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HITRANS
THE HIGHLANDS AND ISLANDS TRANSPORT PARTNERSHIP

Report to Partnership Meeting 6 November 2026

Research and Strategy Delivery

Sustainable Aviation Update

Purpose of Report

To update Board Members on progress across HITRANS' sustainable aviation projects — in particular delivery of the two Zero Emission Flight (ZEF) Demonstrator projects, Project SEAN and the SATE Hydrogen Roadmap — alongside the stakeholder engagement, partnership and knowledge-exchange activity undertaken during the period.

Overview

As reported to the Board in September, HITRANS is delivering two ZEF Demonstrator projects funded by the Department for Transport through Innovate UK: Project SEAN (Scottish Electric Aviation Network) and the SATE Hydrogen Roadmap. Both began in August 2026 and are progressing on schedule, within the ten-year framework set by HITRANS' published Regional Sustainable Aviation Strategy. The period has seen tangible delivery progress on both projects, alongside continued engagement with industry partners and representation at national and international events, as set out below.

Update

Project SEAN (Scottish Electric Aviation Network) – *delivery progress*

Project SEAN is delivering a programme of demonstration flights using BETA Technologies' all-electric ALIA CTOL (CX300) aircraft from a hub at Inverness Airport, together with electric aircraft charging infrastructure. Two main strands progressed during the period:

Charging infrastructure – site walks were carried out with BETA Technologies and Highlands and Islands Airports Limited (HIAL) to assess the options for electric aircraft charging at Inverness Airport. A preferred site has now been chosen, allowing installation planning to proceed ahead of the demonstration flights.



Community and education engagement – a schools engagement programme has been developed to accompany the demonstration activity. The proposed activities have been reviewed and approved by teachers, and a pilot school session is scheduled at Charleston Academy ahead of a wider rollout.

SATE Hydrogen Roadmap – *delivery progress*

The 18-month SATE Hydrogen Roadmap feasibility study continues to progress. An in-person workshop is confirmed for 2 November, bringing project partners and stakeholders together to advance route prioritisation, infrastructure requirements and the evidence base that will underpin the roadmap.

Wider engagement, partnerships and knowledge exchange

Windracers production facility visit – SATE visited Windracers' production facility in Fareham in October, continuing engagement on autonomous cargo drone operations and future regional collaboration.

Air Charter Scotland – HITRANS has opened engagement with Air Charter Scotland on potential collaboration on regional air services and sustainable aviation operations.

Re-engagement with REGENT – HITRANS has re-established contact with REGENT Craft, the US developer of all-electric seagliders, reviving discussions on a feasibility study for seaglider operations in the region — a medium- to long-term option in the Regional Sustainable Aviation Strategy.

Conference representation – Jayne Golding represented SATE at the AIR 2026 conference in London and the ZERAC conference in Oslo, sharing regional learning and strengthening links across the zero-emission aviation community.

ZEFIG programme group – SATE is contributing to ZEFIG, a zero-emission aviation programme group, sharing the region's experience with wider UK efforts to accelerate zero-emission aviation.

Future funding and pipeline development

HORIZON eMultipass application – HITRANS has contributed to the eMultipass application to the EU's Horizon Europe programme, working with consortium partners led by Aston University to develop a bid that would support the region's role in advancing sustainable and integrated mobility.

Growth deal applications – work has continued on growth deal applications to secure investment in the infrastructure and capability needed to deliver the Sustainable Aviation Strategy across the region.

Risk Register

RTS Delivery
Impact – Positive
Comment – Supports delivery of the RTS through improved regional connectivity and low-carbon air services.

Policy
Policy Impact – Positive
Comment – Positions the Highlands & Islands as a global leader in net zero aviation, supporting the Scottish Government's ambition for the world's first net zero aviation region and its target to decarbonise regional aviation by 2040.

Financial
Impact – Positive
Comment – High intervention rates and consortium delivery models mitigate financial risk for HITRANS while delivering significant leverage of Department for Transport and Innovate UK funding.

Equality
Impact – Neutral

Recommendation

Members are asked to:

1. Note the delivery progress on Project SEAN, including selection of the charging infrastructure site and the launch of the schools engagement programme.
2. Note progress on the SATE Hydrogen Roadmap, including the in-person consortium workshop confirmed for 2 November.
3. Support continued engagement, partnership development, representation at national and international events, and the pursuit of future funding as a platform for advancing sustainable aviation solutions for the Highlands & Islands.

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