

Item:

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Report to Partnership Meeting 24 April 2026

RESEARCH AND STRATEGY DELIVERY

Access to Employment Funding

Purpose of Report

This report provides Members with information regarding a new stream of funding being directed to Regional Transport Partnerships (RTPs) from the Scottish Government. Subject to final approvals, a total of £9.8m RDEL is being made available across the seven RTPs in 2026/27 to improve access to employment as part of the national Tackling Child Poverty Delivery Plan.

The report also outlines the agreed national allocation model and summarises the proposed HITRANS delivery approach.

Background

RTP leads were alerted to the potential for funding to support access to employment in early January 2026. This opportunity has arisen as a consequence of UK Government funding decisions, enabling a targeted revenue programme focused on reducing transport barriers to employment.

Alongside this transport funding, a complementary funding stream of a similar scale (circa £9m nationally) is being directed through Local Employability Partnerships (LEPs) to support parental employability initiatives.

Across Scotland, approximately 2,000 parents and carers report that transport barriers prevent them from accessing training or securing employment. These barriers are primarily linked to affordability, accessibility and availability.

RTP leads have collectively agreed to adopt the People and Place distribution formula, reflecting population and land mass while ensuring a viable base allocation. This has resulted in an allocation to HITRANS of £1,032,148.

Proposals

The funding will be administered through the Transport Scotland team responsible for the People and Place programme, reflecting confidence in RTP delivery mechanisms. RTPs have been invited to outline their approach to managing and distributing funding. The emerging approach focuses on system-level interventions that improve access to employment, rather than solely individualised support.

For HITRANS, this will include:

- Strong alignment with Local Employability Partnerships (LEPs) and Skills Development Scotland
- Establishment of a regional partnership governance structure

- Targeted interventions addressing affordability, accessibility and availability barriers
- Integration with public, community and demand responsive transport
- Support for access to:
 - Employment
 - Training and skills
 - Further and higher education
 - Health-related employment

A summary of the HITRANS outline programme is provided in Appendix A.

Monitoring and Evaluation

Transport Scotland has emphasised proportionate but effective monitoring to support future funding.

Monitoring will focus on:

- Availability
- Accessibility
- Affordability

Alongside employment-related outputs such as job access, interviews supported and job sustainment.

Next Steps

- Transport Scotland will issue grant award letters following completion of internal approvals
- HITRANS will finalise governance and delivery arrangements including how we will provide appropriate staff cover for the programme. Given the uncertain nature of the funding this will likely be achieved by engaging consultancy support or temporary staff to manage the overall programme.
- Engagement with Local Employability Partnerships will be formalised to ensure alignment of activity

Risk Register

RTS Delivery

Impact – Positive

Comment – The Access to Employment programme directly supports delivery of the HITRANS Regional Transport Strategy by improving connectivity to jobs, training and services. The programme aligns strongly with RTS priorities on inclusive, accessible and sustainable transport, particularly in rural and island communities.

Policy

Impact – Positive

Comment – The programme aligns with the National Transport Strategy (NTS2) and the Tackling Child Poverty Delivery Plan, providing a coordinated policy framework linking transport and employability. It also complements wider national initiatives including People and Place and Local Employability Partnerships.

Financial

Impact – Positive

Budget line and value – Scottish Government Access to Employment Fund – £1,032,148 (expected allocation to HITRANS for 2026/27).

Comment – This represents a significant additional revenue funding stream supporting HITRANS and its partners. The funding will be incorporated into the HITRANS Business Plan and used to deliver targeted interventions improving access to employment.

Equality

Impact – Positive

Comment – Reducing inequalities is central to this programme. The funding is specifically targeted at removing transport barriers faced by low-income households, parents, young people, and rural and island communities, thereby improving equitable access to employment and training opportunities.

Recommendations

Members are invited to:

1. Note the Scottish Government's Access to Employment funding programme;
2. Note the agreed national allocation model and HITRANS' expected funding of £1,032,148;
3. Endorse ongoing engagement with Transport Scotland, Scottish Government and Local Employability Partnerships;
4. Support the development and delivery of the HITRANS Access to Employment programme as summarised in Appendix A.
5. Delegate to the Partnership Director and Chairman responsibility for establishing appropriate project management arrangements for the Programme and recruit short term support as required.

Report by: Ranald Robertson

Designation: Partnership Director

Date: 26 March 2026

Background Paper: Appendix A – Summary of HITRANS Access to Employment Programme

Appendix A – Summary of HITRANS Access to Employment Programme

The HITRANS programme proposes a targeted, revenue-funded intervention to remove transport barriers to employment.

Overview

- Programme scale: £1m annually
- Target groups: low-income households, job seekers, young people, parents returning to work, and rural communities
- Delivery model: commissioning and partnership-led, with HITRANS as strategic lead

Key Elements

Governance and Partnerships

- Access to Employment Partnership Board
- Alignment with LEPs, SDS, Jobcentre Plus and local authorities
- Core Interventions
- Mobility credits (free/discounted travel)
- Employer engagement and workforce travel solutions
- HI-Bike employment support (free/low-cost access)
- Community and demand responsive transport enhancements
- Targeted support for vulnerable groups

Delivery Structure

- Transport integration and mobility credits
- Employer and community access fund
- HI-Bike employment offer
- Alignment with People and Place programme

Monitoring

- Job access and sustainment
- Employer engagement
- Uptake of transport interventions

A Month 9 review and full annual evaluation will inform future delivery.