

Report to Partnership Meeting 11 September 2026

PARTNERSHIP

Public Service Reform – Transport Governance

Purpose of Report

To update Members on emerging Scottish Government work relating to Public Service Reform and to consider the opportunities this may present for strengthening regional transport governance and improving the delivery of transport services across Scotland.

Background

The Scottish Government has identified Public Service Reform as one of its principal priorities for the current Parliamentary term. While detailed proposals continue to emerge, there is already a clear emphasis on delivering better outcomes through prevention, collaboration, place-based delivery, improved productivity and ensuring that public services are delivered at the most appropriate level.

This agenda recognises that many public services are currently delivered through complex governance arrangements that can lead to duplication, fragmented responsibilities and inconsistent outcomes. The Public Service Reform programme therefore presents an opportunity to review how services are organised and delivered, with the aim of improving outcomes while making better use of public resources.

Transport is particularly well placed to contribute to this agenda. Many transport services naturally operate across local authority boundaries and require close collaboration between national agencies, Regional Transport Partnerships (RTPs), local authorities, transport operators and other public bodies.

Unlike many service areas, Scotland already possesses an established statutory regional transport tier through the Regional Transport Partnerships established by the Transport (Scotland) Act 2005. As a result, transport governance offers an opportunity to build upon existing institutions and partnerships rather than creating new delivery structures.

National Transport Strategy

The opportunity presented by Public Service Reform builds upon work previously undertaken as part of the National Transport Strategy Review.

The National Transport Strategy Transport Governance Working Group, supported by independent consultants Jacobs, concluded that:

- the case for change had been established;
- existing governance arrangements were becoming increasingly unsustainable;
- future transport governance arrangements should be based upon a strengthened regional model; and
- further work should be undertaken to develop an implementable framework.

The Working Group identified a number of challenges including fragmented responsibilities, increasing financial pressures, skills shortages, cross-boundary transport issues and the need for stronger integration between transport, planning and economic development.

While aspects of transport delivery have evolved since publication of the report, many of these observations remain highly relevant. The current Public Service Reform agenda therefore provides an opportunity to revisit these recommendations and consider how regional transport governance can support wider Scottish Government objectives.

Opportunities for Regional Transport Partnerships

The Public Service Reform agenda presents an opportunity to consider whether additional transport responsibilities could be delivered more effectively at a regional level through Regional Transport Partnerships.

This should not be viewed simply as a transfer of responsibilities from national government. Rather, it provides an opportunity to ensure that transport functions are delivered at the most appropriate level, reflecting the principle of subsidiarity whilst maintaining strong national leadership where appropriate.

Potential opportunities include:

- Regional programme management for Active Travel investment replacing the ATIF system that channels funds through Transport Scotland with RTP agreeing regional priorities with Transport Scotland for delivery by partner Councils.
- Regional Rural Mobility and Community Transport programmes to be delivered by the relevant partner local transport authority.
- Regional public transport infrastructure planning and integration.
- Expanded shared services.
- Regional transport data and information systems.
- Enhanced coordination of transport investment.
- Greater involvement in ferry governance and regional connectivity planning.
- Enhanced involvement in Highlands and Islands aviation policy, Public Service Obligation development and regional air connectivity.
- Closer integration between regional transport planning and Regional Economic Partnerships.

Many of these opportunities could be delivered through partnership arrangements without requiring significant legislative change.

Existing Examples of Regional Delivery

Regional Transport Partnerships already demonstrate the benefits of collaborative regional delivery across a range of transport programmes.

Within the HITRANS area these include:

- Public Transport Information Shared Service - HITRANS provides a regional public transport information shared service supporting partner councils through coordinated management of passenger information systems, demonstrating the benefits of shared expertise and economies of scale.

- Electric Vehicle Infrastructure Fund (EVIF) - HITRANS is delivering the Electric Vehicle Infrastructure Fund programme on behalf of Argyll and Bute Council, Comhairle nan Eilean Siar, Orkney Islands Council and Shetland Islands Council.

This demonstrates how regional programme management can support local delivery while reducing duplication and providing specialist expertise.

Active Travel

HITRANS has extensive experience supporting the development and delivery of regional active travel initiatives and believes there may be opportunities to further strengthen the regional role in programme management and investment coordination while continuing to support local authority delivery.

Under such an approach, Scottish Government would retain responsibility for national policy and investment priorities, while RTPs could act as regional delivery partners working alongside constituent local authorities.

Rural Mobility

The development of regional rural mobility programmes offers a further opportunity to simplify delivery arrangements.

Rather than multiple short-term funding programmes administered nationally, consideration could be given to allocating funding at a regional level, enabling RTPs to work alongside local authorities, community transport providers and operators to develop integrated solutions that reflect local circumstances whilst achieving wider regional outcomes.

Roads Collaboration

Public Service Reform also creates opportunities to strengthen collaboration between neighbouring Regional Transport Partnerships.

HITRANS have previously supported work on a Northern Roads Collaboration and see potential for this to evolve into a shared approach across the HITRANS and Nestrans geographies. This could also include Shetland. The purpose would be to support opportunities for greater collaboration on roads functions and shared services. Such initiatives demonstrate how regional partnerships may help improve resilience, share specialist expertise and deliver efficiencies whilst continuing to support local authority responsibilities.

Looking Ahead

As Public Service Reform develops, there will be opportunities for HITRANS to engage positively with Scottish Government, Transport Scotland, COSLA and partner organisations regarding the future role of Regional Transport Partnerships.

Future discussions may consider opportunities to strengthen regional delivery across a range of transport functions, improve collaboration between national, regional and local government and ensure that governance arrangements continue to support the needs of Scotland's communities and economy.

HITRANS is well placed to contribute to these discussions, drawing upon over twenty years of experience delivering transport initiatives across local authority boundaries and working

collaboratively with local authorities, Government and a wide range of public and private sector partners.

Recommendations

Members are invited to:

1. Note the report.
2. Note the opportunities that the Scottish Government's Public Service Reform agenda may present to strengthen regional transport governance.
3. Support continued engagement with Scottish Government, Transport Scotland, COSLA, Regional Transport Partnerships and local authority partners regarding the future role of Regional Transport Partnerships within Public Service Reform.
4. Agree that HITRANS should continue to identify opportunities for enhanced regional collaboration and shared service delivery which improve transport outcomes while supporting wider public service reform objectives.

Risk Register

RTS Delivery

Impact – Positive

Comment: Strengthening regional transport governance has the potential to improve delivery of the Regional Transport Strategy through enhanced collaboration, streamlined governance and improved programme management.

Policy

Impact – Positive

Comment: Supports Scottish Government priorities relating to Public Service Reform, the National Transport Strategy and regional economic development.

Financial

Impact – Positive

Comment: Greater regional collaboration and shared delivery models have the potential to improve efficiency, reduce duplication and secure better value from public investment.

Equality

Impact – Positive

Comment: More integrated regional transport delivery has the potential to improve accessibility, connectivity and inclusion, particularly for rural and island communities.

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Date: 14th July 2026