HI TRANS
THE HIGHLANDS AND ISLANDS TRANSPORT PARTNERSHIP

Minute of Meeting held in the Council Chamber, Comhairle nan Eilean Siar, Sandwick Road, Stornoway and virtually through MS Teams on Friday 11 September 2026 at 9.30am.

PRESENT	Uisdean Robertson, Comhairle nan Eilean Siar (Chair) Amber Dunbar, Moray Council (Vice-Chair) Mellissa Thomson, Orkney Islands Council Michael Green, The Highland Council John Armour, Argyll and Bute Council Naomi Bremner, Non-Councillor Member Shona Maclennan, Non-Councillor Member Robert Andrew, Non-Councillor Member
APOLOGIES	Mr Ken Gowans, The Highland Council
IN ATTENDANCE	Ranald Robertson, Partnership Director Frank Roach, Partnership Manager Neil MacRae, Senior Partnership Manager Coralyn Pieraccini, Partnership Treasurer Laura Cromarty, Orkney Islands Council Colm Fraser, Comhairle nan Eilean Siar Linda Cunningham, Comhairle nan Eilean Siar Timothy Mackay, Moray Council Fergus Murray, Argyll and Bute Council Nicholas Sobey, HIE Vikki Trelfer, HITRANS Gemma Robinson, HITRANS Dawn Gillies, HITRANS Emily Bowie, HITRANS Derek Mackay, Partnership Secretary Adam Haahr, Audit Scotland Katy Beasley, HITRANS Meadhbh Maguire, The Highland Council Christine Darby-Munro, HITRANS

The Chair, on behalf of the Partnership Board welcomed Mellissa Thomson, Orkney Islands Council, to her first meeting of the Board.

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 24 April 2026 — 1

The Minute of Meeting of 24 April 2026 was **approved.**

Matters Arising

2 Neil Macrae, Senior Partnership Manager, provided a verbal update on Air Departure Tax following a recent meeting. The meeting presentation on international comparators would be circulated to Board Members.

FINANCE

Annual Accounts HITRANS Internal Audit Annual Report 2025-26

3 (a) Mr Ranald Robertson, Partnership Director, submitted a Report presenting the HITRANS Internal Audit Annual Report 2025/26. The full Annual Report was reproduced at Appendix A to the Report.

The Report stated that the Annual Report records the work undertaken by Internal Audit during 2025/26, including review of the adequacy and effectiveness of systems of internal control, testing of a sample of expenditure transactions and an overview of budgeted income. It also considers HITRANS governance and risk-management arrangements and records the assurance provided by the Partnership Director as part of the Annual Accounts process.

The Report indicated that Internal Audit concluded that, based on the work undertaken during the year, HITRANS' key systems operated in a sound manner and that there had been no fundamental breakdown in control resulting in material discrepancy. The formal audit opinion was that reasonable assurance can be placed upon the adequacy and effectiveness of HITRANS' framework of governance, risk management and control for the year to 31 March 2026. This opinion provides relevant assurance in support of the Partnership's Annual Governance Statement and the 2025/26 Annual Accounts.

It was agreed to:

(1) note that the HITRANS Internal Audit Annual Report 2025/26 was finalised and shared with HITRANS on 25 May 2026 and is being presented to the first formal Partnership Board meeting following its receipt;

(2) note the Internal Audit opinion that reasonable assurance can be placed upon the adequacy and effectiveness of HITRANS' framework of governance, risk management and control for the year to 31 March 2026; and

(3) note the HITRANS Internal Audit Annual Report 2025/26 reproduced in full at Appendix A.

HITRANS Annual Audit Report 2025-26

3 (b) Mr Ranald Robertson, Partnership Director, submitted the HITRANS Internal Audit Annual Report 2025/26. The Report provided an annual Internal Audit opinion for the period 1st April 2025 to 31st March 2026. The Report met the requirements of the Global Internal Audit GIAS (the GIAS) which came into effect from 1st January 2025 and applied to all internal audit service providers. CIPFA had subsequently issued "The Application Note: Global Internal Audit GIAS in the UK Public Sector" which changed this date to 1st April 2025. Therefore, this was the first annual report produced under the GIAS.

It was agreed to note the Internal Audit Annual Report 2025/26.

HITRANS Annual Audited Accounts 2025-26

3 (c) **It was agreed to defer consideration of this item to a special meeting of the Partnership Board when the completed annual audited accounts 2025-26 would be available, and to authorise the Chair and Partnership Director to finalise the meeting date, in consultation with the Finance Team.**

Revenue Budget Monitoring Report – 1 April 2026 to 31 August 2026

4 With reference to item 3 of the Minute of Meeting of 24 April 2026, Ms Jennifer Johnston, Partnership Treasurer, submitted a Report setting out the revenue position for the period 31 July 2026 and the projected year end position.

It was agreed to approve the Report and the attached schedule showing the revenue monitoring position for the period to 31 July 2026.

RESEARCH AND STRATEGY DELIVERY

Research/Strategy Development Programme for 2026/27

5 With reference to item 6 of the Minute of Meeting of 24 April 2026, Mr Ranald 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 2026/27 Business Plan at the Partnership meeting on 24 April 2026.

It was agreed to note the amendments to the Research and Strategy Development Programme 2026/27 as detailed in the Appendix to the Report.

Health and Transport Action Plan

6 With reference to item 12 of the Minute of Meeting of 24 April 2026, Mr Neil Macrae, Senior Partnership Manager submitted a Report providing an update on the highlands and Islands Health and Transport Action Plan (HTAP). The Report stated that HITRANS had appointed a Project Manager who would take up their post on 14 September 2026, and it was intended to convene the first meeting of the HTAP Steering Group in October.

The Report indicated that HITRANS were currently undertaking work to better understand current and future demand for staff and patient travel between Health Boards. This work would provide a better understanding of the full costs to the public purse in providing these essential services and inform the parallel work on the Highlands and Islands Air Connectivity and the implementation of sub national planning with the NHS.

The Report provided an update in relation to identifying options to improve accessibility for Persons with Reduced Mobility (PRM's) on a number of inter-island PSO's operated using the Britten Norman Islander aircraft.

It was agreed to:

(1) note the Report;

(2) agree that HITRANS continues to work with project partners Napier University and Aurrigo to explore funding opportunities to progress the prototype lifting device for the Britten Norman Islander to final design and manufacture;

(3) agree that HITRANS Chair writes to Cabinet Secretary inviting them to a demonstration of the prototype lifting device; and

(4) write to Liam Macarthur MSP to request that he issues an invitation to the Cabinet Secretary for Economy, Transport and Tourism to visit Orkney to discuss inter-island air services in the Orkney Islands.

Route and Branch – Regional Rail Strategy

7 With reference to item 13 of the Minute of Meeting of 7 November 2025, Mr Frank Roach, Partnership Manager submitted a Report to update member on the Rail Development Strategy. The Report provided an update under the following emerging themes, and it was indicated that the full Strategy was being finalised.

- The Vision
- Why Rail Matters in the HITRANS Region
- Market Performance and Key Trends
- Main Challenges Facing the Network
- Strategic Response and Recommendations
- Delivery Priorities
- The Study

It was agreed to:

(1) note the Report; and

(2) circulate Scotland Railway – A Railway for Everyone to Board Members.

Active Travel Update

8 With reference to item 8 of the Minute of Meeting of 24 April 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:

- Skye Cycle Way
- Lochbroom Links
- Oban Interchange

An update was provided on the People and Place Programme, highlighting the activity through Q1. The report noted that the 2026/27 Programme was now into Q2 of delivery, with a claim for £302k submitted to Transport Scotland at the end of Q1.

An update was also provided in relation to the Regional Active Travel Strategy. The Active Travel Team Leader indicated that a further round of consultation was planned on the revised draft Strategy in early autumn, with the intention to present the Strategy to the Board in November 2026.

It was agreed to:

(1) note the Report; and

(2) that officers would circulate details of the funding awards to groups for Active Travel Projects in 2026/27.

People and Place Programme 2025/26 Evaluation Report

9 With reference to item 8 of the Minute of Meeting of 24 April 2026, Ms Emily Bowie, People and Place Programme Project Manager, submitted a Report detailing the People and Place Programme 2025-26 Evaluation Report. The Report stated that, in the second year of the People and Place Programme funded by Transport Scotland, HITRANS supported 21 projects across five strategic themes. Projects included those delivered in communities by local delivery partners, a cycle parking programme and access to bikes funding which HITRANS delivered together with Local Authorities and other partners, and the Workplace Active Travel Grant scheme which supported 12 workplaces to install or improve facilities for staff. These interventions were delivered across the HITRANS region in Highland, Moray, Orkney, Western Isles and Argyll and Bute, with a particular emphasis on inclusivity and local capacity building.

It was agreed to note the Report.

Fort William Integrated Transport Plan Update

10 With reference to item 14 of the Minute of Meeting of 24 April 2026, Mr Neil Macrae, Senior Partnership Manager, submitted a Report which provided 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 and supporting on. The Report stated that the Fort William Integrated Transport Plan aimed to support a connected, inclusive, safe and resilient Fort William. It is seeking to address long-standing issues including the reliability and resilience of the trunk road network in the town.

The Report stated that HITRANS appointed a partnership between Aecom and Stantec to undertake the 18-month study in May 2025. The Report noted that the study was nearing the completion of the Detailed Options Appraisal stage. It was hoped that the outputs of this work would be shared at the next HITRANS Partnership meeting in November and at a number of local member and community forums in Fort William. The outputs of the Detailed Appraisal and subsequent engagement would inform the preparation of the final Integrated Transport Plan towards the end of this year.

During discussion concerns were raised regarding incidents of flooding on roads in Fort William. In relation to the Rest and be Thankful on the A83 concerns were raised regarding the proposed diversionary route while the long-term solution was being constructed and the potential economic impacts on the Argyll community.

It was agreed to:

(1) note the Report including Appendix A: Fort William Integrated Transport Plan Summary Engagement Report and Appendix B: Fort William Interchange Feasibility Report;

(2) make representations to Scottish Government on the need to alleviate road flooding risks in Fort William; and

(3) make representations to Transport Scotland and Scottish Government to request that options are explored for a two-way solution on the Old Military Road during construction of the long-term solution at the Rest and Be Thankful.

EV Infrastructure Shared Service Report

11 With reference to item 11 of the Minute of Meeting of 18 September 2025, Ms Gemma Robinson, EVIF Project Manager, submitted a Report which provided an update on regional activity of a project management shared service under the Electric Vehicle Infrastructure Fund (EVIF). The shared service covers Comhairle nan Eilean Siar, Orkney Islands Council, Shetland Islands Council and Argyll and Bute Council.

The Report provided an update on progress made through Phase one of the EVIF project. The Business Case for Phase two was attached to the Report at Appendix 2 and aimed to develop a commercially investible EV charging network that secures affordable clean energy. The Report indicated that the Business Case had been approved by Transport Scotland and following approval of the strategic aims, it was being presented to Comhairle nan Eilean Siar and Shetland Islands Council in September, with continued development already supported by Orkney and Argyll and Bute Councils.

The Report stated that the proposed Phase 2 programme seeks to build on the progress made through Phase 1 by expanding and strengthening the regional charging network, improving operational resilience and establishing the foundations for future commercial investment as market conditions develop.

The Report stated that HITRANS would continue to act as lead partner for the project in Phase Two and would work closely with project partners and other stakeholders to ensure the project was delivered in a way that accommodates wider investment in the network and ongoing development of EV charging and other related technologies.

It was agreed to note the Report.

Sustainable Aviation Update

12 With reference to item 10 of the Minute of Meeting of 24 April 2026, Ms Dawn Gillies, Sustainable Aviation Development Manager submitted a Report which provided an update on the sustainable aviation projects in which HITRANS was involved, including two new Zero Emission Flight (ZEF) Demonstrator awards secured over the summer, and to report on the publication of HITRANS' Regional Sustainable Aviation Strategy.

The Report provided an update on the following:

- Regional Sustainable Aviation Strategy – Highlands and Islands set out 10-year roadmap to become the UK's sustainable aviation leader.
- SATE Hydrogen Roadmap – Zero Emmission Flight Demonstrator Award
- Project SEAN (Scottish Electric Aviation Network) – Zero Emission Flight Demonstrator Award

It was agreed to:

(1) note the publication of the HITRANS Regional Sustainable Aviation Strategy and its 10-year roadmap for the region.

(2) welcome HITRANS' involvement in the two new Zero Emission Flight Demonstrator awards — the SATE Hydrogen Roadmap and Project SEAN.

(3) support continued engagement in the Zero Emission Flight Demonstrator programme as a platform for advancing sustainable aviation solutions for the Highlands & Islands.

Transport to Employment Programme

13 With reference to item 9 of the Minute of Meeting of 24 April 2026, Mr George Eckton T2E Programme Manager and Mr Ranald Robertson, Partnership Director submitted a Report providing an update on progress made on the Access to Employment/Transport to Employment (T2E) programme, and on the initial engagement/negotiation phase with Scottish Government. The Report stated that the Transport to Employment programme aimed to remove systemic transport barriers that prevented key child poverty family groups/parents from accessing jobs/training because of interlinked challenges.

The Report further stated that the HITRANS agreed 2026/27 funding had increased to £1,123,777, and outlined the initial interventions in progress, programme resourcing, key risks and mitigations, and the establishment of a regional Challenge Group. The Report highlighted that the next phase would focus on finalising priorities through the Challenge Group and launching targeted pilots that build the evidence base for a sustainable, multi-year Transport to Employment Programme.

It was agreed to:

(1) note the update on the Scottish Government's Access to Employment funding programme;

(2) note the further uplift and HITRANS' agreed funding of £1,123,777;

(3) endorse ongoing engagement with Transport Scotland, Scottish Government and Local Employability Partnerships to advocate for multi-year funding;

(4) support the development and delivery of the HITRANS Access to Employment challenge programme and governance as summarised in the Report; and

(5) note the establishment of appropriate project management arrangements for the Programme and recruitment of short-term support as agreed at the April 2026 Partnership Board Meeting.

£2 Regional Bus Fare Cap Update

14 With reference to item 13 of the Minute of Meeting of 24 April 2026, Mr Ranald Robertson, Partnership Director, submitted a Report providing an update on the delivery of the Regional £2 Bus Fare Cap Pilot across the Highlands and Islands. The Report highlighted emerging local evidence on patronage, affordability and the role of the pilot in addressing the additional cost of accessing everyday opportunities and services.

The Report stated that over the remainder of the pilot HITRANS would seek to supplement the programme-level data with local evidence to help explain the impact behind the headline figures. This would include:

- continuing to monitor patronage and fare-paying use across different parts of the regional network;
- working with local authorities and operators to identify changes in travel behaviour that can reasonably be associated with the fare cap;
- capturing passenger experience and case-study evidence, particularly where the cap is improving access to employment, education, retail and essential services;
- considering the interaction between affordability, patronage growth and the sustainability of rural and supported bus services; and
- supporting Transport Scotland's evaluation so that the Highlands and Islands experience is fully reflected in any consideration of the future of affordable fares policy beyond the 12-month pilot.

It was agreed to:

(1) note the progress of the Regional £2 Bus Fare Cap Pilot since the April 2026 Partnership meeting;

(2) **note the encouraging early evidence of increased fare-paying patronage on Highland Council in-house services, while recognising the need for appropriate caveats and formal evaluation;**

(3) **note the particular role of the pilot in addressing the higher cost of accessing employment, education, retail and essential services in rural and island communities; and**

(4) **support continued collaborative delivery, monitoring and evaluation of the pilot with Transport Scotland, ZetTrans, local authorities and operators.**

Highlands and Islands Air Connectivity

15 Mr Ranald Robertson, Partnership Director, submitted a Report providing an update on recent developments affecting Highlands and Islands air connectivity and seeking endorsement for HITRANS continuing to work with the Scottish Government, Transport Scotland, partner Councils, NHS Boards, Highlands and Islands Enterprise, elected representatives and other stakeholders to support the development of a long-term strategic approach to regional air connectivity. The Report sought to position HITRANS as a constructive partner in helping develop an evidence-based, collaborative and long-term strategic approach to regional air connectivity.

The Report stated that officers would continue to engage with key stakeholders to further develop the evidence base supporting a long-term strategic approach to Highlands and Islands air connectivity. This work would include consideration of:

- current and future passenger demand;
- healthcare requirements;
- regional economic growth;
- international best practice;
- existing public investment supporting regional aviation;
- future technologies; and
- opportunities to strengthen connectivity whilst delivering value for money.

It was agreed to:

(1) **note the strategic importance of Highlands and Islands air connectivity to communities, public services and Scotland's future economic development.**

(2) **note the ongoing engagement being undertaken by officers with Scottish Government, Transport Scotland, partner Councils, NHS Boards, Highlands and Islands Enterprise, HIAL, airline operators and elected representatives.**

(3) **support the continued development of an evidence-based, collaborative and long-term strategic approach to Highlands and Islands air connectivity.**

(4) **note that officers expect the next phase of this work to include an initial stakeholder round table discussion to inform the development of a longer-term strategic approach.**

(5) **agree that a further Report be presented to a future meeting of the Partnership Board as this work progresses.**

Scottish Islands Passport Update and Economic Impact

16 With reference to item 16 of the Minute of Meeting of 25 April 2025, Ms Katy Beasly, Scottish Islands Passport Project Manager, submitted a Report providing an update on the Scottish Islands Passport Project. The Report stated that the Scottish Islands Passport app had reached 71,000 downloads. Work had been commissioned to understand the projects economic impact based on responses from a user survey. Based on the survey responses, the Report undertaken by Reference Economic Consultants indicated that the app had already generated an estimated £1.12 million in additional visitor spend over the project's lifetime. Based on a mid-range forecast of future app downloads and its usage, it was estimated that the Passport would support £1.25 million in additional annual visitor expenditure by 2030.

It was agreed to:

(1) note the Report and the findings of the Scottish Islands Passport Impacts Analysis Report undertaken by Reference Economic Consultants; and

2) agree that officers seek further engagement with partners for funding support based on the impact captured.

HITRANSformers Update

17 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 had appointed Pell Frischmann 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. The study objectives were outlined in the Report, and it was further stated that early activity had included work on Pumped Storage Hydro Logistics with roundtable discussions and data gathering with developers, and canal and port teams.

It was agreed to note the Report.

National Smart Ticketing Advisory Board (NSTAB) Update

18 With reference to item 23 of the Minute of Meeting of 24 November 2017, Mr Ranald Robertson, Partnership Director, submitted a Report providing an update on the work of the National Smart Ticketing Advisory Board (NSTAB), on which the Partnership Director represented Scotland's Regional Transport Partnerships, and highlighting the publication of the Board's first Standards and Technology Advisory Report (STAR).

The Report stated that many of the recommendations within STAR aligned closely with work already being undertaken across the Highlands and Islands and provided a framework that allowed regional innovation to continue whilst ensuring locally developed solutions could integrate effectively within a future national ticketing environment.

It was agreed to:

(1) note the ongoing work of the National Smart Ticketing Advisory Board (NSTAB);

(2) note the publication of the Standards and Technology Advisory Report (STAR) and its recommendations for the future development of smart and integrated ticketing in Scotland; and

(3) note that the Partnership Director will continue to represent the interests of Scotland's Regional Transport Partnerships through NSTAB as work progresses on implementation of the report's recommendations.

CONSULTATION

Public Service Reform Consultation

19 Mr Ranald Robertson, Partnership Director, submitted a Report providing an update on the Scottish Government's Public Service Reform agenda and its potential implications and opportunities for regional governance and delivery. The Appendix to the Report detailed the HITRANS response submitted to the Scottish Parliament Public Service Reform Committee's Call for Views as part of its Pre-Budget Scrutiny 2027-28. The submission emphasised a number of key principles:

- Public Service Reform should improve outcomes rather than simply reduce expenditure.
- The principle of subsidiarity should inform decisions about whether functions are best delivered nationally, regionally or locally.
- Scotland should make greater use of existing regional governance arrangements where these can reduce duplication and improve delivery.
- Shared services provide opportunities to retain specialist capacity while improving efficiency.
- Multi-year funding is essential where meaningful preventative interventions require medium- or long-term commitment.
- Funding and reporting requirements should be proportionate to programme value and risk.
- Public Service Reform should recognise the wider economic and social value created by transport.
- Improved and standardised data should support transparent and evidence-led decision making

It was agreed to:

(1) note the Scottish Government's continuing focus on Public Service Reform and the potential implications and opportunities for transport governance and delivery;

(3) note the opportunities for greater use of regional and shared-service delivery where this accords with the principle of subsidiarity and can improve outcomes, efficiency and resilience;

(3) homologate the HITRANS response to the Scottish Parliament Public Service Reform Committee's Pre-Budget Scrutiny 2027-28 Call for Views, detailed in Appendix 1 to the Report; and

(4) support continued engagement with Scottish Government, Transport Scotland, COSLA, other Regional Transport Partnerships and partner Councils on the role that regional transport governance and collaborative delivery can play within Public Service Reform.

UK Parliament Transport Committee – Getting to Work Transport Connectivity Enabling Young People to Access Jobs

20 Mr Ranald Robertson, Partnership Director, submitted a Report detailing the HITRANS draft response to the House of Commons Transport Committee's call for evidence on *Getting to Work – Transport Connectivity Enabling Young People to Access Jobs, Training and Apprenticeships*. The consultation sought evidence on how transport connectivity affects young people's access to employment, apprenticeships, college and training, with a particular focus on affordability, availability, reliability and integration with wider employability systems.

The HITRANS draft response was detailed in the Annex A to the Report and drew on the Regional Transport Strategy and operational experience, evaluation evidence, international research, and learning from the Transport to Employment (T2E) programme and the £2 Regional Bus Fare Cap Pilot. It highlighted the distinct circumstances of rural

and island communities, the interaction between transport and digital access, and the need for multi-year funding certainty to support systemic interventions. The submission also emphasised the concept of a transport penalty experienced by young people in rural and island Scotland, where dispersed labour markets, limited public transport options, high travel costs and misaligned shift patterns significantly restricted access to opportunities.

It was agreed to:

(1) note the House of Commons Transport Committee's call for evidence;

(2) approve HITRANS' draft response, subject to any amendments agreed by members;

(3) delegate authority to the Chair and Partnership Director to finalise and submit the response on behalf of HITRANS; and

(4) support continued engagement with UK Government, Scottish Government and regional partners to strengthen the rural evidence base and advocate for multi-year funding certainty.

PARTNERSHIP

Programme of Meetings 2027

21 Mr Ranald Robertson, Partnership Director, submitted a Report setting out the proposed dates for Partnership Board and Permanent Advisors meeting in 2027.

It was agreed that

(1) the HITRANS Partnership and Advisors meet in 2027 on the following dates, subject to confirmation that there were no clashes with partner Council meetings; and

(2) delegate authority to the Chair and Partnership Director to liaise with local authorities to the check suitability of a 17th or 28th September 2027 Partnership Board meeting date.

Date	Partnership Meeting	Advisors Meeting	Location
14 January 2027		Morning	Virtual
5 February 2027	Partnership Board Meeting		Virtual / Inverness
25 March 2027		Morning	Virtual / Inverness
23 April 2027	Partnership Board Meeting		Virtual / Inverness
10 and 11 June 2027	Late Afternoon Board Induction Workshop followed by full Partnership meeting on Friday morning		Venue to be confirmed
19 August 2027		Morning	Virtual
TBC September 2027	Evening meeting followed by full Partnership meeting on Friday morning		Orkney

21 October 2027		Morning	Virtual
4 and 5 November	Evening meeting followed by full Partnership meeting on Friday morning		Moray

Public Service Reform – Transport Governance

22 Mr Ranald Robertson, Partnership Director, submitted a Report providing an update on emerging Scottish Government work relating to Public Service Reform and presenting opportunities this may present for strengthening regional transport governance and improving the delivery of transport services across Scotland. Potential opportunities that could be delivered through partnership arrangements without requiring significant legislative change included:

- 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.

It was agreed 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; and

(4) agree that HITRANS should continue to identify opportunities for enhanced regional collaboration and shared service delivery which improve.

Programme for Government

23 Mr Ranald Robertson, Partnership Director, submitted a Report providing an initial overview of the Scottish Government's Programme for Government (PfG) 2026–27, published 1 September 2026 and outlining the immediate implications, opportunities and alignment points for the Partnership's current work programme. The Report highlighted areas of direct relevance to HITRANS strategic objectives, delivery commitments and statutory responsibilities, and identified where further analysis or engagement would be required as detailed policy measures were released.

It was agreed to:

(1) note the publication of the Programme for Government and the initial assessment set out in the 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; and

(6) agree that the Partnership continues proactive engagement with Scottish Government officials and regional partners as PfG measures are developed.