

Report to Partnership Meeting 6th February 2026

Research and Strategy Delivery

Sustainable Aviation Projects Update

Purpose of Report

To inform Members of HITRANS' success in securing a new consortium partner for the SATE project in NHS Grampian; North Innovation Hub; the SATE team's shortlisting for The Engineer's Collaborate to Innovate (C2I) awards; and last quarters successful in person workshop and QRM1 for SATE, and QRM1 for ALBUM.

Background

The Future Flight Challenge is delivered by UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) to develop greener and more efficient ways of flying. It supports projects that bring together aviation, energy, regulatory, and digital expertise to deliver low-carbon, resilient air transport services.

On 29 September 2025, the UK Government announced more than £4 million of new funding to support the next generation of aviation technology projects. This funding is split between two competitions, Regional Demonstrator and Strategic Growth – both of which HITRANS was successful in. This latest round of awards builds on earlier phases of Future Flight, including the HITRANS-led Sustainable Aviation Test Environment (SATE) project, which established the UK's first operational low-carbon aviation test centre at Kirkwall Airport.

HITRANS Projects

Project 1 - HITRANS-Led Project – SATE: Highlands & Islands Regional Pathway to Sustainable Aviation

It was announced in December that SATE welcomed a new consortium partner. NHS Grampian North Innovation Hub join the project, offering vital insights into the applicability of drone technologies for the benefit of healthcare services across the region.

This period also saw an in-person workshop hosted by partners Urban Foresight in Newcastle and successful first quarterly review. In addition to this, the SATE project has been shortlisted for The Engineer's C2I award in the aerospace and defence category.

Project 2. HITRANS Partner Project – Advanced Logistics BVLOS UAV Mission (ALBUM)

This period saw a successful Q1 review in Cranfield, including a tour of the ARC Aerosystems facilities.

Wider Programme Context

Funding was awarded in 2025 for 7-month projects which conclude March 2026. It is anticipated that a future funding round will be announced shortly. HITRANS is working with consortium partners to determine future flight projects across the region.

HITRANS are awaiting an update on the status of funding bids submitted to the Inverness & Highland City Region Deal (£300k) and the Island Centre for Net Zero (£1.515m). HITRANS is working with Highland schools and teachers to embed local sustainable aviation projects into the region's secondary curriculum for long term impact.

Budget

Project 1 – SATE

HITRANS has a budget of £35,164 within the £270,579 SATE project. This budget runs from the 1st September 2025 to 31st March 2026. In quarter one (September – November) HITRANS spent £17,756.77 of this budget and is on track for the next two quarters within the project to spend the remaining.

HITRANS has budget for labour, overheads, subcontracting (David Holden, Regional Sustainable Aviation Manager), events and travel within SATE.

Project 2 – ALBUM

HITRANS has a budget of £77,779 within the £680,008 ALBUM project. This budget runs from the 1st September 2025 to 31st March 2026. In quarter one (September – November) HITRANS spent £15,987.85 of this budget and may be underspent for the next two quarters, depending on the outcome of the trials.

HITRANS has budget for labour, overheads, events and travel within ALBUM.

RISK REGISTER

RTS Delivery

Impact – Positive

Policy

Policy Impact – Positive:

Comment – Positions Highlands & Islands as a global leader in net zero aviation, supporting the Scottish Government's ambition for the world's first net zero aviation region.

Financial

Impact – Positive

Comment – High intervention rates mitigate financial risk for HITRANS while delivering significant leverage of UKRI funding.

Equality

Impact – Neutral

RECOMMENDATION

Members are asked to:

1. Note HITRANS' success in securing new SATE consortium partner.
2. Note HITRANS' success in gaining nomination for C2I award.
3. Support continued engagement in the UKRI Future Flight programme as a platform for advancing sustainable aviation solutions for the Highlands & Islands.

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Date: 13th January 2026