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Report to Partnership Meeting 6 November 2026

Research and Strategy Delivery

Transport to Employment Programme Update

PURPOSE OF REPORT

The purpose of this report is to update Members on progress since the September 2026 Board meeting, provide an overview of programme mobilisation and delivery activity, highlight changes in programme status, and seek continued support for the Transport to Employment (T2E) programme as it moves into implementation

BACKGROUND

The Transport to Employment (T2E) programme seeks to remove transport barriers that prevent people, particularly parents within priority child poverty family groups, from accessing, securing and sustaining employment.

The programme focuses on addressing three interconnected transport challenges:

- Availability of transport services.
- Accessibility of transport services and information.
- Affordability of travel for employment, training and skills opportunities.

The programme is designed to support increased job starts, improved job retention, higher household incomes and the development of scalable models that can be adopted across HITRANS communities.

Members received a detailed mobilisation update in September 2026. At that point, the programme had moved from development into delivery preparation, with a number of projects confirmed and a number remaining conditional on procurement, delivery partner commitments and affordability considerations.

PROGRESS UPDATE

Since the previous report, activity has focused on converting programme design into delivery activity, finalising partner arrangements, establishing governance mechanisms and progressing procurement where required. The Regional Challenge Group has continued to develop as a commissioning and oversight mechanism for Transport to Employment activity across the region.

Engagement with Local Employability Partnerships, local authorities, anchor employers and community partners has confirmed strong support for the programme objectives. Monitoring and evaluation arrangements are being developed on a common basis across HITRANs and nationally amongst 4 participating RTPs, providing greater consistency in reporting and evidence gathering during the first year of delivery.

INTERVENTIONS IN PROGRESS

At the September meeting Members noted that approximately two-thirds of the programme portfolio had secured commitment and approval, with the remaining elements subject to varying levels of delivery and mobilisation risk.

The current position is summarised overleaf:

Bundle	Status	Budget (£)
M-Connect Transport Integration	Conditional	75,000
Employer & Community Access Fund	Committed	225,000
Hi-Bike to Employment	Committed	100,000
Anchor Employer Travel Audits	Committed	110,000
HITRANS Programme Management	Committed	100,000
Regional Systems and Safety Mapping	Committed	120,000
Housing Storage & Access	Committed	28,000
Community Transport Capacity / Pilots	Committed/Conditional	150,000
Prepaid Travel Infrastructure	Committed	35,000
HiTravel Awareness & Information	Committed/Conditional	120,000
Employer Liaison & Engagement	Conditional	60,000

Committed Activity: £903,000
Conditional Activity: £220,000
Total Programme: £1,123,000

The committed projects provide a sufficiently robust delivery programme to demonstrate programme outcomes during Year 1. Work continues to refine the conditional projects, with decisions informed by affordability, partner readiness, procurement outcomes and expected contribution to programme objectives.

While the HITRANS programme is organised around a series of delivery bundles, many interventions are being developed jointly with Local Employability Partnerships, local authorities, employers and community partners. Examples include:

- **Hi-Bike to Employment and Cycling Training,** is exploring the provision of e-bike loans, confidence-building training and accredited cycle maintenance qualifications, helping to create employability pathways into the active travel and cycle maintenance sector whilst supporting access to work through low-cost transport options.

- **HiTravel Awareness and Information,** is developing an employability placement model that would provide paid work experience, training and progression support for employability clients through activities such as bus stop audits, timetable renewal programmes and passenger information improvements. This approach delivers both employability outcomes and improvements to transport information infrastructure across the region.

- **Prepaid Travel Infrastructure,** is developing a prepaid mobility credit pilot that would enable Local Employability Partnerships to provide travel support through a controlled prepaid card system, reducing upfront travel cost barriers for jobseekers and simplifying administration of transport support schemes

Many of the proposed interventions within the identified bundles are designed to deliver both employability and transport outcomes. Consequently, programme benefits extend beyond individual journeys or travel subsidies to include workforce development, transport infrastructure improvements, passenger information enhancements, employer engagement and the creation of sustainable delivery capacity across the region.

DELIVERY AND RESOURCING ARRANGEMENTS

The programme continues to operate on the partnership approach endorsed by Members in September. Under this model:

- HITRANS leads strategic coordination, programme governance and investment in shared systems and regional infrastructure.
- Local Employability Partnerships provide front-line engagement with participants and coordinate local delivery support.
- Employers contribute to the design of practical transport solutions linked to workforce recruitment and retention needs.
- Community and third-sector organisations support locally tailored interventions and route-to-employment solutions.
- Evaluation and evidence gathering activity is being delivered on a collaborative, cross-RTP basis.

This approach is intended to maximise local flexibility while maintaining a consistent regional and national evidence base.

KEY RISK AND MIGITATIONS

Funding Certainty

The principal risk remains the absence of multi-year funding certainty. While the additional funding received during 2026/27 has strengthened delivery capacity, programme planning remains constrained by annual funding cycles. This limits opportunities for longer-term operator commitments, sustainable staffing arrangements and investment in services requiring multi-year support. Discussions with Scottish Government continue regarding future funding arrangements and the development of a longer-term delivery model.

Delivery and Mobilisation Risk

A number of project bundles remain conditional and may require further refinement prior to implementation. Mitigations include:

- Phased commissioning.
- Clear go/no-go decision points.
- Procurement and mobilisation reviews.
- Prioritisation of projects capable of delivering measurable outcomes within available timescales.
- Ongoing engagement with delivery partners and employers.
- Retention of a flexible commissioning reserve, allowing resources to be redirected towards emerging opportunities where stronger evidence of impact, delivery readiness or partnership commitment is identified.

The Board should note that the programme has always been intended to operate as a portfolio of interventions rather than a fixed list of projects. Where individual proposals prove undeliverable, fail to demonstrate value for money, or are overtaken by stronger opportunities, resources may be reallocated to alternative employment-focused interventions

Monitoring and Evaluation

Agreement on programme success measures continues to evolve nationally. HITRANS is working with Transport Scotland and partner RTPs to ensure a common approach to monitoring, reporting and evaluation, enabling consistent assessment of value for money and programme effectiveness.

Outlook

The programme has made significant progress since approval and is now transitioning from mobilisation into active delivery. The continued establishment of governance arrangements, the development of the Regional Challenge Group, confirmation of core delivery projects and continued engagement with employers and employability partners provide a strong foundation for implementation. The immediate focus for the remainder of 2026/27 will be:

- Launching priority interventions.
- Progressing conditional projects where value for money and delivery readiness can be demonstrated.
- Generating early evidence of impact.
- Strengthening the case for a sustainable multi-year Transport to Employment programme.

RISK REGISTER

<u>RTS Delivery</u>

Impact - Positive
Comment – This work directly supports the HITRANS Regional Transport Strategy by improving connectivity to jobs, training and services across rural and island communities. It advances RTS priorities on inclusive, accessible and sustainable transport and strengthens strategic partnerships.

<u>Policy</u>

Impact – Positive
Comment – This programme supports the development and advocacy of our RTS policy positions on transport poverty, particularly with regards to remote, rural and island provision for key family groups. The programme aligns with the National Transport Strategy (NTS2) and the Tackling Child Poverty Delivery Plan, as well as recent Community Wealth Building national legislation

<u>Financial</u>

Impact – Positive
Budget line and value – Scottish Government Access to Employment Fund – £1,123,777
Comment – This represents a significant additional revenue funding stream supporting HITRANS and its partners. The funding has been incorporated into the HITRANS Business Plan and used to deliver targeted interventions improving access to employment.

<u>Equality</u>

Impact – Positive
Comment – The programme is targeted at reducing inequalities by focusing on Child Poverty Delivery Plan priority groups of households. If delivery is well targeted and monitored, the programme will improve equitable access to employment and training. However, there is a risk that poorly designed interventions or inadequate outreach could fail to reach the most disadvantaged cohorts and lack of certainty of multi-year funding could reduce confidence in priority groups to use and engage in the infrastructure/support funded by this programme.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Member are asked to:

1. Welcome the progress made since the September 2026 update.
2. Note the current status of the programme portfolio and associated delivery risks.
3. Support continued development of the Transport to Employment programme and the associated partnership delivery model.
4. Support ongoing engagement with Scottish Government regarding future multi-year funding arrangements.

Report by: Ranald Robertson
Designation: Partnership Director
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