

Annual Report

—
2024/2025

Foreword



Ranald Robertson
*HITRANS Partnership
Director*

2024/25 has been another significant year for HITRANS, marking the transition from developing our new Regional Transport Strategy to putting in place the foundations for its delivery over the next twenty years.

The approval of the Regional Transport Strategy by the HITRANS Board in September 2024 represented the culmination of extensive engagement with our partner Councils, communities, stakeholders and Transport Scotland. The Strategy sets a clear vision for transport across the Highlands and Islands, focused on reducing inequalities, taking climate action, supporting inclusive economic growth and improving health and wellbeing. While Ministerial approval followed in May 2025, much of our effort during the year was already focused on translating that vision into practical delivery.

Alongside this strategic work, HITRANS has continued to deliver an ambitious programme of projects across every part of the region. We were delighted to assume the role of Lead Partner for the internationally recognised Sustainable Aviation Test Environment (SATE) programme, reinforcing the Highlands and Islands' reputation as a global testbed for innovation in sustainable aviation. At the same time, we continued to develop projects supporting smarter travel choices, public transport, digital innovation, active travel, electric vehicle infrastructure and decarbonisation.

One of the most significant developments during the year was the expansion of our role in delivering active and sustainable travel through Transport Scotland's People and Place Programme. This represented a major vote of confidence in HITRANS and enabled us to support a wide range of initiatives across the region, from HI-Bike expansion and cycle parking to behaviour change programmes, workplace travel planning and improved access to cycling. Working closely with our partner local authorities, we have continued to demonstrate the value of regional collaboration in delivering national priorities effectively at a local level.

Innovation remains at the heart of what HITRANS does. Our work on Mobility as a Service through GO-HI, Demand Responsive Transport, real time passenger information, sustainable aviation, electric vehicle infrastructure and European research projects continues to ensure that the Highlands and Islands is recognised internationally as a place where new transport solutions can be developed, tested and implemented in ways that deliver real benefits for our communities.

We have also continued to champion the importance of resilient transport connections across our region. Whether supporting investment in rail, ferry, aviation, bus or active travel, HITRANS remains committed to ensuring that the distinctive needs of rural, island and remote communities are recognised in national policy and investment decisions. Good transport is fundamental to economic opportunity, access to education and healthcare, tackling inequalities and sustaining vibrant communities throughout the Highlands and Islands.

Financially, the Partnership has once again demonstrated prudent stewardship of public resources. Strong project delivery and successful external funding secured during the year enabled us to continue investing in transport improvements across the region while delivering a modest operating surplus, strengthening our reserves and providing a sound financial platform for future activity.

Finally, I would like to thank our Board Members, partner Councils, Transport Scotland, Highlands and Islands Enterprise, our many public and private sector partners, and the dedicated HITRANS staff team whose professionalism and commitment continue to make these achievements possible. Through partnership working and a shared ambition for the region, we are well placed to deliver the aspirations set out in our new Regional Transport Strategy and continue improving connectivity for the people, businesses and communities of the Highlands and Islands.

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Board, Advisors and Staff

The HITRANS Board comprises a Councillor from each local authority area covered by the partnership and 3 non-council members appointed in a personal capacity by the Board and approved by the Minister for Transport following open advertisement and selection. The Board has appointed a group of professional advisers who play an important role, working with the executive team, in developing strategy. The executive team report to the Board.

Board

CLlr Uisdean Robertson, Chair (Comhairle Nan Eilean Siar)
CLlr Amber Dunbar, Vice Chair (Moray Council)
CLlr Kristopher Leask (Orkney Islands Council)
CLlr Ken Gowans (Highland Council)
CLlr John Armour (Argyll and Bute Council)
Mrs Naomi Bremner
Ms Shona MacLennan
Mr Robert Andrew

Advisors

Jim Buck (Orkney Islands Council)
Grant Campbell (Prosper Scotland)
Fergus Murray (Argyll and Bute Council)
Colm Fraser (Comhairle Nan Eilean Siar)
Malcolm MacLeod (Highland Council)
Nicky Sobey (Highlands and Islands Enterprise)
Nicola Moss (Moray Council)

Staff Team

Ranald Robertson (Partnership Director)
Katy Cunningham (Business Manager)
Sheena Corcoran (Smart Travel Choices Officer – Job Share)
Neil MacRae (Partnership Manager)
Vikki Trelfer (Active Travel Officer)
Frank Roach (Partnership Manager)
Robert Wilson (Public Transport Information Officer)
Jayne Golding (SATE Manager)

Jayne Gourlay (SATE Coordinator)
Gemma Robinson (Project Manager - EVIF)
Rachael Fraser (Project Officer – Finance)
Clare Harper (Business Support Assistant)
Rebecca Purvis (Project Manager -
Katy Beasley (Project Manager –
Scottish Islands Passport)
Sheila Wickens (Smart Travel Choices Officer – Job Share)

The Regional Transport Strategy

The Transport Scotland Act 2005 placed the preparation of the Regional Transport Strategy as the first duty of the Regional Transport Partnerships. The Strategies are strategic high-level documents that focus on the transport strategies necessary to support Government's key objectives and the single outcome agreements of the constituent local authorities.

The Regional Transport Strategy was fully reviewed and refreshed and following approval by the HITRANS Partnership Board when they met in September 2024 the Strategy and its associated documents were submitted to Scottish Ministers for their consideration and approval in October 2024.

In working towards the publication of the final RTS, several interim milestones were delivered:

- A Strategic Environmental Assessment Scoping Report was submitted to the SEA Gateway on 30th June 2022
- The RTS Case for Change was approved for consultation by the HITRANS Board. The RTS Case for Change SEA Interim ER and Equalities Duties Report were consulted upon between 16th March 2023 and 27th April 2023
- The Draft RTS was approved for consultation by the HITRANS Board and the Statutory consultation on the Draft RTS, the ER, ER Non- Technical Summary (NTS) and Equalities Duties Report took place between 22nd April 2024 and the 14th June 2024
- On 20th September 2024, the HITRANS Board approved the final version of the RTS. The RTS was then submitted to Scottish Ministers for approval on 4th October 2024 in compliance with the requirements of the Transport (Scotland) Act 2005 and the statutory guidance on the preparation of an RTS. Ministerial approval was granted on 13th May 2025.

The RTS Case for Change set out the policy context within which the RTS was developed, highlighting how the transport network and services in the HITRANS region contribute to the delivery of a wide range of social, environmental, economic and health outcomes. The policy and planning context is summarised in Chapter 2 of the RTS. At the heart of the RTS is a core alignment with the four 'Priorities' and the Sustainable Travel Hierarchy defined in the Scottish Government's National Transport Strategy 2 (NTS2), which was published in February 2020.

The four NTS2 'Priorities' are:

- Reduces inequalities
- Takes climate action
- Helps deliver inclusive economic growth
- Improves our health and wellbeing

The RTS establishes:

- A **Vision** for the transport network in the HITRANS region
- Six **Strategy Objectives** which support the **Vision**
- Eleven **Themes** setting out how the **Vision** and **Strategy Objectives** will be achieved – these Themes were used to shape the structure of the RTS, with separate chapters of the document covering each Theme
- A set of associated **Policies** under each Theme – these set out the 'broad direction of travel' across a range of transport issues affecting the HITRANS region over the period of the Strategy, circa 20-years

Supporting Local Outcome Improvement Plans

As a statutory community planning partner HITRANS works across our five CPP areas to provide transportation support to the process. The work of CPPs continues to evolve and Single Outcome Agreements are now to be replaced with Local Outcome Improvement Plans that will enable priority areas to be identified and addressed by Partners.

The modern transport system that is detailed in the Regional Transport Strategy will support a smarter community through better access to learning opportunities. The Strategy and the joint working of the Partnership, its Councils and Community Planning partners will help people across the Highlands and Islands to sustain and improve their health, ensuring faster, more reliable, and more affordable access to healthcare, and greater opportunities to lead an active lifestyle through active travel access to local services and facilities. HITRANS is actively engaging in the SOA process covering each of the five Community Planning Partnerships in our region.

Research and Strategy Delivery

The Regional Transport Strategy (RTS) and its associated RTS Delivery Plan set out the key priorities, proposals and interventions required to support successful implementation and realisation of the Strategy's Vision and Objectives. Each year the Partnership approves a Business Plan which sets out the Partnership's key delivery priorities for the financial year concerned.

The Business Plan details the projects the Partnership is involved in and an update is reported to the Partnership Board which meets four times per annum. These projects link to the aims of the strategy and the Annual Report provides a report of performance against objectives, targets and performance indicators as outlined in the Regional Transport Strategy.

During 2024/25 the Business Plan set out a wide range of, local regional and national scale projects that have been delivered. These include:

- Assumption of Lead Partner duties for the Sustainable Aviation Test Environment Project (SATE) which is funded through UKRI Future Flight Challenge.
- Ongoing development, monitoring and refresh of the RTS
- Scottish Islands Passport
- Real Time Passenger Information
- Inverness Station Masterplan
- Bottlenecks! Whisky Logistics Study
- Fastline Faslane local rail development
- Bus Partnership Fund Projects – Highland and Argyll & Bute
- HiTravel Shared Service Travel Information Project
- GO-HI MaaS Project (MaaS Investment Fund)
- MOOVE Flexi Digital Demand Responsive Transport
- RURALITIES Horizon Europe Project
- FASTER SEUPB Programme Project
- ERDF Smart Cities – Scotland's 8th City ERDF
- Electric Vehicle Infrastructure Fund Pathfinder Project
- Zero Emissions Vessels Orkney Project support
- Website Development

HITRANS also received a new grant award from Scottish Government (through Transport Scotland) to directly deliver a new behaviour change programme at a regional level under the People and Place Programme which was established as a key output from the Active Travel Transformation Programme. This grant award in 2024/2025 amounted to an initial budget of £1,626,186 for the year. The programme supported a wide range of sustainable travel interventions for the following projects:

- HI Bike – Inverness and Fort William
- Living Streets WOW and Travel Tracker
- Access to Cycles and Bikeability
- Cycle Parking Programme
- Employers Sustainable Travel Grant
- Workplace Travel Planning
- Access to non-standard cycles trial.
- Neighbourhood Hubs
- Cycling UK Programme
- Building Capacity and Capability in HITRANS and LA Teams
- Behaviour Change Strategy

In addition to its principal focus on developing and delivering the RTS through work on the Research and Strategy Delivery Programme a significant proportion of staff time and resource was committed to supporting Community Planning engagement and to work on activity in all five partner Council areas.

Further information on the Partnership's activity, the Regional Transport Strategy and our Revenue and Strategy Delivery Programme work can be obtained by visiting our website www.hitrans.org.uk.

Equalities Scheme

HITRANS as the Transport Partnership for the Highlands and Islands has statutory duties to have an Equalities Scheme and take very seriously engagement in matters relating to equality. Since the Partnership was established at the beginning of 2006, we have made significant progress in adopting and implementing policies in the human resources area which have equalities of opportunity enshrined within them. In addition, a major theme throughout our Regional Transport Strategy is the need for equality of access to transport facilities and services and through these to jobs, health care, education, shopping and social activities.

We have a statutory duty to publish an equalities scheme under legislation covering Race, Gender and Disability and we chose to introduce a single scheme addresses what we intend to do in these areas. It also addresses our proposals in other areas as well, for example age, religion/belief and sexuality.

We have chosen to combine these commitments in one equalities scheme rather than publish a series of individual schemes addressing specific legal duties, but we have made it clear in the scheme which sectors of society should benefit from our proposals. The publication of this scheme is not the end of our duty to promote equal opportunities but simply the beginning. We hope that stakeholders and service users find this scheme informative, and we welcome constructive feedback with a view to its improvement.

HITRANS
Equalities Scheme
2025-2029

Stakeholder Engagement



Active Travel Advisory Group

The Active Travel Advisory Group (ATAG) meets twice per year. The Group is attended by local authority transport officers, Sustrans, Cycling Scotland, cycle campaigners, access officers, and representatives from the health sector and transport operators.

The group has been engaged in the Active Travel Town Audit/Masterplan process and acts as a forum for those interested in the greenest form of transport to share ideas and expertise at a regional level



Ferry Consultation Arrangements

The Scottish Government tasked the Regional Transport Partnerships to put in place arrangements to provide consultative mechanisms between the operator, users and public agencies for the ferry network serving the Clyde, Hebrides, and Northern Isles.

The first line of consultation is between island groups and the ferry operator (Tier 1), with three second tier committees largely concerned with longer term planning and route development. The arrangements are now well established, and the Tier 1 groups meet two to three times per annum.

There are four ferry user groups. These are:

- Clyde, Kintyre and Islands
- Argyll, Lochaber, Skye, Raasay and Small Isles
- Hebrides
- Orkney Transport and Travel Forum



Aviation Consultation Group

Our strategy for aviation is to enhance connectivity within the region and to our national gateways; to increase links with countries outside the UK; to retain the London services particularly through Heathrow and Gatwick; and to manage the environmental impact of aviation on the region without adversely affecting economic growth and sustainability of our communities.

To help us take forward these strategic aspirations HITRANS has established the Aviation Consultation Group with membership drawn from representatives of our key aviation stakeholders.



Transport Coordinators Group

The HITRANS Transport Coordinating Officers Group (HITCOG) is formed of officers from HITRANS and local authority transport officers and aims to deal with technical issues and share good practice in relation to the management and delivery of passenger transport coordination across the Highlands and Islands. The group meets two or three times each year.

Budget

Financial Performance

The Audited Annual Accounts presented a public statement on the stewardship of funds for the benefit of both members of the Transport Partnership and the public. The Partnership is funded by The Highland Council, Moray Council, Comhairle Nan Eilean Siar, Orkney Islands Council and Argyll & Bute Council (excluding Helensburgh and Lomond).

The Partnership's financial results for the year, compared against budget, are as shown below. The full Audited Accounts are available at this [link](#).

	2024/25		
	Budget £000	Actual £000	Variance £000
Staff costs	401	275	126
Property costs	17	24	(7)
Travel and subsistence costs	25	27	(2)
Administration and meeting costs	25	42	(17)
Research and strategy development costs	1,921	402	1,519
Publicity costs	10	18	(8)
Projects costs	1,117	1,908	(791)
Support services	60	74	(14)
Gross expenditure	3,576	2,770	806
Government grants	(2,259)	(510)	(1,749)
Other grants	(1,117)	(2,113)	996
Other income	0	(8)	8
Constituent Council requisitions	(200)	(200)	0
Gross income	(3,576)	(2,831)	(745)
Net deficit/(surplus)	0	(61)	61

The position in the year was a surplus of £0.061m and this sum was transferred to the General Fund Reserve with the main variations from budget during the year being as follows:

- Within both income and expenditure there has been a movement in activity from Regional Active Travel to the People and Places project which accounts for

the under and overspends above within Research and strategy development and project costs and Government and other grants.

- Support services costs are higher than budgeted due to increases in staff pay in line with pay awards and the support time allocated to HiTrans in the recharge from Highland Council.

Public Service Reform Act (Scotland) 2010

HITRANS 2024/25

Section 32(1)(a) of the Public Services Reform (Scotland) Act 2010 provides that as soon as reasonably practicable after the end of each financial year each listed public body must publish a statement of the steps it has taken during the financial year to promote and increase sustainable growth through the exercise of its functions.

HITRANS, as a statutory Regional Transport Partnership, is a listed body within the Act.

During 2024/25 HITRANS has continued implementing a number of initiatives that have improved efficiency, effectiveness and economy and these are outlined below, following on from our actions the previous year. The table below details the information we publish under the Public Service Reform (Scotland) Act 2010 which can also be accessed at this [link](#).

HITRANS Public Reforms Act Information Period covering 01/04/20234 - 31/03/2025				
1) Public Relations Statement - 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024				
	Category	Supplier	External costs - invoiced	Supplier Total
	Spring Newsletter	EllenP Design	£35.00	£400.00
	HITRANS annual report 2023-24	EllenP Design	£100.00	
	HITRANS Business plan 24-25	EllenP Design	£140.00	
	winter Newsletter	ELLENP Design	£35.00	
	Report design	ELLENP Design	£90.00	
	HITRANS website	Hillside Agency	£2,954.00	£6,861.50
	HITRANS Website	Hillside Agency	3692.50	
	HITRANS website	Hillside Agency	£215.00	
	ATCO Membership - Neil Macrae 2024-25	ATCO	£50.00	£100.00
	ATCO Membership - Ranaid Robertson 2024-25	ATCO	£50.00	
	Spring Newsletter, RTS, New board member	Gordon Fyfe PR	£210.00	£595.00
	Press release	Gordon Fyfe PR	£210.00	
	winter Newsletter	Gordon Fyfe PR	£175.00	
	website hosting	Velocity	£395.00	
	website hosting	Velocity	£1,200.00	£1,595.00
	PR photos	Ewen Weatherspoon	£270.00	£270.00
	National Transport Awards	Transport Times	£2,300.00	£2,300.00
	Membership renewal	SCDI	£1,250.00	£1,250.00
	Membership renewal - Scottish council for Development	Inverness Chamber of Commerce	£1,540.00	£1,540.00
	SCOTS Membership 24-25	Improvement Service	£450.00	£565.00
	Membership	Improvement Service	£115.00	
	SCOTS Conference			
	Total			£7,520.00

2) Overseas Travel								
Reason	Origin / Destination	No. Employees	Travel Costs	Subsistence	Accommodation / Meals	Other Expenditure	Total	
Clean Aviation Annual forum	Brussels	1	£195.00	£173.00	£910.00		£1,278.00	
Networkng workshop and board meeting - Ruralities Project	Iasi, Romania	1	£634.00	£85.00	£133.00		£852.00	
Ruralitiies Event	Zagreb, Croatia	1	£751.00	£126.00	£691.00	£0.00	£1,568.00	
Ruralitiies Event	Aarhus, Denmark	1	£597.00	£71.00	£878.00	£0.00	£1,546.00	
Hydrogen Airports Conference & TULIPS project meeting	Turin	1	£292.00	£123.00	£876.00		£1,291.00	
Pilot Lofoten Event	Norway	1	£923.00	£139.00	£414.00		£1,476.00	
Total							£8,011.00	

3) Hospitality & Entertainment		
Date	Reason	Cost
n/a		
Total		

4) External Consultancy				
	Supplier	Project / Service	Total	Supplier Total
	E-Rail	gic Property and Transport advice related to Inverness Station	£5,000.00	£10,000.00
	E Rail	gic Property Review of proposed Inverness Station Masterplan	£5,000.00	
	AECOM	Evanton station study	£1,126.00	£1,126.00
	Railway Industry Association	RIA subscription for the membership	£970.00	£970.00
	CNNCT Ltd	Consultancy	£2,340.00	£4,680.00
	CNNCT Ltd	CAPEX cost estimate	£2,340.00	
	WSP UK Ltd	Whisky logistics study	£3,992.49	£3,992.49
	CITTI Awards	HI-Bike and SATE	£1,185.00	£1,185.00
	Matthew Kenrick	Report	45,873.00	£45,873.00
	Tom Davy	Oban BPF	£210.00	£210.00
	Arup	Oban & Inverness Integration	£11,724.33	£27,660.62
	Arup	Oban & Inverness Integration	£15,936.29	
	Property and Land Surveys Ltd	Oban Integration	£1,490.00	£1,490.00
	Stantec	HITRANS RTS Refresh	£20,800.00	£26,000.00
	Stantec	HITRANS RTS Refresh	£5,200.00	
	Orkney Ferries	Orkney Ferries Funding towards Electric Orkney	£12,500.00	£12,500.00
	Better Points	GO-HI App	£9,035.00	£47,435.00
	Better Points	12-month BetterPoints challenge licence	£38,400.00	
	Reference Economic Consultants	Consultation for the Islands Connectivity Plan	£2,600.00	£6,500.00
	Reference Economic Consultants	Ferry Service Development	£3,900.00	
	Transport Times Events	Scottish Transport Awards	£4,000.00	£4,000.00
	Scotland Excel	Associate membership 24-25	£550.00	£550.00
	Associate membership 24-25	(SCSP Funded Project)	£25,253.00	£25,253.00
	David Holden	Wick John O'Groats Airport Development Study	£8,492.85	£19,836.27
	David Holden	Highland Air Access	£2,500.00	
	David Holden	Highland Air Access	£757.12	
	David Holden	Wick Study	£8,086.25	
	Jacobs	CNES Health and transport Action Plan	£10,000.00	£10,000.00
	Austin Smith Lord	Inverness Feasibility study project.	£3,178.00	£21,625.00
	Austin Smith Lord	Inverness Feasibility study project.	£8,050.00	
	Austin Lord-Smith	Inverness Feasibility study	£10,397.00	
	Edinburgh City Council	Thistle assistance	£2,686.72	£2,686.72
	EllenP Design	Health and Transport review	£90.00	£90.00
	Total			£2,776.72

5) Payments in Excess of £25,000				
Payee	Commodity / Service Description	Payment Date	Amount	
Egis	SATE WP5 Phase 4b Monthly Invoice - August 2024	03/09/2024	£43,500.00	
Egis	SATE WP5 Phase 4b Monthly Invoice - July 2024	03/09/2024	£42,000.00	
Better Points	12-month BetterPoints challenge licence	02/10/2024	£38,400.00	
We are Cycling UK	"People & Place programme Connecting Communities - Q2 July to September 2024"	07/10/2024	£56,250.00	
Egis	SATE WP5 Phase 4b Monthly Invoice - October 2024	19/11/2024	£43,500.00	
Living Streets (The Pedestrians Association)	People & Place programme and Travel - Tracker pt1	19/11/2024	£72,234.00	
We are Cycling UK	"People & Place programme Connecting Communities - Q3 October to December 2024"	13/01/2025	£56,250.00	
Orkney Island Council	"People & Place programme - Purchase and installation of bike shelters"	10/03/2025	£27,192.60	
The Highland Council	"People & Place programme - Contributions towards cycle storage at Mackintosh Road"	10/03/2025	£75,000.00	
Egis	SATE WP5 Phase 4b Monthly Invoice - January 2025	10/03/2025	£43,500.00	
Stronsay Development Trust	"People & Place programme - bike lockers, shelters, installation and ebike chargers"	10/03/2025	£31,316.97	
Egis	SATE WP5 Phase 4b Monthly Invoice - February 2025	13/03/2025	£43,500.00	
Egis	SATE WP5 Phase 4b Monthly Invoice - March 2025	13/03/2025	£43,500.00	
We are Cycling UK	"People & Place programme Connecting Communities - Q4 January to March 2025"	18/03/2025	£56,250.00	
Orkney Island Council	People & Place programme - Reimbursement costs to cover Kir	18/03/2025	£43,608.00	
Vix	People & Place programme - RTP1 displays	31/03/2025	£50,393.00	
Total				£766,394.57

6) Members or employees who received remuneration in excess of £150,000				
	Nil return.			



Highlands and Islands Transport Partnership

The Highlands and Islands
Transport Partnership (HITRANS)

Inverness Town House
Inverness, IV1 1JJ

Phone - 01463 719002
Email - info@hitrans.org.uk