

Report to Partnership Meeting 11 September 2026

PARTNERSHIP

Programme for Government

PURPOSE OF REPORT

The purpose of this report is to provide members with an initial overview of the Scottish Government's Programme for Government (PfG) 2026–27, published 1 September 2026 and to outline the immediate implications, opportunities and alignment points for the Partnership's current work programme. The report highlights areas of direct relevance to our strategic objectives, delivery commitments and statutory responsibilities, and identifies where further analysis or engagement will be required as detailed policy measures are released. The PfG document is available at this [link](#).

BACKGROUND

The Programme for Government sets out the Scottish Government's legislative intentions, priority reforms and investment commitments for the year ahead. As an annual statement of governmental direction, it provides the policy context within which regional transport partnerships, local authorities, public bodies and delivery agencies are expected to plan, coordinate and report their activity.

This year's Programme emphasises a continued focus on public service reform, inclusive economic growth, net-zero transition, and community wellbeing, alongside targeted measures intended to support households and strengthen local delivery capacity. While the detailed implications for regional transport, digital inclusion, economic development and place-based programmes will emerge over the coming weeks, the publication provides an important framing for our forward planning, risk management and stakeholder engagement.

STRATEGIC ALIGNMENT

Initial analysis indicates that several PfG commitments intersect with the Partnership's current priorities, including transport decarbonisation, behaviour-change initiatives, accessibility, economic participation and community resilience. These areas present opportunities to strengthen our contribution to national outcomes and ensure our programmes remain aligned with emerging policy direction.

Public Governance & Regional Reform

- Intensive dialogue across local government and parliamentary partners to shape regional governance models and explore regional resource pooling over the rest of 2026.
- A structural review of all remaining transport bodies to identify opportunities for mergers and streamlining.
- The re-integration of Transport Scotland directly back into the Scottish Government.
- Reviewing the functions of the National Smart Ticketing Advisory Board for potential transfer to the Scottish Government or other public bodies and consulting on taking Mobility and Access Committee into the Scottish Government.
- Simplifying the NHS by replacing the current 14 territorial Health Boards with two Strategic Health Boards and build on planner reforms to further reduce the number of Special Health Boards.

Ferry Networks & Island Connectivity

- Exploring the establishment of a single ferries body to manage the Clyde and Western Isles routes.
- Sustained capital investment in vessel replacements and port upgrades supporting the Clyde & Hebrides (CHFS) and Northern Isles (NIFS) services under the Islands Connectivity Plan.
- Rollout of the £10 million Islands Resilience Fund and initiation of a feasibility study for a new Shetland-to-mainland subsea cable to strengthen infrastructure resilience.

Bus Services & Fares Expansion

- Expansion of the £2 bus fare cap, scaling the initial Highlands and Islands pilot scheme toward a comprehensive national rollout.
- Introduction of Better Buses legislation designed to improve regional bus service delivery, local connectivity, and access to public services.

Strategic Road Infrastructure

- Progressing statutory dualling commitments for the A9 and A96, including the Pitlochry–Killiecrankie section, Inshes-to-Smithton link advanced works, and the Nairn bypass.
- Advancing medium- and long-term infrastructure interventions on critical rural road corridors, including the A83 Rest and Be Thankful.

Industrial Strategy & Public Procurement

- Ferguson Marine & Clyde Shipbuilding: Seeks to protect commercial shipbuilding and skilled jobs in Scotland by proposing direct awards of government vessel contracts including small replacement ferries and marine research vessels subject to legal, commercial, and subsidy control checks.
- Procurement Bill Consultation: Launches a consultation on new procurement legislation aimed at driving innovation in health and social care, embedding community wealth building, and maximising local economic impact.
- Green Freeports & Investment Zones: Focuses on joint delivery with regional partners to leverage tax incentives, attract private investment, and execute investment plans.

Rural & Island Communities

- Rural Renewal Bill: Begins work on primary legislation intended to stimulate targeted economic growth across rural economies.
- National Islands Plan: Prioritizes population retention, sustainable island growth, and embedding islander representation within central government decision-making.
- Islands Resilience Fund: Engages island communities to deploy the dedicated £10 million fund to build local infrastructure and service resilience.

Access to Employment

- Continued multiyear funding for *No One Left Behind* and a commitment to the key barriers to work identified through Employability Support review being addressed within the next Scottish Budget.
- Support for Regional Economic Partnerships to deliver regional interventions that respond to employers' skills needs and support people in training and job opportunities.

Active & Sustainable Travel Investment

- Funding Escalation: PfG scales total investment in Sustainable and Active Travel from £115 million in 2021–22 to over £226 million in 2026–27.

Policy and Legislation Proposals

Scottish Prevention Investment Framework

Building on Scotland's preventative budgeting work, the development of a Scottish Prevention Investment Framework will drive a decisive shift toward early intervention across public services. This framework will establish a consistent approach to identifying, assessing, and prioritizing investment in prevention and early intervention. By directing resources toward proactive measures, it aims to improve long-term outcomes for individuals while reducing future demand on public services. This offers direct strategic alignment with wider regional transport goals and targeted access-to-employment initiatives, such as Transport to Employment (T2E).

Public Service Renewal (Scotland) Bill

The Scottish Government intends to introduce the Public Service Renewal (Scotland) Bill to provide statutory backing, where required, for reforming the public service delivery landscape in alignment with the Public Service Reform Strategy. The Bill aims to improve the long-term fiscal sustainability of public service delivery through structural reform, including the potential merging or abolition of public bodies and the transfer of functions between core government and public agencies.

RISK REGISTER

RTS Delivery

Impact - Positive

Comment – The publication of the Programme for Government provides clearer renewed national direction for transport decarbonisation, active travel, accessibility and place-based investment. This strengthens alignment between the Regional Transport Strategy.

Policy

Impact – Positive

Comment – The PfG sets out refreshed policy commitments across net-zero, public service reform, community wellbeing and inclusive economic growth. These reinforce the strategic relevance of regional transport as an enabler of wider outcomes.

Financial

Impact – Unknown

Budget line and value – The PfG signals continued investment in transport decarbonisation, active travel, accessibility and place-based regeneration. A detailed financial assessment will be presented once budget lines are published.

Equality

Impact – Positive

Comment – The PfG emphasises reducing inequalities, improving access to services and supporting priority groups. This aligns strongly with the RTP's statutory equality duties and the RTS focus on inclusive mobility. The commitments may enable strengthened partnership work on transport barriers affecting low-income households, disabled people and rural communities

RECOMMENDATIONS

Members are asked to:

1. Note the publication of the Programme for Government and the initial assessment set out in this report.
2. Agree that officers undertake a full mapping exercise to identify alignment between PfG commitments and the Regional Transport Strategy and statutory duties.
3. Request that a detailed analysis be circulated following the meeting once policy leads have been engaged and implications for transport delivery are clearer.
4. Agree that officials monitor the introduction of the Public Service Renewal (Scotland) Bill and present a dedicated paper to a future Partnership meeting outlining any specific governance, operational, or statutory implications for Regional Transport Partnerships once the draft legislation is formally published.
5. Endorse the approach that any required adjustments to delivery plans, risk registers or reporting arrangements be proposed at that future meeting.
6. Agree that the Partnership continues proactive engagement with Scottish Government officials and regional partners as PfG measures are developed.

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