

## **Report to Partnership Meeting 23<sup>rd</sup> April 2026**

### **RESEARCH AND STRATEGY DELIVERY**

#### **Health and Transport Action Plan Update**

##### **Purpose of Report**

To provide an update on work to establish a Health and Transport Action Plan (HTAP) for the Highlands and Islands and updates on other transport to health related activity that HITRANS are leading or supporting.

##### **Progress Update**

In a report to the HITRANS partnership meeting in September 2025, Members were updated on work to support the development of a Health and Transport Action Plan (HTAP) for the Highlands and Islands has progressed significantly.

This included a workshop bringing together representatives from NHS Boards, Local Authorities, HITRANS, and ZetTrans to consider the opportunities and priorities for a regional HTAP. The discussion explored how a regional approach could support more coordinated and complementary working across different geographies and governance structures, including Community Planning Partnerships (CPPs) and Health & Social Care Partnerships (H&SCPs).

Subsequent to this work, HITRANS submitted a successful proposal to the Scottish Government seeking funding to support the Implementation of a Highlands and Islands Health and Transport Action Plan. Details are set out in the next section of this report.

Following confirmation of support for the resourcing of the HTAP, HITRANS has been re-engaging with Health Boards and Local Authority partners to update them and seek feedback on a preferred governance structure framework for progressing the HTAP.

Following the workshop last year, HITRANS undertook work to scope potential governance models for a Highlands and Islands HTAP which recommended that the HTAP should be overseen by a single, clear regional governance structure, with:

- Committed input from key players (at least NHS Boards, Local Authorities and RTPs).
- Acknowledged links to other partners/groups (e.g. CPPs, H&SCPs).
- Clearly defined responsibilities, including:
  - Identifying and monitoring actions towards delivering priority outcomes.
  - Identifying budgets and monitoring investment/expenditure.
  - Advocating for the work of the HTAP and investment in it.
  - Providing a coordination/secretariat function.

Recent engagement has highlighted the need for workstreams to be undertaken at individual NHS Board / local authority level to address area specific challenges that may then inform wider solutions. There was also broad consensus that the priorities identified through the scoping report and workshop should remain the focus for any Action Plan.

### **National Islands Plan – Implementation Route Map**

The following commitment was included within the final Implementation Route Map for National Islands Plan 2026 <https://shorturl.at/JO1ky>:

*By early 2026, we will provide funding to HITRANS to develop a Health and Transport Action Plan (HTAP) for the Highlands and Islands, including demand assessments and structured engagement between transport providers and Health Boards*

Following the adoption of the final National Islands Plan by the Scottish Parliament, HITRANS has received confirmation of funding support for 2025/26 to enable the recruitment of a Programme Manager with responsibility for overseeing the development and implementation of a Health and Transport Action Plan for the region. The proposal focuses on improving islanders' access to healthcare services through coordinated regional action, practical interventions, and strengthened governance.

The initial grant of £105,000 for this financial year will also provide for a small working budget that will support the partnership, prepare and administer the action plan, enable delivery of key initiatives, support advocacy, and case-building for strategic improvements.

Attached as **Appendix A** is a copy of the draft specification for the proposed HTAP Coordinator position that HITRANS will seek to recruit subject to Members approval.

It is proposed that HITRANS writes to all Health Boards, Local Authorities and Regional Transport Partnerships that cover the HITRANS and Shetland Islands seeking their support for our proposed approach to governance arrangements (**Appendix B**) and to ask them to commit to supporting the work of the HTAP.

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### **Western Isles Transport to Health Working Group**

Building on the task and finish group chaired by HITRANS, work is currently being undertaken to support Recommendation 13 of the final report (<https://shorturl.at/ddr4l>).

*Develop and implement protocols for patient care during ferry and flight journeys which define what support should be available from whom, especially in the event of travel disruptions, and establishes which facilities are available during journeys in the event that patients need assistance or comfort breaks*

This work is an example of where individual actions may be progressed at a single health board / local authority level but where the outcomes may inform or support improvements that could be implemented on a similar basis elsewhere within the region.

### **Accessibility of BN Islander Aircraft**

Following initial representations by a local MSP on behalf of constituents in Summer 2024 - Local, Regional and National partners involved in the aviation sector have been working together to identify options to improve accessibility for Persons with Reduced Mobility (PRMs) on a number of inter-island PSOs operated using the Britten Norman Islander aircraft.

Currently all inter-island PSO services within Argyll and Bute, Comhairle nan Eilean Siar, Orkneys Islands and Shetland Islands Council areas are operated using the 9-seater Islander aircraft.

These PSOs provide lifeline connectivity between 16 airports and airstrips on different islands. The services are increasingly used for health-related trips and enable island residents to access healthcare either at the main hospital serving these island groups but also then on to mainland healthcare facilities providing specialist care in larger hospitals on the Scottish mainland including Inverness, Glasgow and Aberdeen. With demand increasing from an aging demographic, it is imperative that a solution is found to enable as many PRMs to access the aircraft and utilise the air services.

Initial work by the two operators of these PSO services (Loganair and Airtask) did not identify any existing products on the market or in use by other operators of the Islander elsewhere that could be readily deployed or adapted. As a result, a steering group of 11 local, regional and national partners was established to help identify the scope and scale of the challenge and potential solutions.

In parallel, Loganair, in partnership with the Transport Research Institute at Napier University and Aurrigo, collaborated within the HEART programme - a UKRI funded 'Future Flyer' project – to develop a prototype lifting device.

Following the completion of this work HITRANS, Napier University and Aurrigo have developed a proposal for a 6month project to refine the prototype solution developed within the HEART project through further design iteration and user testing to final costed design ready for manufacture. This proposal was submitted to Transport Scotland for consideration in autumn 2025. Transport Scotland confirmed that there was not funding available to support the proposal in 2025/26 but invited the project partners to resubmit the proposal for consideration within the new financial year.

If successful, it is proposed to establish a project steering group to oversee the implementation of the project. As with the HEART project, the project work itself will be led by Transport Research Institute at Napier University in partnership with Aurrigo. A Collaboration agreement will be drafted setting out the role and any obligations of HITRANS, Napier University and Aurrigo.

## Recommendations

Members are invited to:

1. Note the report.
2. Approve the recruitment of a Programme Manager based on the specification for the post outlined in Appendix A
3. Agree that HITRANS writes to all Health Boards, Local Authorities and Regional Transport Partnerships that cover the HITRANS and Shetland Islands seeking their commitment for establishing a H&I Health and Transport Action Plan based on the scope and governance arrangements set out in Appendix B of this report.

## RISK REGISTER

### RTS Delivery

Impact – Positive

Comment: Establishing an HTAP is a key action within the RTS Delivery Plan. Progressing governance discussions while also delivering early actions demonstrates momentum and commitment.

### Policy

Impact – Positive

Comment: Supports national priorities in the Transport to Health Delivery Plan and National Transport Strategy, and strengthens local partnership working across health and transport.

### Financial

Impact – Positive

Comment: Members previously approved funding to support the initial HTAP scoping and workshop that informed the subsequent funding application under the National Islands Plan. HITRANS has received a grant offer of £105,000 for 2026/2027 to enable the recruitment of a HTAP Programme Manager and a small working budget to support the initial work of the partnership.

### Equality

Impact – Positive

Comment: HTAP development directly supports improved access to healthcare for communities most disadvantaged by geography, age, and inequality of provision.

**Report by:** Neil MacRae  
**Designation:** Senior Partnership Manager  
**Date:** 14<sup>th</sup> April 2026

## Appendix A

### Programme Manager – Highlands & Islands Health & Transport Action Plan

#### General

The post-holder will be the lead officer responsible for:

- Coordinating the work of the Highlands & Islands Health & Transport Action Plan Steering Group, and
- Delivering actions identified in the Highlands & Islands Health & Transport Action Plan.

HITRANS is the Regional Transport Partnership covering the Highland, Eilean Siar, Orkney, Moray and Argyll & Bute council areas (excl Helensburgh and Lomond Ward areas).

The Scottish Government, in its 2026 National Islands Plan (<https://www.gov.scot/publications/national-islands-plan-2/documents/>), committed to provide funding to HITRANS to develop a Health and Transport Action Plan (HTAP) for the Highlands and Islands, including demand assessments and structured engagement between transport providers and Health Boards.

This builds on good experience from the Grampian region where an HTAP has been in place since 2008. That plan is helping organisations from both healthcare and transport delivery sectors work together to improve access to healthcare sites for patients, visitors and staff, and promote active travel to improve public health.

HITRANS is working with partners in the Highlands & Islands to develop an HTAP for its region. The proposed geographic scope also includes Shetland and its neighbouring partner RTP ZetTrans. The priorities for the HTAP will be shaped by the partners (and by the HTAP Programme Manager) but are expected to include:

- Improving joint working between partners, to help implement schemes with a better shared understanding of issues and priorities;
- Helping share knowledge between partners, including of the scale of problems and of the effectiveness of potential interventions;
- Raising awareness of important issues amongst local, regional and national decision makers;
- Making the case for increased investment to deliver improved outcomes; and
- Delivering new initiatives.

The post-holder will help establish and administer the Highlands & Islands HTAP, working with representatives of all partner organisations through a Steering Group, and to then help the Steering Group deliver priority actions.

The post-holder will also manage Steering Group meetings and prepare and disseminate communication materials.

The post-holder will be based at HITRANS office in Inverness, with hybrid working options available.

The role will involve travel to each of the partner councils and health boards, and other areas as relevant to the post.

**Job Purpose**

1. The post-holder is being recruited to fill a new position which is being created to programme manage the emerging Highlands & Islands Health & Transport Action Plan.
2. The post-holder will join a small team of staff supporting HITRANS in securing the delivery of the priorities set out by regional partners.
3. Support the finalisation and approval of the regional HTAP.
4. Support delivery of actions identified in the HTAP.
5. Administer HTAP Steering Group meetings.
6. Monitor and advocate the positive work and outcomes of the HTAP to local, regional and national partners.
7. Maintain compliance with partners' processes and support completion of financial claims.
8. Prepare an annual report recording HTAP inputs, achievement and lessons learned.
9. In delivering these functions the post-holder will be expected to work closely with fellow partner councils, Health Boards, RTPs and other key stakeholders including the Scottish Governments Health Directorate, Islands Team and Transport Scotland.

**Main Duties**

1. The post-holder will report to the HITRANS Senior Partnership Manager on a day-to-day basis but will also be expected to engage with other HITRANS Team Members and liaise with HTAP Steering Group members (health boards and local authorities) and others on a regular basis.
2. Assist with the finalisation of the HTAP.
3. Co-ordinate and assist with delivery of the HTAP according to the priorities determined by the Steering Group.
4. Manage any funding provided to third parties, as allocated by the Steering Group.
5. Administer HTAP Steering Group meetings and other sub group or associated meetings as required.
6. Provide regular progress reports / updates to the Steering Group, including an annual report.
7. To support HITRANS and other Steering Group members on issues, developments, updates, and work in relation to health and transport.
8. To ensure post-holder activities are delivered efficiently on time and within agreed budgets.
9. To represent the Steering Group externally in a number of forums on areas relevant to the job purpose as appropriate.
10. The post-holder will need to maintain effective working relationships with staff of partner organisations and others as appropriate.