



Minute of Meeting held in the Chamber,
The Town House, Inverness and virtually
through MS Teams on Friday 24 April
2026 at 9.30am

PRESENT

Uisdean Robertson, Comhairle nan Eilean Siar (Chair)
Amber Dunbar, Moray Council (Vice-Chair)
Kristopher Leask, Orkney Islands Council
Ken Gowans, The Highland Council
John Armour, Argyll and Bute Council
Naomi Bremner, Non-Councillor Member
Shona Maclellan, Non-Councillor Member
Robert Andrew, Non-Councillor Member

APOLOGIES

Malcolm Macleod, The Highland Council
Michael Green, The Highland Council

IN ATTENDANCE

Ranald Robertson, Partnership Director
Frank Roach, Partnership Manager
Neil MacRae, Senior Partnership Manager
Jennifer Johnston, The Highland Council
Julie Cromarty, The Highland Council
Gareth Waterson, Orkney Islands Council
Laura Cromarty, Orkney Islands Council
Colm Fraser, Comhairle nan Eilean Siar
Linda Cunningham, Comhairle nan Eilean Siar
Timothy Mackay, Moray Council
Nicholas Sobey, HIE
Vikki Trelfer, HITRANS
Gemma Robinson, HITRANS
John Ross, HITRANS
Dawn Gillies, HITRANS
Emily Bowie, HITRANS
Shona Hadwen, Partnership Secretary
Claire Harper, HITRANS
Adam Haahr, Audit Scotland
Katy Beasley

Declaration of
Interests

Mr Robert Andrew declared that he had retired as Stagecoach Scotland Regional Director
in June 2020 and acted as an advisor to Scottish Citylink.

MINUTES

Minute of Meeting of 1
6 February 2026

The Minute of Meeting of 6 February 2026 was **approved**.

Matters Arising	2	Mr Neil Macrae, Senior Partnership Manager, provided an update on the Inverness Station Quarter Masterplan Bus and Rail Interchange consultation.
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FINANCE

Revenue Budget Monitoring Report – 1 April 2025 to 28 February 2026	3	With reference to item 3 of the Minute of Meeting of 6 February 2026, Ms Jennifer Johnston, Partnership Treasurer, submitted a Report setting out the revenue monitoring position for the period 1 April 2025 to 28 February 2026 and the projected year end position. The Report stated that the annual budget was as approved at the Board Meeting held on 7 February 2025. The budget also included income from Highland Council, as part of the Inverness City Active Travel Network Programme, and income contributions for research and strategy development work.
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The summary statement appended to the Report showed the financial position to 28 February 2026. The variance to budget to date is a £0.675m overspend, which was mostly due to project ATIF for which there was no income shown in the budget table, however grant income was confirmed in December 2025 following confirmation of a successful bid by HITRANS to Transport Scotland ATIF Tier 2 meaning that all expenditure subsequently incurred for these awards would be received and accounted for in the final accounts. Claims to date exceed £676,000 and with accruals a total of £1,038,619 will be received for this in 2025/26.

It was agreed to approve the Report and schedule detailing the revenue monitoring position for the period to 28 February 2026.

HITRANS Draft External Audit Plan	4	With reference to item 4 of the Minute of Meeting of 25 April 2025, Adam Haar, Audit Scotland presented a Report detailing the draft Annual HITRANS External Audit Plan for 2025/26. The Report provided an overview of the planned scope and timing of the 2025/26 audit of the HITRANS annual accounts and outlined the audit work planned to meet the audit requirements set out in auditing standards and the Code of Audit Practice, including supplementary guidance.
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It was agreed to note the Report.

HITRANS Business Plan for 2026-27	5	Mr Randal Robertson, Partnership Director, submitted a Report which sought approval from the Partnership for the HITRANS Business Plan for 2026/27. The Report stated that the Business Plan set out how it was intended to support delivery of our Strategy during 2026/27 working with constituent Councils and Stakeholders with a view to improving transport services across the Highlands and Islands. The Report further stated that as with previous Business Plans the programme of work set out included a two-year Research and Strategy Development Programme in line with the recommendation of the Partnership Board discussion at the February 2026 meeting. The Plan also includes an updated Medium Term Financial Plan.
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It was agreed to approve the Business Plan for the Financial Year 2026/27.

RESEARCH AND STRATEGY DELIVERY

Research/Strategy Development Programme for 2025/26	6	With reference to item 6 of the Minute of Meeting of 6 February 2026, Mr Randal Robertson, Partnership Director, submitted a Report which provided the Partnership Board with an update on progress on delivering the Research and Strategy Development programme and sought 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 25 April 2025.
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It was agreed to note the amendments to the Research and Strategy Development Programme 2025/26 as detailed in the Appendix to the Report.

Rail Roundup	7	With reference to item 12 of the Minute of Meeting of 6 February 2026, Mr Frank Roach, Partnership Manager, submitted a Report to provide an update on the following rail matters across the area: • Route and Branch – Consultants Systra continue to work on the HITRANS Rail Development Strategy. • Jacobite • Progress on Safety Upgrades • Mallaig 125 • Rolling Stock Replacement • Station access (Helmsdale, Ardgay and Lairg) • Rail Freight – West Fraser, Power to Rail • Line closure – Far North line between Dingwall and Wick (From 2-29 June 2026 for engineering works) During discussion it was noted that unacceptable temperature levels on some trains from Oban to Glasgow were an ongoing issue and a recent example of a situation experienced by an elderly person requiring hospital treatment a direct result of this was shared with members. All agreed that this was unacceptable. It was agreed that the Chairwrite to the new Transport Secretary following the May election highlighting the unacceptable temperature condition on some of the trains in the region and to underline the need to replace this unfit rolling stock. It was agreed to note the Report.
Active Travel Update	8	With reference to item 8 of the Minute of Meeting of 6 February 2026, Ms Vikki Trelfer, Active Travel Team Leader, submitted a Report which provided an update on Active Travel projects in which HITRANS and Partner Local Authorities were involved, and on delivery of the People and Place Programme funded by Transport Scotland. An update was provided on Capital Projects through the Active Travel Infrastructure Fund (ATIF) including: • lochdar Community Path • Skye Cycle Way • Oban Interchange • Lochbroom Links Emily Bowie, HITRANS provided an update on the People and Place Programme, which included highlights of the 25/26 Programme including: • Annual Networking and Knowledge Sharing Event held in Orkney • Details of allocation of £92,000 of grant funding across 14 workplaces • Details of new cycling park facilities supported by £257,000 in grant funding A summary of the People & Place Programme 2026/27 was also provided, although confirmation of the funding award for this had not yet been finalised. It was agreed to note the Report and direct any questions to the Active Travel Team Leader.

Access to Employment 9

Mr Ranald Robertson, Partnership Director, submitted a Report which provided Members with information regarding a new stream of funding being directed to Regional Transport Partnerships (RTPs) from the Scottish Government. The Report stated that subject to final approvals, a total of £9.8m RDEL was 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 outlined the agreed national allocation model and summarised the proposed HITRANS delivery approach.

It was agreed 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 to the Report: and**
- (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.**

Sustainable Aviation Projects 10

With reference to item 11 of the Minute of Meeting of 6 February 2026, Dawn Gillies, Sustainable Aviation Development Manager and Jayne Gourlay, Aviation Development Manager/SATE Project Coordinator submitted a Report which provided an update on Sustainable Aviation projects in which HITRANS were involved and sought Members approval to publish HITRANS' Regional Sustainable Aviation Strategy.

Members discussed the use of the word "remote" throughout the Strategy document and suggested amendments be made to reflect this, prior to approval of the final Strategy. It was agreed that a revised version of the Strategy would be circulated to all members for their approval prior to the Strategy being published.

It was agreed to:

- (1) endorse publication of the HITRANS Regional Sustainable Aviation Strategy subject to amendments discussed; and**
- (2) support continued engagement in the UKRI Future of Flight programme as a platform for advancing sustainable aviation solutions for the Highlands and Islands.**

National Transport Strategy – Fifth Delivery Plan 11

With reference to item 6 of the Minute of Meeting of 25 April 2025 Mr Ranald Robertson, Partnership Director, submitted a Report which provided 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 identified 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.

The Report highlighted that a copy of the National Transport Strategy Fifth Delivery Plan (published March 2026) was available to download on the Transport Scotland website.

It was agreed to note:

- (1) the Report;**
- (2) the publication of the Scottish Government's Fifth National Transport Strategy Delivery Plan; and**
- (3) the alignment between Delivery Plan priorities and the work programme of HITRANS and its partners.**

Health and Transport
Action Plan 12

With reference to item 12 of the Minute of Meeting of 7 November 2025, Mr Neil Macrae, Senior Partnership Manager submitted a Report providing 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 were leading or supporting.

Appendix A to the Report detailed a copy of the draft specification for the proposed HTAP Coordinator position that HITRANS would seek to recruit subject to Members approval.

It was proposed that HITRANS write to all Health Boards, Local Authorities and Regional Transport Partnerships that cover the HITRANS and Shetland Islands seeking their support for a proposed approach to governance arrangements, as detailed in Appendix B, and to ask them to commit to supporting the work of the HTAP.

In discussion it was noted that the wording in the General Responsibilities of the new HTAP Coordinator be revised to read more achievable goals as in its current form, this may deter applicants from applying for the role.

It was agreed to:

- (1) note the Report;**
- (2) approve the recruitment of a Programme Manager based on the specification for the post outlined in Appendix A, with amendments to general responsibilities as discussed; and**
- (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.**

Regional Bus Fare Cap
Pilot 13

With reference to item 10 of the Minute of Meeting of 6 February 2026, Mr Ranald Robertson, Partnership Director submitted a Report providing an update on the implementation of the Regional £2 Bus Fare Cap Pilot across the Highlands and Islands. The Report provided details of when each phase of the Pilot would be rolled out, the alignment with original objectives, and the strategic context.

The next steps for the pilot would be to continue coordinated communications to maximise public awareness, and monitor patronage, revenue and behavioural impacts.

It was agreed to:

- (1) note the background and objectives of the pilot as previously reported in February 2025;**
- (2) note the phased roll out of the pilot; and**
- (3) support continued collaborative delivery and evaluation of this nationally significant pilot.**

Fort William Integrated Transport Plan 14 With reference to item 17 of the Minute of Meeting of 7 November 2025, Mr Neil Macrae, Partnership Manager submitted a Report providing an update on progress to develop an Integrated Transport Plan for Fort William in accordance with Recommendation 32 of the second Strategic Transport Projects Review (STPR2) and other parallel work within Fort William which HITRANS were leading or supporting on. The Report stated that extensive traffic data collection had been undertaken in August and November to support the development of an updated transport model that was used in the appraisal of different options, and there had been engagement with a wide range of key stakeholders and businesses.

The Report further stated that in addition to one-to-one meetings with stakeholders, over 200 survey responses were submitted through the online portal and were currently being reviewed. A consultation report summarising the feedback would be provided at the next HITRANS partnership meeting alongside an update on the option design and appraisal work.

It was agreed to note the Report.

HI-Transformers Renewable Energy Transport Opportunities 15 With reference to item 13 of the Minute of Meeting of 6 February 2026, Mr Frank Roach, Partnership Manager submitted a Report providing an update on the project to study the transport impacts arising from the increased activity in the renewables sector across the Highlands and Islands, and to identify interventions that may be necessary. The Report stated that HITRANS would look for a consultant to study the impacts of consented, planned and proposed renewable energy projects on the transport network in the Highlands and Islands, and to make recommendations on solutions to enable Net Zero targets to be fulfilled, and to leave a legacy for future generations.

The Report outlined the study objectives and indicated that the study would be tendered in the coming weeks. The study would be overseen by a steering group comprising Transport Scotland, HITRANS, HIE, and HRA. A wider stakeholder group would be formed of all funders plus HITRANS' local authority partners, and it was proposed that the renewables industry would be represented by Scottish Renewables and SSEN.

It was agreed to note the Report and approve the £25k funding.

Electric Vehicle Infrastructure Shared Service 16 With reference to item 15 of the Minute of Meeting of 6 February 2026, Ms Gemma Robinson, EVIF Project Manager providing an update on regional activity of a project management shared service under the Electric Vehicle Infrastructure Fund (EVIF). The shared service covered Comhairle nan Eilean Siar, Orkney Islands Council, Shetland Islands Council and Argyll and Bute Council. The Report provided an overview of the service and an update on replacement and management. The strategy aims had been approved by all four Council Service Committees and work was now being done on Business Case outputs for Transport Scotland to review and approve.

The Report stated that the Scottish Government had confirmed a £17.8 million funding package for 2026/27 to boost electric vehicle (EV) update and infrastructure.

It was agreed to note the Report.

Kirkwall Autolink Project Update 17 With reference to item 13 of the Minute of Meeting of 7 November 2025, Ms Jayne Gourlay, SATE Coordinator and Mr Randal Roberston, Partnership Director submitted a joint Report providing an update on progress with the Kirkwall Autolink project, including outcomes from the February 2026 demonstrator, and setting out this work within the wider strategic context for autonomous vehicle deployment in rural islands areas.

The Report highlighted the following next steps:

- Completion of feasibility study outputs and business case.
- Engagement with UK Government and industry partners on future deployment opportunities.
- Identification of potential funding routes for pilot deployment.
- Continued alignment with national AV policy and regulatory development.

It was agreed to note the Report.

CONSULTATION

Air Departure Tax Consultation Response	18	With reference to item 16 of the Minute of Meeting of 6 February 2026, Mr Neil Macrae, Partnership Manager, submitted a Report seeking homologation of HITRANS response to the Scottish Government’s consultation on Air Departure Tax (ADT). The consultation response was provided at Appendix A to the Report and had been submitted with an accompanying email summarising a number of key priorities for local and Regional Partners. The Report further stated that HITRANS had been invited to join an Advisory Group that the Scottish Government had established to support the implementation of ADT and to inform future policy and legislation for the Tax. It was agreed to: (1) note the Report; and (2) homologate HITRANS response to the Delivering Scotland’s Air Departure Tax consultation.
Scottish Government Infrastructure Strategy Consultation Response	19	Mr Ranald Robertson, Partnership Director submitted a Report providing details of the Scottish Government consultation on the draft Infrastructure Strategy 2027-2037 and seeking approval of the proposed HITRANS response provided at Appendix A to the Report. The draft response had been developed to: • Reflect HITRANS Regional Transport Strategy priorities • Align, where appropriate, with positions taken by other RTPs • Emphasise issues specific to the Highlands and Islands It was agreed to: (1) note the Scottish Government consultation on the Infrastructure Strategy 2027-2037; (2) consider the key issues for the Highlands and Islands as outlined in the Report; (3) circulate the response for comment from members prior to submission; and (4) approve the draft HITRANS response attached as Appendix A to the Report, subject to any comments received from members.