

Report to Partnership Meeting 6 February 2026

RESEARCH AND STRATEGY DELIVERY

Research/Strategy Development Programme for 2025/26

SUMMARY

This Report provides the Partnership Board with an update on progress on delivering the Research and Strategy Development programme and seeks approval of amendments to the programme to reflect commitments made and changing priorities and funding opportunities identified since approval of the 2025/26 Business Plan at the Partnership meeting on 25th April 2025.

DETAIL

The Partnership at its meeting of 25th April agreed the HITRANS Business Plan for 2025/26 which includes a programme for Research and Strategy Development for 2025/26 in support of development, implementation and delivery of the HITRANS Regional Transport Strategy.

Work is progressing on delivery of the Programme as indicated in the Appendix to the report.

The Programme has been amended to reflect changes that have been identified to the circumstances surrounding some projects. The changes are summarised below and more information is provided on each change in Appendix A to this report and where relevant in the items more closely related to the detail of the projects.

Summary of key Programme changes:

- Increase People and Place Programme budget by £95,000 to £2,526,884 following increase in grant offer from Transport Scotland to support HI-Bike expansion to Aviemore which will be delivered in partnership with Cairngorms National Park Authority
- Introduce a new budget line for Active Travel Infrastructure Fund following confirmation of £1,059,516 for HITRANS applications for the lochdar path and Skye AT route design works.
- Introduce a budget line for Renewable Energy Transport Opportunities study following approval of this at the November meeting. Budget of £45,000 in 2025/26 which includes a new contribution of £25,000 from Transport Scotland.
- Remove Climate Adaptation Study budget of £20,000 which has been diverted to Renewable Energy study.
- Reduce unallocated Regionally Significant project budget by £10,000 to £30,000.

- Reduce EV Strategy and Fleet budget from £6,000 to £5,000.

RISK REGISTER

RTS Delivery

Impact - Positive

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

Policy

Impact - Neutral

Financial

Impact – Positive

Budget line and value – This item reports on the 2025/26 Business Plan research and strategy delivery programme

Equality

Impact – Positive

Comment – Actions within the programme will have a positive impact on Equalities including Accessibility.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Members and Advisors are asked to note the amendments to the Research and Strategy Development Programme 2025/26 as detailed in the Appendix to the Report.

Report by:	Ranald Robertson
Designation:	Partnership Director
Date:	6 th January 2026
Additional Information:	Appendix – Research and Development Programme

Appendix – Research and Development Programme

Area	Project	2025/26	January Update	Comments
Sustainable Travel	Regional People and Places Programme	2431884	2526884	Programme delivery continues and is reported separately in detail.
	Active Travel Infrastructure Fund		1059516	Confirmed funds awarded to support Skye and Lochdar active travel schemes delivered in partnership with community organisations.
	Bus Infrastructure Fund / BSIP and CCAM	10000	50000	Partnership work with Highland Council on BIF and UKRI CCAV funding for Kirkwall Autolink project.
Aviation	Future fo Flight Challenge / CAA Sandbox	100000	120000	UKRI funded low carbon aviation programme.
	Low Volume Air Routes / PSO Networks		15,000	Low Volume Air Route Research and related activity on PSO network future opportunities.
	IHCRD - Drone Aviation		300000	Low carbon Drone Logistics programme under Inverness and Highland City Region Deal
External Funding	Fort William ITP	250000	250000	Partnership with Highland Council and Transport Scotland to deliver an Integrated Transport Plan for Fort William. Contract awarded to consortium led by Aecom.
	RURALITIES	100000	100000	Project is live to October 2027 with the main delivery focus including Scottish Islands Passport and Micromobility Hubs in Orkney. Mapping everything that moves partnership in place with RGU that will help inform spend in new locations.

RTS	ERDF / INTERREG / SG Bid Project Support	3000	3000	Budget to support Horizon Europe project development.
	Regionally Significant Scheme Development	40000	30000	Funding support to help partner Councils develop Regionally Significant Transport Projects. Current allocation is for a contribution to the Fort William Integrated Transport Plan. Costs for support of HTAP work.
	Local Authority Ferry Investment	15000	12500	Final allocation is to support OIC's UKRI project with Artemis.
	Renewable Energy Transport Opps		45000	Commissioning of study and Transport Scotland contribution of £25,000
	Climate Adaptation Study	20000	0	Analysis of Climate Adaptation Required across the region.
	EV Infrastructure Fund Shared Service	145000	145000	HITRANS partnership with OIC, SIC and Moray Council on the EV Infrastructure Fund. To be reported separately in the meeting pack.
	EV Strategy and Fleet	6000	5000	EV Strategy Development / Fleet
Rail	Rail Policy Development	30000	30000	Support rail policy development work.
	Inverness Station Masterplan	10,000	10,000	Budget allocation to analyse and consider the creation of a strategic multi-modal transport interchange that considers bus, rail, active travel and parking.
Bus / DRT	Bus Service Development, Bus Partnership Fund support	30,000	30,000	Support bus policy work and public transport information production.
	Total Identified Project Expenditure	3190884	4731900	
	Current Estimated Budget (R&D)	250000	250000	
	Current Estimated Budget (External - EU, Sustrans, Transport Scotland Ring Fenced Project Support)	3,250,000	4,574,516	