



Minute of Meeting held in the Chamber, The Town House, Inverness and virtually through MS Teams on Friday 25 April 2025 at 9.30am

PRESENT

Uisdean Robertson, Comhairle nan Eilean Siar (Chair)
Amber Dunbar, Moray Council (Vice-Chair)
John Armour, Argyll and Bute Council
Kristopher Leask, Orkney Islands Council
Ken Gowans, The Highland Council
Naomi Bremner, Non-Councillor Member
Shona Maclellan, Non-Councillor Member
Robert Andrew, Non-Councillor Member

APOLOGIES Michael Green, The Highland Council
Jayne Golding, HITRANS

IN ATTENDANCE

Ranald Robertson, Partnership Director
Frank Roach, Partnership Manager
Neil MacRae, Partnership Manager
Carolyn Pieraccini, Partnership Treasurer
Jennifer Johnstone, The Highland Council
Gordon Blair, Argyll and Bute Council
Fergus Murray, Argyll and Bute Council
Julie Cromarty, The Highland Council
Nicola Moss, Moray Council
Gareth Waterson, Orkney Islands Council
James Buck Orkney Islands Council
Colm Fraser, Comhairle nan Eilean Siar
Linda Cunningham, Comhairle nan Eilean Siar
Nicholas Sobey, HIE
Grant Campbell, Prosper
Vikki Trelfer, HITRANS
Gemma Robinson, HITRANS
Katy Beasley, HITRANS
Robert Wilson, HITRANS
Liam Gallagher, HITRANS
John Ross, HITRANS
David Holden, HITRANS
Clare Harper, HITRANS
Derek Mackay, Partnership Secretary
Patricia Fraser, Audit Scotland
Natalie Bush, Loganair
Simon Macnamara, Heart Aerospace

Declaration of Interests There were no declarations of interest.

MINUTES

Minute of Meeting of 7 February 2025 1 The Minute of Meeting of 7 February 2025 was **approved**.

Matters Arising 2 Mr Ranald Robertson provided the following updates:

10 Mr Robertson indicated that he would circulate the response from the Cabinet Secretary to the submission from Regional Transport Partnership Chairs.

15 Mr Roberston indicated that he would circulate the response from the Cabinet Secretary to the submission from HITRANS in respect of the A96 Corridor Review Consultation.

It was agreed to note the updates.

FINANCE

Revenue Budget Monitoring Report – 1 April 2024 to 28 February 2025 3 With reference to item 3 of the Minute of Meeting of 7 February 2025 Jennifer Johnston, The Highland Council, submitted a Report setting out the revenue monitoring position for the period to 28 February 2025 and the projected year end position.

It was agreed to approve the information in the Report and the attached schedule showing the revenue monitoring position for the period to 28 February 2025.

HITRANS Draft External Audit Plan 4 With reference to item 4 of the Minute of the Meeting of 26 April 2024, Patricia Fraser, Audit Scotland, presented a Report detailing the draft Annual HITRANS External Audit Plan for 2024/ 2025. The Report provided an overview of the planned scope and timing of the HITRANS annual accounts and outlined the audit work planned to meet the audit requirements set out in auditing standards and the Code of Audit Practice, including supplementary guidance.

It was agreed to:

(1) note the Report; and

(2) note that the Partnership Director would forward the draft Hospitality Events Policy to Audit Scotland.

HITRANS Business Plan for 2025-26 5 With reference to item 5 of the Minute of 26 April 2024, Mr Ranald Robertson, Partnership Director submitted a Report seeking approval of the HITRANS Business Plan for 2025/26. The Report indicated that the Business Plan set out how it was intended to support delivery of the Strategy during 2024/25 working with constituent Councils and Stakeholders with a view to improving transport services across the Highlands and Islands. The Report stated that, as with previous Business Plans, the programme of work set out included a two-year Research and Strategy Development Programme in line with the recommendation of the Partnership Board discussion at the February 2025 meeting. The Plan also included a Medium-Term Financial Plan.

It was agreed to approve the Business Plan for Financial Year 205/26.

RESEARCH AND STRATEGY DELIVERY

Loganair's path to net zero emissions – collaboration with Heart Aerospace	6	Natalie Bush, Loganair and Simon Macnamara, Heart Aerospace, delivered a presentation detailing Loganair's path to net zero emissions, in collaboration with Heart Aerospace. The presentation detailed progress with the development of a 30 seat hybrid aircraft. Flight testing would take place in 2025 with projected delivery by the end of the decade. The operating costs would be less than for aircraft operating on conventional aviation fuel. Work was ongoing in relation to the infrastructure that would be required at airports to accommodate hybrid and hydrogen powered aircraft.
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It was agreed to note the Presentation.

Research/Strategy Development Programme for 2024/25	7	With reference to item 6 of the Minute of Meeting of 7 February 2025, Mr Ranald Robertson, Partnership Director submitted a Report providing an update on progress with delivery of 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 2024/25 Business Plan at the Partnership meeting on 26th April 2024.
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It was agreed to approve the amendments to the Research and Strategy Development Programme 2024/25 as detailed in the Appendix to the Report.

Rail Roundup	8	With reference to item 12 of the Minute of Meeting 26 April 2024, Mr Frank Roach, Partnership Manager submitted a Report providing an update on rail matters across the area. The Report stated that HITRANS would be seeking to appoint a consultant to develop a HITRANS Rail Strategy which would form a daughter document to the Regional Transport Strategy and would identify improvements to the network to increase mode shift as we journey to Net Zero. An anticipated budget of £40-£50k would be required. The Report provided an update on rail passenger and freight service projects across the HITRANS area.
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It was agreed:

- (1) to note the Report:**
- (2) to approve the provision of £50k from the Research and Strategy Development Programme to develop a HITRANS Rail Strategy; and**
- (3) that the Partnership Manager would circulate the draft brief for the Rail Strategy to Board Members and Advisors.**

Active Travel Update	9	With reference to item 8 of the Minute of Meeting of 7 February 2025, Ms Vikki Trelfer, Active Travel Officer, submitted a Report providing an update on the development of the People and Place Programme funded by Transport Scotland, and other Active Travel projects in which HITRANS and Partner Local Authorities were involved.
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It was agreed to note the Report.

Active Behaviour Strategy	Travel Change	10	Ms Vikki Trelfer, Active Travel Officer, submitted a Report presenting the final draft of the Active Travel and Sustainable Transport Behaviour Change Strategy which would guide development of HITRANS' People and Place Programme in future years. The Strategy would support delivery of the Regional Transport Strategy and was aligned with the Active Travel Framework outcomes. An annual delivery plan would be developed together with an annual report to measure the impact of interventions.
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It was agreed to approve the Active Travel and Sustainable Transport Behaviour Change Strategy.

SATE Project		11	With reference to item 12 of the Minute of Meeting of 7 February 2025, Mr David Holden, SATE Project, presented a Report providing an update on developments in the Sustainable Aviation Test Environment (SATE) Programme. The Report provided an update on demonstration flights and technology; airport infrastructure and operational systems; CAA hydrogen sandbox; development of a dedicated test environment airspace; engagements; future of Flight Industry Group; and funding opportunities.
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The Report stated that HITRANS received 100% funding based on the organisation classification within the UK Research and Innovation Programme. HITRANS current budget sat at £1,051,131 and the overall project budget was £14M. Officers continued to explore further funding opportunities to continue the work on sustainable aviation across the Region.

It was agreed to note the Report.

Regional Transport Strategy Update		12	With reference to item 11 of the Minute of Meeting of 7 February 2025, Mr Neil Macrae, Senior Partnership Manager, submitted a Report providing an update on the development of a new Regional Transport Strategy. The Report stated that HITRANS had a duty under the Transport (Scotland) Act 2005 to produce a Regional Transport Strategy (RTS). Working with local authority partners, HITRANS had produced a new RTS for the development of a transport system in the region over the next circa 20 years with the aim of delivering a transport system that reduces inequalities, takes climate action, helps deliver inclusive economic growth, and improves the health and wellbeing of people in the region.
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The Report further stated that following approval at the Partnership meeting in September 2024 a copy of the final version of the RTS, together with supporting documents and an Islands Communities Impact Assessment (ICIA) was submitted to the Cabinet Secretary for Transport for approval on 4 October 2024.

It was agreed to:

- (1) note the report and update;**
- (2) approve that a final version and the adoption of the RTS and supporting documentation is undertaken if and when Ministerial approval is confirmed; and**
- (3) approve that a corporate version of the Regional Transport Strategy with current images, formatting and case studies is developed and published thereafter.**

Regional Transport Strategy – First Delivery Plan 13

With reference to item 11 of the Minute of Meeting of 7 February 2025, Mr Neil Macrae, Partnership Manager submitted a Report presenting a final draft of the first Regional Transport Strategy (RTS) Delivery Plan. A final draft version of the first Delivery Plan attached was provided at Appendix A to the Report. The Delivery Plan identified a series of Actions to address each of the policies set out in the updated Regional Transport Strategy. It also set out a proposed timescale for each Action and the outcome sought.

The Report indicated that since the last Partnership meeting, officers had updated the detail of some of the actions and reviewed the timescale for the delivery of those actions that required the commissioning of new work or activity by HITRANS. The Report provided a summary of some of the key actions set out in the draft which HITRANS would seek to implement over the timeframe of the 1st Delivery Plan covering the period up to Summer 2027:

It was agreed to:

- (1) note the Report;**
- (2) approve the actions set out in the 1st Delivery Plan in appendix to the Report;**
- (3) approve the development of a final formatted version of the 1st Delivery Plan ready for publication following the adoption of the Regional Transport Strategy; and**
- (4) note that the final version of the Delivery Plan would be presented to the next Meeting.**

Health and Transport Action Plan 14

With reference to item 9 of the Minute of Meeting of 8 November 2024, Mr Neil Macrae, Partnership Manager submitted a Report which provided an update on progress made to establish a Health and Transport Action Plan for the Highlands and Islands, and to introduce the findings and recommendations of Western Isles Transport to Health Working Group Report. The Report stated that Members approved a final version of the Highlands and Islands Health and Transport Action Plan (HTAP): Scoping Review at the HITRANS Partnership meeting in November 2025. A copy of the published version of this document was attached at Appendix A to the Report and was also available on the HITRANS website.

The Report indicated that HITRANS had subsequently written to each of the 5 NHS Boards, the 6 local authorities that shared a common geography with HITRANS and ZetTrans as well as the Scottish Ambulance Service seeking their support to consider the recommendations of the Scoping Review and to progress an HTAP for the Highlands and Islands. The Report stated that HITRANS had initially requested that each organisation nominate a senior representative to participate in a workshop to discuss the Scoping Review and identify both how an HTAP may be developed and the issues it should focus on. A copy of the final working group that set out the full findings and recommendations were attached at Appendix B to the report

It was agreed to note the Report.

Fort William Integrated Transport Plan	15	<p>With reference to item 16 of the Minute of Meeting of 20 September 2024, Mr Neil Macrae, Partnership Manager submitted a Report which provided an update on progress to undertake an Integrated Transport Plan for Fort William in accordance with Recommendation 32 of the second Strategic Transport Projects Review (STPR2).</p> <p>The Report stated that Transport Scotland published STPR2 in December 2022. Recognising the need to address the challenges across different transport modes in Fort William, STPR2 recommended the development of an Integrated Transport Plan (ITP) for the town:</p> <p>Recommendation 32:</p> <p>Trunk road and motorway renewal for reliability, resilience and safety, specifically recommends continued and increased investment in the trunk road and motorway network over and above current maintenance levels to keep the network reliable and resilient for road users. Potential measures would include, but are not limited to, carriageway and structure schemes, strengthening of major bridges, removal of accessibility barriers and development of integrated transport plans for Fort William and the A90 Kingsway through Dundee</p> <p>It was agreed to note the Report.</p>
Scottish Islands Passport Update	16	<p>With reference to item 15 of the Minute of Meeting of 20 September 2024, Ms Katy Beasley, Scottish Islands Passport Project Manager submitted a Report which provided an update on the Scottish Islands Passport project. The Report provided a detailed update on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Travelogues, digital travel stamps and physical stamps • Digital app and Website • Engagement and working with Partners • Marketing • Funding and Resource <p>It was agreed to note the Report.</p>
Electric Vehicle Infrastructure Shared Service	17	<p>With reference to item 17 of the Minute of Meeting of 7 February 2025, Ms Gemma Robinson, EVIF Project Manager, submitted a Report which provided an update on regional activity by a project management shared service under the Electric Vehicle Infrastructure Fund (EVIF). The shared service covered Comhairle nan Eilean Siar, Moray Council, Orkney Islands Council and Shetland Islands Council. The Report stated that HITRANS was awaiting confirmation that the EVIF grant application for the shared service had been approved by Transport Scotland.</p> <p>The Report indicated that one of the funding conditions was that a high-level plan for the strategy and expansion of the charging networks across the 4 Councils be put in the public domain. The plan was detailed in the appendix to the Report and summarised the details shared in previous reports.</p> <p>It was agreed to note the Report.</p>

PARTNERSHIP

Equalities Update	Duties	18	Ms Jayne Golding, SATE Manager, submitted a Report which provided an update on HITRANS Equalities Duties which had been updated with a report on Mainstreaming the Equality Duty, required to be published by 30 April 2025. The Report stated that the purpose of the public sector equality duty was to ensure that public authorities and those carrying out a public function consider how they could positively contribute to a more equal society through advancing equality and good relations in their day-to-day business.
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It was agreed to:

- (1) note the Report; and**
- (2) approve the draft 'Mainstreaming of Equality Duty' Report as a basis for publishing by 30 April 2025.**

HITRANS Bribery and Anti-Fraud Policies and Procedures Update	Anti-Bribery and Anti-Fraud Policies and Procedures Update	19	Mr Ranald Robertson, Partnership Director submitted a Report which sought approval from the Partnership for updates to three policies and procedures that were introduced in 2013 in relation to Bribery, Corruption and Fraud Prevention. The Report stated that as part of the Planning Process, in advance of the 2024/25 Audit of HITRANS Accounts, colleagues at Audit Scotland noted a number of policies that had become dated and required to be reviewed.
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It was agreed to:

- (1) note the Report:**
- (2) approve the updated Anti-Bribery Policy:**
- (3) approve the updated Anti-Bribery Procedure; and**
- (4) approve the updated Anti-Fraud and Anti-Corruption Policy.**

Risk Management Framework Policy		20	Mr Ranald Robertson, Partnership Director submitted a Report which provided a summary of HITRANS updated Risk Management Strategy which was captured in a new Risk Management Framework which replaced the earlier Risk Management Strategy that the Board approved in 2011. The Framework/Strategy sat alongside HITRANS Risk Register which was subject to regular review and update to the Partnership Board on an annual basis typically to the November Partnership Meeting.
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It was agreed to

- (1) note the Report; and**
- (2) approve the refreshed Risk Management Framework Policy which would continue to operate alongside the Risk Register process that was most recently reported to the November 2024 Partnership Board meeting.**

Asset Management Plan	21	Mr Ranald Robertson, Partnership Director submitted a Report which provided a summary of the HITRANS Asset Management Plan. The summary provided an overview of the key elements of the Asset Management Strategy that had been developed in response to the 2023/24 Annual Audit Report. The Report stated that HITRANS was focused on the efficient management, maintenance, and development of its transport assets. The Asset Management Plan outlined a structured approach to managing these assets, ensuring they were well-maintained, cost-effective, and aligned with regional economic and social goals.
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The Report indicated that the Plan aimed to ensure HITRANS' assets, including the HI-Bike system and IT infrastructure, were sustainable, resilient, and met the evolving mobility needs of the Highlands and Islands region in the long term. The approach prioritised sustainability, technological innovation, and efficient asset management to support the region's transport infrastructure.

It was agreed to:

- (1) note the Report; and**
- (2) approve the HITRANS Asset Management Plan.**

CONSULTATION

Consultations Round up	22	Mr Neil Macrae, Partnership Manager submitted a Report which provided an overview on a number of current consultations. These included those for the Little Minch Timetable consultation and Public Bodies Climate Change Duties.
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It was agreed to:

- (1) note the Report:**
- (2) homologate HITRANS response to the Little Mich Timetable consultation:**
- (3) approve the preparation of draft responses by Officers to the Climate Change Duties Draft Statutory Guidance:**
- (4) delegate responsibility for submitting HITRANS final responses to HITRANS Chair and Partnership Director:**
- (5) authorise the Partnership Director to draft a response to the Community Wealth Building consultation which would be circulated to Board Members and Advisors for final comments prior to submission; and**
- (6) note that the Partnership Manager would circulate HITRANS response to the Scottish Government's consultation on the Rural Development Plan.**

Mr Ranald Robertson, Partnership Director submitted a Report which provided an overview of the consultation process, key questions for input, and the potential impact of the Just Transition: Draft Plan for Transport in Scotland on the Highlands and Islands. It summarised the consultation process and questions which HITRANS would develop a response to in advance of the consultation closing on 19 May 2025. The Report stated that the Scottish Government had released a draft Just Transition Plan for Transport that outlined a vision and set of outcomes to guide the decarbonisation of Scotland's transport sector. The draft Plan aimed to create a fair, sustainable, and inclusive transition toward net zero emissions, addressing the social, economic, and environmental impacts of this transformation.

The Report indicated that the Plan was subject to consultation, and feedback was being solicited from a broad range of stakeholders, including the public, businesses, workers, and community representatives. The Report summarised key elements of the draft plan, focusing on its vision, outcomes, and the impact on the Highlands and Islands. It also highlighted the consultation questions and timelines for engagement.

It was agreed to:

- (1) note the Report; and**
- (2) authorise the Partnership Manager to prepare a draft HITRANS' response to the Just Transition: Draft Plan for Transport in Scotland and circulate the draft response to Board Members and Advisors; and**
- (3) authorise the Partnership Director, in consultation with the Chair, to submit HITRANS' response.**