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Report to Partnership Meeting 24 April 2026

RESEARCH AND STRATEGY DELIVERY

National Transport Strategy – 5th Delivery Plan

Purpose of Report

This report provides Members with an overview of the Scottish Government’s Fifth Delivery Plan for the National Transport Strategy (NTS) and highlights areas of particular relevance to the HITRANS region.

The report also identifies areas where the activities of HITRANS and its partners align with the actions set out in the Delivery Plan and where future workstreams may support delivery of the Strategy through the HITRANS Business Plan and Regional Transport Strategy (RTS) Delivery Plan.

A copy of the National Transport Strategy Fifth Delivery Plan (published March 2026) is available to download on the Transport Scotland website at this [link](#).

Background

The National Transport Strategy (NTS) sets out the Scottish Government’s long-term vision for a transport system that is sustainable, inclusive, safe, and accessible, underpinned by four priorities:

- Reduces Inequalities
- Takes Climate Action
- Helps Deliver Inclusive Economic Growth
- Improves Health and Wellbeing

The Fifth Delivery Plan outlines the actions taken by the Scottish Government and partners since publication of the previous Delivery Plan in December 2024 and sets out the priorities for the coming year.

The Strategy continues to be delivered in partnership with local authorities, Regional Transport Partnerships, transport operators and industry stakeholders, recognising the critical role of regional bodies in translating national policy into place-based delivery across Scotland.

Progress Since the Previous Delivery Plan

The Fifth Delivery Plan reports significant progress across a number of transport policy areas since publication of the fourth plan.

Key developments include:

- Continued expansion of concessionary travel schemes, with over 289 million bus journeys made by young people since the introduction of free bus travel for under-22s.
- Permanent removal of ScotRail peak fares and a freeze on rail fares from April 2026 to support affordability and encourage modal shift.
- Introduction of free inter-island ferry travel for under-22s and ferry vouchers for young island residents travelling to the mainland.
- Investment in battery-electric rail services and electrification works, alongside the first year of operation of the Levenmouth Rail Line.
- Progress in delivering new ferries and the Small Vessel Replacement Programme supporting island connectivity.
- Continued investment in road safety and trunk road maintenance with record funding for casualty reduction measures.
- Progress on climate action including expansion of zero-emission buses, EV charging infrastructure and climate adaptation measures for the trunk road network.

The Delivery Plan also highlights the economic importance of transport, supporting approximately 150,000 jobs and almost £10 billion in Gross Value Added across Scotland.

Delivery Plan Priorities

Reduces Inequalities

Key actions under this priority focus on ensuring transport is accessible, affordable and easy to use.

Relevant initiatives include:

- Continued delivery of concessionary travel schemes and improved affordability of public transport.
- Expansion of integrated ticketing and smart ticketing systems.
- Improvements to Traveline Scotland journey planning and real-time information.
- Bus infrastructure investment to improve passenger facilities and journey reliability.
- The £2 Bus Fare Cap pilot, being rolled out across the ZetTrans and HITRANS regions in early 2026.

These initiatives are directly relevant to HITRANS activities supporting rural and island accessibility and integration between modes.

Takes Climate Action

Transport remains a major contributor to Scotland's carbon emissions and a key focus for achieving net zero by 2045.

The Delivery Plan highlights actions including:

- Development of the Climate Change Plan and new statutory carbon budgets.
- Continued investment in zero-emission buses and heavy-duty vehicle infrastructure.
- Expansion of the EV Infrastructure Fund and public charging networks.
- Investment in climate adaptation measures across the transport network.
- Freight decarbonisation through modal shift and new technology.

Within the HITRANS area, this aligns with work on EV infrastructure, sustainable aviation, freight decarbonisation and active travel programmes.

Helps Deliver Inclusive Economic Growth

Transport investment remains central to Scotland's economic development. The Delivery Plan outlines actions including:

- Over £1.2 billion investment in trunk roads and £1.6 billion in rail.
- Continued progress on the A9 and A96 dualling programmes.
- Investment in ferry infrastructure and vessel replacement programmes.
- Support for Highlands & Islands Airports Ltd operations and regional air connectivity.
- Continued development of rail electrification and rolling stock replacement.

For the Highlands and Islands region, connectivity through ferries, aviation and rail services remains critical to economic resilience and regional development.

Improves Health and Wellbeing

Actions under this priority focus on safety, active travel and improved community wellbeing.

Examples include:

- Investment in road safety programmes and casualty reduction measures.
- Continued rollout of 20mph limits and speed management initiatives.
- Expansion of active travel infrastructure and behaviour change programmes.
- Integration of transport and healthcare access planning.
- Implementation of actions to improve safety on public transport.

These priorities align closely with work delivered through the People and Place programme and HITRANS active travel initiatives.

Role of Regional Transport Partnerships

The Delivery Plan recognises the important role of Regional Transport Partnerships (RTPs) in delivering national policy at a regional level.

RTPs provide statutory leadership in the development and delivery of Regional Transport Strategies and work with local authorities, operators and other partners to translate national transport policies into local delivery.

The plan highlights a number of initiatives delivered by RTPs including:

- Development of regional public transport information systems and real-time passenger information.
- Delivery of demand responsive transport services.
- Implementation of active travel and behaviour change programmes.
- Development of regional strategies supporting bus networks, rail development and freight planning.
- Support for innovation including electric vehicle infrastructure and sustainable aviation technologies.

HITRANS is specifically referenced for work including demand responsive transport platforms, public transport information systems and sustainable aviation initiatives.

Implications for HITRANS

There is strong alignment between the priorities set out in the NTS Delivery Plan and the work currently being delivered by HITRANS and partners through the Regional Transport Strategy.

Areas where HITRANS activity directly contributes to Delivery Plan objectives include:

- Public transport information systems and digital journey planning
- Demand responsive transport and bus network development
- Electric vehicle infrastructure and decarbonisation initiatives
- Sustainable aviation innovation programmes
- Regional rail development and station masterplans
- Ferry policy and connectivity improvements
- Active travel programmes including HI-BIKE
- Transport to Health and Transport to Employment initiatives

The Delivery Plan reinforces the role of RTPs as regional delivery partners and highlights opportunities for continued collaboration with Transport Scotland on policy development and delivery programmes.

Risk Register

RTS Delivery

Impact - Positive

Comment – The actions and priorities set out in the NTS Delivery Plan align closely with the objectives of the HITRANS Regional Transport Strategy and will help guide future prioritisation within the RTS Delivery Plan.

Policy

Impact - Positive

Comment – The National Transport Strategy and its Delivery Plans provide a coordinated national policy framework that supports regional transport planning and delivery.

Financial

Impact – Positive

Budget line and value – HITRANS and its partners. These priorities will continue to inform the development of the HITRANS Business Plan and future project funding.

Equality

Impact – Positive

Comment – Reducing inequalities is a central priority of the National Transport Strategy and many of the initiatives highlighted in the Delivery Plan focus on improving access to transport for rural, island and disadvantaged communities.

Members are invited to:

1. Note the report.
2. Note the publication of the Scottish Government's Fifth National Transport Strategy Delivery Plan.

3. Note the alignment between Delivery Plan priorities and the work programme of HITRANS and its partners.

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Date: 16th March 2026