a Report which provided an update on the Demand Responsive Transport App being deployed by HITRANS and partners to help support the operation, booking and marketing of non-scheduled transport services across the Highlands and Islands. The Report indicated that the contract with Liftango had been extended to December 2027 and a summary of the services involved and work to date for each Local Authority area was provided.

It was agreed to:

- (1) note the Report; and**
- (2) consider other on demand bus services that may benefit from the deployment of the Demand Responsive Transport App.**

Route and Branch 13 With reference to item 7 of the Minute of Meeting of 12 September 2025 Mr Frank Roach, Partnership Manager, submitted a Report providing an update on the status of Route and Branch – a Rail Development Strategy for the Highlands and Islands. The Report gave background information, highlighted the significant changes since 2014, and summarised a number of key drivers that would result in changes to the rail network in the HITRANS area. The Report stated that HITRANS had appointed consultant Systra to produce a rail development strategy for the HITRANS area. The study would identify short comings in the network and identify areas for development so that the railway plays its role in the move to Net Zero. Key to this would be decarbonised rolling stock and efficient freight on rail. HITRANS would work with colleagues at Nestrans, Tactran and SPT where there were overlapping in interests.

It was agreed to note the Report.

EGNOS Representations to UK Government 14 Mr Ranald Robertson, Partnership Director, submitted a Report in respect of HITRANS' letter of 5 June 2025 to the then Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Aviation, Mike Kane MP, regarding restoration of UK access to the European Geostationary Navigation Overlay Service (EGNOS), and the subsequent response received on 29 September 2025 from his successor, Keir Mather MP. The Report sought Members' views on the Minister's reply which fell far short of addressing the issues raised in the letter and to consider next steps in HITRANS' campaign.

It was agreed to:

- (1) note the terms of the Ministerial response received on 29 September 2025;**

- (2) Express disappointment at the failure of the process to address the central issue of avoidable cancellations to lifeline air services; and
- (3) support broadening the campaign by engaging cross-part MPs, devolved administrations, airline operators and community representatives to strengthen the case for urgent action on reinstating EGNOS.

RURALITIES Project Update	15	<p>With reference to item 19 of the Minute of Meeting of 15 September 2023 Ms Katy Beasley, Scottish Islands Passport Project Manager, submitted a Report providing an update on the RURALITIES Project. The Report provided an overview of the Project and detailed progress made, stating that Robert Gordon University had been successful with their bid to join the project as an academic partner for Smart Mobility Solutions for Rural and Islands Transport Optimisation. Trackers and data plans had been purchased to map journeys across selected Orkney Islands and data would be collected until at least March 2026.</p> <p>The Report stated that a fixed tracker (LIDAR) was being investigated and tested to map all movement from a fixed location allowing analysis of all traffic and movement through one point, expanding the data already being collected from the individual trackers. The Report provided an overview of the 117,853 samples that had been collected up to September 2025.</p> <p>The Report provided information on funding and resources for the Ruralities project. The project would continue to September 2027 and another Horizon Europe call was being investigated to see if the project's work could be extended to look at enhancing rural multi modal transport solutions to create strategy and solutions for rural/urban transport.</p> <p>It was agreed to note the Report.</p>
Future of Flight Challenge Progress Report	16	<p>With reference to item 11 of the Minute of Meeting of 25 April 2025 Ms Jayne Gourlay, SATE Project Coordinator and Mr Ranald Robertson, Partnership Director, submitted a joint Report informing of HITRANS' success in securing new UK Government funding through Innovate UK's Future Flight Challenge, with HITRANS confirmed as the lead partner in the project SATE: Highlands & Islands Regional Pathway to Sustainable Aviation and participating as partner in the Advanced Logistics BVLOS UAV (ALBUM) project.</p> <p>The Report set out details of projects 1 and 2 and stated that HITRANS' leadership of the SATE: Highlands and Islands Regional Pathway to Sustainable Aviation project had secured 100% intervention funding, with the total project value confirmed through Innovate UK as being £199,912 of which HITRANS will receive £35,164. Participation in the ALBUM project will also be fully funded in line with Innovate UK rules for local authority bodies. HITRANS budget for this project is £77,780. This represents a continuation of the strong financial return already achieved through SATE Phase 1 and Phase 2, where HITRANS secured over £1 million in direct funding.</p> <p>It was agreed to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (1) note HITRANS' success in securing new Future Flight Funding; (2) recognise the strategic importance of HITRANS' leadership role in SATE: Highlands and Islands Regional Pathway to Sustainable Aviation and partnership role in ALBUM; and (3) support continued engagement in the UKRI Future Flight Programme as a platform for advancing sustainable aviation solutions for the Highlands and Islands.
Fort William Integrated Transport Plan Progress Report	17	<p>With reference to item 10 of the Minute of Meeting of 25 April 2025 Mr Neil Macrae, Senior Partnership Manager submitted a Report providing and update on progress to undertake an Integrated Transport Plan for Fort William in accordance with Recommendation 32 of the second Strategic Transport Projects Review (STPR2) and other parallel work within Fort William which HITRANS are leading or supporting.</p>

A copy of slides that had been presented to the Fort William 2040 Transport Subgroup on 17 September provided an overview of the appraisal process and the next stages of work to develop the Integrated Transport Plan.

It was agreed to note the Report.

PARTNERSHIP

HITRANS Key Asks 18 Document

Mr Ranald Robertson, Partnership Director submitted a Report presenting the proposed Key Asks for inclusion in party manifestos for the 2026 Scottish Parliament Election, reflecting the Partnership's vision for enhanced regional governance of transport, tailored to the needs of rural and island communities.

The Report summarised the six core Key Asks:

1. Devolve key Transport Funds to RTPs by 2027
2. Guarantee Sustainable Revenue for Rural and Island Transport Services
3. Reform Concessionary Fares to Make Them Fair
4. Expand RTP Power and Remit by 2028
5. Create a Regional Transport Investment Fund
6. Move to Enhanced Regional Governance of Transport

The full Regional Key Asks report was provided in the Appendix to the Report. In addition to the six core asks, HITRANS calls for reforms to ferry governance and community engagement, along with national commitments to major infrastructure projects and climate resilience. The Report further noted that investment in grid and renewables must also be aligned with transport priorities to unlock economic opportunity.

It was agreed to note the Report and endorse the Key Asks, detailed in Appendix 1 to the Report, as the basis for HITRANS engagement with political parties in advance of the 2026 Scottish Parliament Election.

HITRANS Equalities 19 Scheme 2025 – 2029

With reference to item 18 of the Minute of Meeting of 25 April 2025, Mr Ranald Robertson, Partnership Director submitted a Report presenting the new HITRANS Equalities Scheme 2025-2029 for consideration and approval. The Scheme set out how the Partnership would continue to meet its statutory obligations under the Equality Act 2010 and the Public Sector Equality Duty (Scotland), as well as the Fairer Scotland Duty and the Islands (Scotland) Act 2018. The Report stated that the Scheme would replace the previous Equalities Scheme (2019-2024) and reflected both the policy context established by the Regional Transport Strategy 2025-2045 and the findings of the Mainstreaming the Equality Duty Report published in April 2025.

It was agreed to:

- (1) note the Report; and**
- (2) approve the HITRANS Equalities Scheme 2025-2029 for publication and implementation.**

HITRANS Marketing 20 and Communications Strategy

Ms Sheena Corcoran, Smart Travel Choices Promotion and Marketing Officer and Mr Ranald Robertson, Partnership Director, submitted a Joint Report presenting the new HITRANS Marketing and Communications Strategy. The Report stated that the Strategy set out a clear framework for how HITRANS would communicate its purpose, promote its projects, and engage with key audiences across the Highlands and Islands. The Strategy was designed

to strengthen the Partnership's profile, ensure consistent and transparent communications, and support the delivery of the Regional Transport Strategy 2025-2045 and associated Business Plan objectives.

It was agreed to:

- (1) note the Report; and**
- (2) approve the HITRANS Marketing and Communications Strategy for implementation and publication.**

Artificial Intelligence 21
Use Policy 2025

Mr Ranald Robertson, Partnership Director, submitted a Report presenting the new HITRANS Artificial Intelligence (AI) Use Policy for consideration and approval. The Policy established the principles, governance, and guidance for the responsible use of Artificial Intelligence tools across HITRANS. It ensures that AI was used to improve productivity, creativity, and data-informed decision-making while maintaining compliance with ethical, legal, and data protection standards. The AI Use Policy supported HITRANS' broader digital transformation aims by providing a structured framework for adopting innovative technologies that enhanced the delivery of transport planning, partnership engagement, and operational efficiency.

It was agreed to:

- (1) note the Report; and**
- (2) approve the HITRANS Artificial Intelligence (AI) Use Policy for implementation and publication.**

Staffing Report

22

Mr Ranald Robertson, Partnership Director, submitted a Report seeking approval to extend the contracts of the Transport Integration Manager, Smart Travel Choices Officer and Business Support Assistant (Active Communities: Western Isles) posts for a further 12 months to 31 March 2027. These posts remain fully funded through Transport Scotland's People and Place Programme.

It was agreed to:

- (1) note the Report; and**
- (2) approve the extension of the Transport Integration Manager, SMART Travel Choices Officer and Business Support Assistant (Active Communities: Western Isles) contracts for a further 12 months, with salaries remaining at the current grades.**

URGENT ITEM

Climate Change Plan

23

Mr Ranald Robertson, Partnership Director submitted a Report summarising the Scottish Government's Draft Climate Change Plan (CCP) 2026–2040, published in November 2025, which set out the pathway for Scotland to achieve net zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2045. The Report highlighted the main policy objectives, carbon budgets, sectoral priorities, and the implications for Regional Transport Authorities including HITRANS.

It was agreed:

- (1) to note the key objectives and commitments set out in Scotland's Draft Climate Change Plan 2026–2040.**

- (2) to agree that HITRANS should prepare a consultation response focusing on Highlands and Islands transport challenges.
- (3) that the draft response would be circulated to Board Members for electronic approval; and
- (4) to endorse continued engagement with the Scottish Government and the Scottish National Investment Bank on regional investment opportunities.