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HI TRANS
THE HIGHLANDS AND ISLANDS TRANSPORT PARTNERSHIP

Report to Partnership Meeting 6 November 2026

RESEARCH AND STRATEGY DELIVERY

Health and Transport Action Plan Update

Purpose of Report

To provide an update on the Highlands and Islands Health and Transport Action Plan

Background

At its last meeting, the Partnership received an update on the establishment of the Highlands and Islands Health and Transport Action Plan (HTAP), including confirmation of funding support from Transport Scotland, Scottish Governments Health Directorate and the National Islands Plan enabling the appointment of a dedicated Programme Manager.

The Programme Manager commenced in post during September 2026 and has since undertaken an extensive programme of engagement with stakeholders across the health and transport sectors. This work has focused on understanding current priorities, building relationships with key stakeholders and establishing the governance arrangements necessary to support development of the HTAP.

The inaugural Steering Group meeting is scheduled for 12 November 2026 and will provide the first opportunity for partners to collectively consider priorities and agree next steps for development of the HTAP.

Progress Update

Governance

Following commencement of the Programme Manager role in September 2026, priority has been given to establishing the governance and partnership arrangements necessary to support development of the Highlands and Islands Health and Transport Action Plan.

Significant engagement has been undertaken with organisations across the health, transport and public sectors to understand current priorities, identify existing activity and inform development of the Action Plan.

This engagement has helped secure broad support for the programme and informed the development of a draft governance structure, Terms of Reference and proposed Steering Group membership.

The Steering Group will bring together representatives from NHS Boards, Local Authorities, Regional Transport Partnerships, Scottish Government and other relevant public bodies to provide strategic oversight and direction for the development of the Action Plan.

The inaugural Steering Group meeting is planned for 12 November 2026.

Stakeholder Engagement

The establishment of a dedicated Programme Manager has enabled detailed engagement across a wide range of organisations and interests. This has helped develop a clearer understanding of the complex

health and transport landscape within the region and establish relationships that will support the future work of the Steering Group.

A programme of one-to-one engagement has been undertaken with key partners across the Highlands and Islands and at national level.
These discussions have sought to:

- understand existing healthcare access and transport challenges, current priorities and emerging pressures;
- identify ongoing initiatives, areas of good practice and opportunities for collaborative working;
- understand organisational responsibilities, decision-making arrangements and the wider policy landscape; and
- identify opportunities to build upon existing activity and support greater coordination between organisations.

Engagement undertaken to date has highlighted a range of ongoing activity and shared challenges relating to healthcare access across the Highlands and Islands. This includes patient travel arrangements, inter-board connectivity, community transport provision, aviation links supporting access to healthcare, and wider healthcare and transport service planning. Development of the HTAP will seek to provide a mechanism through which learning, evidence and emerging opportunities can be considered collectively and, where appropriate, progressed through coordinated action across organisations. Initial engagement has highlighted opportunities to strengthen coordination between organisations involved in planning, funding and delivering healthcare and transport services. The Steering Group will provide a forum through which these issues can be considered collectively and opportunities for collaborative action explored.

Initial engagement has highlighted opportunities to strengthen coordination between organisations involved in planning, funding and delivering healthcare and transport services. The Steering Group will provide a forum through which these issues can be considered collectively and opportunities for collaborative action explored. The engagement process has also provided an opportunity to identify ongoing initiatives and examples of good practice that may support delivery of the Action Plan.

Developing the Evidence Base

Alongside stakeholder engagement, work has commenced to identify available evidence, datasets and previous research that may support development of the Action Plan.

This includes consideration of patient travel activity, inter-board travel demand, community transport provision, aviation connectivity, reimbursement arrangements, previous consultation and engagement exercises, and wider work relating to access to healthcare in remote, rural and island communities.

Initial work has highlighted areas where greater regional coordination may help support improved access to healthcare across the Highlands and Islands. These include challenges associated with travel between NHS Board areas, the role of community transport in supporting access to services, and the contribution of aviation connectivity to healthcare access within remote and island communities. The Steering Group will provide an opportunity to explore these and other issues further as priorities for the Action Plan are developed.

Early discussions have also highlighted the challenges associated with obtaining consistent healthcare-related travel data across different organisations and systems. Consequently, an important element of the initial phase of work has been identifying existing evidence sources, understanding current data gaps and considering how these may be addressed through future partnership working.
The evidence gathered through stakeholder engagement and data review will support the Steering Group in identifying priorities for action and opportunities for collaborative working across organisational

boundaries. This will help ensure that future actions are informed by both stakeholder experience and available evidence.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Members are invited to:

1. Note the report.
2. Note progress made in establishing the Highlands and Islands Health and Transport Action Plan, including the development of governance arrangements, stakeholder engagement and evidence gathering undertaken to date.
3. Support the continued development of the Highlands and Islands Health and Transport Action Plan and its emerging governance arrangements through active engagement within their respective organisations and by championing collaborative working across partner organisations.

RISK REGISTER

RTS Delivery
Impact – Positive
Comment: Establishing an HTAP is a key action within the RTS Delivery Plan. Progress in governance arrangements, stakeholder engagement and evidence gathering demonstrates momentum and commitment to delivery.

Policy
Impact – Positive
Comment: Supports national priorities in the Transport to Health Delivery Plan and National Transport Strategy and strengthens partnership working across health and transport.

Financial
Impact – Positive
Comment: HITRANS has received a grant offer of £105,000 for 2026/27 to support the appointment of a HTAP Programme Manager and provide a small working budget for the initial phase of programme delivery.

Equality
Impact – Positive
Comment: HTAP development supports improved access to healthcare for communities experiencing disadvantage as a consequence of geography, transport availability and wider inequalities in access to services.

Report by: Struan Charters
Designation: Health and Transport Programme Manager
Date: 20th October 2026

Highlands and Islands Health Transport Action Plan (HTAP)

Governance Arrangements and Terms of Reference (Draft)

1. Purpose

The Highlands and Islands Health Transport Action Plan (HTAP) exists to bring together health, transport, local authority and other stakeholders to support the delivery of actions to improve access to healthcare and improve health and transport outcomes across the Highlands and Islands.

These governance arrangements are intended to provide a proportionate and flexible framework for partnership working.

2. Governance Structure

The HTAP Partnership will consist of:

- **Steering Group** providing strategic leadership and oversight.
- **Delivery Groups** established as required to progress specific actions, projects, themes or geographical areas of work.
- *(The Steering Group may establish a **Co-ordination Group** to provide officer and manager-level support, partnership co-ordination and development of proposals where this is considered necessary to support delivery).*

3. Steering Group

Purpose

The Steering Group will provide strategic direction and oversight for the HTAP. It will be responsible for agreeing and regularly reviewing the actions and priorities set out in the Health and Transport Action Plan.

Membership

Membership will comprise senior representatives from:
Participating Local Authorities –

- Argyll and Bute Council
- Comhairle nan Eilean Siar
- Highland Council
- Moray Council
- Orkney Islands Council
- Shetland Islands Council

Participating NHS Boards –

- NHS Grampian
- NHS Highland
- NHS Orkney
- NHS Shetland
- NHS Western Isles
- Scottish Ambulance Service

Transport Partners –

- HITRANS
- ZetTrans
- NHS Assure
- Transport Scotland

The Steering Group may agree to invite representatives from other organisations or individuals to join the Steering Group where this would support the delivery of HTAP objectives.

Responsibilities

The Steering Group will:

- Agree strategic priorities for HTAP.
- Champion the objectives of HTAP within member organisations, sharing relevant information and providing updates on activity both to and from their respective organisations.
- Monitor progress against agreed priorities.
- Consider opportunities, risks and barriers.
- Commission project activity where appropriate.
- Review governance arrangements periodically to ensure they remain fit for purpose.

Meetings

The Steering Group will normally meet twice per year, with additional meetings arranged where required. Where a decision is required between meetings, the Chair may seek approval by correspondence (including email). Any decisions agreed in this manner will be reported to the next meeting of the Steering Group for noting.

Appointment of Chair

The Steering Group will appoint a Chair and Deputy Chair. The Chair and Deputy Chair will normally serve for one year, with arrangements for appointment and succession agreed by the Steering Group. In the event that both the Chair and Deputy Chair are unavailable for a meeting, the meeting will be chaired by the HITRANS Partnership Director or their nominee.

Secretariat

The HITRANS HTAP Project Manager will provide secretariat support for the Steering Group. Dates of meetings will be confirmed each year with the Project Manager responsible for issuing the agenda and minutes in advance of each meeting. A draft minute of each meeting and agreed actions will be circulated following each meeting.

4. Co-ordination Group (if established)

Purpose
The Steering Group may establish a Co-ordination Group where officer-level co-ordination is required to support delivery of HTAP priorities.

Membership
Membership would comprise officers and managers from partner organisations with responsibilities relevant to the delivery of HTAP objectives.

Responsibilities
The Co-ordination Group would:

- Support delivery of HTAP priorities.
- Facilitate collaboration between partners.
- Share information, good practice and learning.
- Identify emerging issues and opportunities.
- Develop proposals and recommendations for Steering Group consideration.
- Support communication and stakeholder engagement.
- Establish and oversee Delivery Groups as required to progress agreed priorities.

Meetings
The Co-ordination Group would meet as required to support delivery of the Action Plan.

5. Delivery Groups
Delivery Groups may be established by the Steering Group or Co-ordination Group where there is a requirement to progress a specific action, project, theme or geographical area of work.

Membership, reporting arrangements and meeting frequency will be determined according to the needs of the project, theme or geographical area.

6. Review

These arrangements will be reviewed after the first year of operation and amended as required by the Steering Group.