

Report to Partnership Meeting 4 February 2022

CONSULTATION

Scottish Aviation Strategy Consultation

Purpose of Report

This report introduces HITRANS response to a Scottish Government consultation to help inform the development of a Scottish Aviation Strategy.

Background

Transport Scotland published a discussion document in November 2021 to help the Scottish Government develop an Aviation Strategy that realises their vision for aviation:

For Scotland to have national and international connectivity that allows us to enjoy all the economic and social benefits of air travel while reducing our environmental impact.

The Aviation Strategy will form the basis of the work that the Scottish Government and partner agencies undertake with the aviation sector and other relevant organisations to achieve the vision.

The Aviation Strategy will not consider the transport infrastructure needed to travel to and from the main Scottish airports as this is being covered in Transport Scotland's Strategic Projects Review 2.

Consultation

Following discussion at our last Partnership Meeting and engagement with local and regional stakeholders, HITRANS have developed a joint response to the Consultation in partnership with Highlands and Islands Airports (HIAL). A copy of our full response together with an accompanying letter highlighting our key priorities for the Aviation Strategy is included as an appendix to this report.

The joint response to the consultation was submitted prior to this meeting in order to meet the deadline with Members consulted on a final draft prior to submission.

RTS Delivery

Impact - Positive

Comment – This work supports RTS Strategic priority enhance regional connectivity.

Policy

Impact - Positive

Comment – This work supports development of the Aviation policies set out in the RTS.

Financial

Impact – Neutral

Comment - There are no direct funding implications for HITRANS resulting from this report.

Equality

Impact –neutral

Recommendation

Members are invited to;

1. Note the report

Report by:	Neil MacRae
Designation:	Partnership Manager
Date:	27 th January 2022

Appendix A: Aviation Strategy Supporting Letter

28th January 2021

Dear Sir / Madam,

Aviation Strategy Response

HITRANS and HIAL would like to thank Transport Scotland for the opportunity to input into the development of a Scottish Aviation Strategy. We have worked collaboratively with input from partner Local Authorities and other Highlands and Islands stakeholders to submit a joint response.

Air links form an essential, often lifeline, element of the transport network in the Highlands and Islands. All domestic air services either depart or land at an airport in the Highlands and Islands. They provide these locations with the only connectivity that enables these areas to compete economically with other regions of Scotland. The services also often provide access to essential services such as health and education as well as the means by which many centrally located services are delivered to these islands and remote communities.

In our attached response we seek to highlight the following key points:

- To achieve both the ambitious transition to Net Zero and fully realise the opportunities that transition can provide through improved connectivity and benefits to local supply chains, sustained investment is required from the Scottish Government. In particular to support the development of these new technologies and the associated infrastructure required to support them.
- HITRANS and HIAL welcome a comprehensive review of both the funding and governance of air services in the Highlands and Islands. This requires a collaborative objective led review of all current support mechanisms including PSOs and the Air Discount Scheme but also all wider funding and infrastructure. The starting point of this review should be to establish a minimum level of service to ensure the connectivity needed to support sustainable local economies and a fairer and more just Scotland.
- Surface transport to all UK airports is currently founded on models which incentivise private car use – be it a reliance on car parking revenue at airports or the promotion of fly and drive over public transport by airlines. Again, an extensive overhaul of existing policy and regulation is required if we are to meet Net Zero targets and deliver against the sustainable travel hierarchy within the National Transport Strategy.
- Stakeholders and businesses in the Highlands and Islands have repeatedly highlighted the importance of securing guaranteed access to International Hub airport/s over any new direct routes to Scotland. It is imperative that mechanisms are established which ensure that Inverness Airport has access to London Heathrow with a minimum frequency of two services per day that enables passengers to undertake a viable day return in each direction.

In summary, air connectivity is essential for lifeline services and supporting the economy of the Highlands and Islands. With the right investment and governance, there are excellent opportunities for Aviation to deliver improved sustainable low carbon connectivity to the Highlands and Islands and we look forward to engaging collaboratively with Transport Scotland, Local Authorities and air operators to develop an ambitious Aviation Strategy.

Yours sincerely,

Cllr Allan Henderson, HITRANS Chair

Inglis Lyon, HIAL Managing Director

Appendix B: HITRANS & HIAL Aviation Consultation Response

1. What more, if anything, should the Scottish Government and industry do to accelerate the transition to low/zero emission aviation?

HIAL, HITRANS and Orkney Islands Council are currently partners in the Sustainable Aviation Test Environment (SATE) project. Sustained significant investment and support in this and similar projects is needed over the next 5-10 years if the Scottish Government is to realise its ambitious commitment for the Highlands and Islands to become the first net zero aviation region by 2040.

Denmark and Sweden have both recently committed to make domestic aviation fossil fuel free by 2030. As all scheduled domestic flights in Scotland serve the Highlands and Islands, the Scottish Government has in effect made a similar national commitment when it set the target of a net zero aviation region for the H&I.

Investing in work of the SATE project and similar innovative trials will help ensure that we can deliver improved and affordable connectivity for the region but also that the opportunities for research and development supporting the transition to alternatively fuelled aircraft can provide wider economic benefits to the region. This can only be realised by the Government playing a leading role in the support and coordination of this innovative work.

Net Zero Air Connectivity offers a route to better connecting more peripheral areas to business centres and there should be support to ensure a basic level of access is feasible from every part of Scotland to national centres such as Inverness, Edinburgh, Glasgow or Aberdeen as appropriate. Low carbon aviation can support the delivery of a fairer more connected Scotland where a true alternative to long road journeys (such as the five hours from Skye to the central belt) are replaced by low carbon flights at a price that is affordable for all.

2. What can the Scottish Government do to help increase the use of sustainable aviation fuels?

The Scottish Government can help increase the use of sustainable aviation fuels firstly through the support of projects such as SATE and up to the point at which the new technology is approved. Thereafter the Government can seek to influence the delivery of a progressive taxation environment for the most sustainable fuels, provide additional indirect incentives and use the specification of PSOs to help deliver this transition.

There is an assumption that alternative fuels will reduce costs but it likely that this will not be the case, at least in the initial years, with hydrogen for example more expensive than current fuels. However, with the right early investment and coordination of infrastructure, the Highlands and Islands, with its access to surplus renewable energy, has an excellent opportunity to be at the forefront of supporting clean and efficient air travel.

Lastly it is important that the government introduces minimum blend levels sooner rather than later. Mandating minimum blend levels will help build up the SAF infrastructure which is in its infancy. Currently, only two countries in the world have SAF blending mandates: both Sweden and Norway have put in place a 1% SAF blending mandate for any aircraft refuelling in their territories. Next year, France will impose a similar 1% blending mandate.

In the US there are many types of incentives to blend SAF with fossil jet fuel, especially in California.

Looking further ahead, the European Commission is proposing in its Refuel EU aviation plan a 2% SAF mandate by 2025, 5% by 2030 and 63% by 2050, while the UK government announced a few months ago a target of 10% by 2030 and 75% by 2050.

However, and to be realistic, SAF currently accounts for only 0.05% of total aviation fuel demand in Europe. There is a mountain to climb both operationally, fiscally legislatively before a journey to deliver SAF can truly be said to have started.

3. What do you think the Scottish Government can do to help ensure a just transition to net-zero for the Scottish aviation sector?

A just transition to net zero for the aviation sector should ensure that connectivity to Scotlands islands is not just maintained but enhanced through the period of transition. A regional approach to achieving national targets is required to ensure that the role of lifeline air services in delivering core services such as health and education can still be delivered.

Existing policy levers provide an opportunity to influence the domestic aviation sector where, for example, PSO specification can be used to deliver desirable social and environmental outcomes.

As we look ahead, it is important that the government sets out how it intends to transition to net zero. By setting out the roadmap, it will give industry certainty around investment, airlines make long term plans and airports plan their infrastructure. Without the roadmap the approach will be piecemeal and inefficient at best.

4. Considering the future challenges and opportunities, what changes, if any, should we make to our approach to help achieve our aim for international connectivity?

Because of its relative peripheral location to key markets, Scotland - and the Highlands and Islands to an even greater extent - is, and will continue to be, heavily reliant on aviation for international connectivity. It is therefore essential that the Scottish Government policy reflects this challenge while adopting the sustainable travel hierarchy which we fully support. This can be achieved both through supporting the adoption of sustainable aviation fuels but also a radical shift to sustainable surface transport options to/from airports rather than the current model which actively encourages fly and drive options at all of Scotlands main airports.

The Highlands and Islands rely heavily on access to key hub airports to/from Inverness (primarily Heathrow but also Amsterdam, Gatwick and Manchester) for access to all these destinations. This has been highlighted in a number of evidence papers which HITRANS, HIAL and other regional partners have developed in response to the recent UK Aviation Strategy and Davies Commission

https://www.hitrans.org.uk/Documents/Aviation_2050_Highlands_and_Islands_Consultation_Response_June_2019.pdf

Along with Edinburgh, the Highlands and Islands is the top destination for international visitors to Scotland and yet it is more difficult for visitors to access much of the Highland mainland if they arrive at Glasgow or Edinburgh airports than if they transfer to Inverness via the Hub airports listed above.

As surface transport connectivity stands, much of the Highland mainland would prioritise the establishment of three daily services to Heathrow and two daily services to Amsterdam over improved direct connectivity to new short and long-haul destinations to Edinburgh and Glasgow.

Those Islands which have better connectivity to Glasgow or Edinburgh than Inverness require the timetable connections to these destinations to be of a frequency that enables onward connectivity throughout the day without excessively long layover times at Glasgow or Edinburgh. Similar to the need for Inverness to have security over its links to International Hubs, island and regional airports should have security of access to Glasgow and Edinburgh with peak time slots that enable day return trips. We understand countries such as Norway have regional policies which secure access to the capital, Oslo, before 0900. Securing access to the democratic and economic centres of Scotland would be a tangible outcome for island proofing the Aviation Strategy.

Priority	Short haul	Long haul
1	Germany	USA
2	France	China
3	Netherlands	Canada
4	Italy	Australia
5	Norway	Japan
6	Spain	
7	Switzerland	
8	Belgium	
9	Sweden	
10	Ireland	

5. Do you agree with the priority countries for short haul and long haul set out in the table above?
1. Yes
 - b. No
 - c. Don't know

We broadly agree with the list of short and long haul countries identified as priorities for improving international connectivity though India and Russia should be added to the list of long haul destinations given the significant growth in both business and tourism markets in these countries. Improved access to Denmark and Sweden as short haul destinations should also be encouraged given the comparatively shorter sector distances to Scotland making connectivity more attractive compared to competitor airports further south within the UK.

As per our response to Question 4 though, the priority routes above all others for both UK and international connectivity are to the key hub airports of Heathrow, Gatwick, Amsterdam and Manchester.

Such is the importance of the link to London Heathrow, we would like to see at least a double daily but preferably a thrice daily service secured through either a PSO mechanism or the backstop of this to be implemented if the commercial market should fail to provide adequate connectivity on this route.

In developing this response, HITRANS and HIAL have engaged with regional business organisations such as the Federation of Small Businesses, SCDI and the Chambers of Commerce who have highlighted how 'critical Scotland's domestic connectivity is for many sectors including oil, gas, offshore-wind and also plays an important part in connecting Scotland's remote, rural and island communities with other parts of Scotland and the UK' with the connectivity they provide all

the more essential given the 'significant challenges for businesses created by the unfit for purpose nature of our surface transport links (A9, A96 and Highland Mail Rail Line).'

6. Which other countries should we focus on in the:
 - a. Short term (next 2 years)
 - b. Medium term (2-5 years)
 - c. Long term (5 years plus)
7. How do we incentivise the use of more efficient aircraft, whilst still ensuring that we secure the routes Scotland needs?

See response to Q1. In some island contexts the cost of providing the infrastructure to facilitate the transition to alternative fuels only makes economic sense if multiple public and private users make that transition. The Scottish Government has a role to play in helping to ensure that all those services it manages are working collaboratively to address the challenges of transitioning to net zero.

As these alternative fuels become available to airlines, the Government should incentivise their use through the adoption of progressive taxation and mandating minimum blend levels.

8. What do you think about the idea of the Scottish Government purchasing new zero emission aircraft to lease to any airline operating routes in the Highlands and Islands?

Airlines have indicated that because the development of new technology in this area is likely to be so rapid in the coming years there is a risk that the Scottish Government could purchase assets that will be quickly superseded. They have also indicated that their preference would be to lease rather than purchase aircraft and that investment from the Scottish Government would be best focussed on supporting infrastructure such as the supply of Hydrogen rather than aircraft.

That said, a significant order for hybrid aircraft is the kind of stability that aircraft manufacturers existing and new require. American Airlines and others recognise the need to pump prime industry because without it product development will falter.

Given the relatively small and self-contained operation that is the Highlands and Islands network and our very specific targets we would encourage the Government to investigate partnering with suitable technology partners to bring net zero aviation to the Highlands and Islands.

9. What else can the Scottish Government do to achieve its aim of decarbonising scheduled flights within Scotland by 2040?

Less Demand for air services	Same level of demand for air services	More demand for air services
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Greater use of video-conferencing and other technology • Telemedicine • Focus on higher spending tourists rather than volume • Improved facilities on islands • High speed rail • Medical supplies and post delivered by drone • Improvement in ferry provision and/or fixed links 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Around the same number of people living and working in the Highland and Islands • No changes to current travel patterns • No changes to how goods are transported 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More people living and working in the Highlands and Islands (e.g. because of growth of the energy sector, more home and remote working, more small business start-ups etc.) • More tourists • Lower costs as a result of using electric/hydrogen aircraft • Modal shift from ferry to plane • More goods transported in belly hold/ dedicated air freight

10. What air services do you think are needed to meet the needs of people living in and visiting the Highland and Islands in the scenarios set out above:

- less demand for air services
- same level of demand for air services
- more demand for air services?

In the context of domestic aviation, the question should be reframed and objective led - What level of air connectivity is needed to enable people living and visiting the Highlands and Islands to compete economically and thrive?

The discussion paper accompanying this Consultation highlights that good air connectivity is a key factor when people choose to make Scotland their home with migration boosting long term GDP per capita. These same factors apply at an island and regional level with good connectivity an essential element to retaining existing population levels and encouraging in-migration and investment.

A similar exercise undertaken for the Routes and Services Methodology applied to each island/peninsula to establish the level of ferry service should be applied at a multi modal level.

HITRANS Regional Transport Strategy outlines a transport network that provides *good transport connections* for each business in each community to grow and thrive. Namely - *Communities across the region should be able to access / be accessed from the Central Belt within 2-3 hours by*

rail or air. Some more remote areas may need to travel to an airport or main centre to start / end the journey, perhaps by local plane or ferry, but the onward connection to / from the central belt will allow a day's business to be undertaken.

Where this cannot be provided by surface transport options then it is essential that air services provide this connectivity. A holistic objective led approach is required. Even at an inter-island level like the Orkney Islands, the Outline Business Case for transport to the outlying Northern Islands has identified that the introduction of a third islander aircraft along with improvements to landside infrastructure as the most cost-effective means of meeting some of these islands transport connectivity.

An Aviation Strategy for domestic aviation should be developed in parallel to the Islands Connectivity Plan with local stakeholders integral to the development process rather than just as consultees.

11. Most air services in the Highlands and Islands are delivered on a commercial basis. How can the Scottish Government best work with the private sector to deliver the air services you think are needed?

All air services to the Highlands and Islands are supported either directly or indirectly, be that through Air Passenger Duty relief, the Air Discount Scheme or a Public Service Obligation (PSO).

The starting question for the Aviation Strategy should be an objective and Islands led review of what type of network and service level we would like to see and then work out how this is most efficiently delivered.

The HITRANS Regional Transport Strategy sets out the ability for each regional centre to access and be accessed from Scotland's main urban centres with a transport network that enables passengers to undertake a meaningful day return in each direction.

Airlines have highlighted that the ability to deliver this service on some routes is likely to substantially increase the cost of providing the service. E.g. some sectors to Scottish Islands are fitted in the middle of the day with the aircraft being deployed on more profitable routes at peak times. They also cite that departures at the main airports are more expensive at peak times and that there are increased operational and staffing costs in serving early departures or late arrivals from island airports.

However, while some of these issues are challenging, they all assume deployment in the context of the status quo and surely there is the responsibility of Aviation Strategy to take an objective led approach with the objectives then informing the policies and priorities needed to support their delivery.

12. How effective do you think the Air Discount Scheme has been at addressing high airfares?

The Air Discount Scheme has been successful to an extent in addressing high airfares for those that are eligible within the scheme but (and it is a large but) the success has therefore been limited. The more laissez faire approach taken when compared to alternatives such as the PSO mechanism has meant wider fare inflation is less controlled. There is still a significant element of passengers having to pay extremely high air fares for what are lifeline routes.

Where the alternative journey may involve a three hour ferry journey followed by an hour bus and then a further three and a half hours on a coach or train then the cost of travelling to and from these destinations shouldn't be so prohibitive as to discourage business travel or even discretionary inbound travel.

The current model also perpetuates a high variation between routes with a like for like search for Barra – Glasgow booked a week in advance being £162 while a journey on the same day from Stornoway to Glasgow coming in at £450 and Kirkwall to Glasgow £410.* Figures which from our experience are representative of these routes but where research would help to understand the average fares and the economics driving them.

On routes such as those from Wick to Edinburgh and Aberdeen where there was a heavier reliance on business travel the uptake has been lower and therefore undermined the viability of these routes.

*Represents a single example where research to compare average fares by route would create an evidence base to help inform the development of policy.

13. How can the Scottish Government improve the Air Discount Scheme?

In recent years, HITRANS has developed a costed business case for the extension of the Air Discount Scheme.

https://www.hitrans.org.uk/Documents/HITRANS_-_AIR_DISCOUNT_SCHEME_RESEARCH.pdf

https://www.hitrans.org.uk/Documents/Appraisal_of_Inclusion_of_All_Business_Travel_Within_the_Air_Discount_Scheme.pdf

[These papers set out the costs involved for extending ADS to different sectors including business travel and also the public sector](#)

14. What do you think about complementing the current operating model with an on demand service, such as air taxi?
15. What do you think about an open charter service?

The option for open charter services is already available where there is demand for it.

16. In addition to on demand and open charter services are there any operational models you think could be used? If so, what?

Operator	HIAL	Shetland Islands Council	Orkney Islands Council	Argyll & Bute Council
Airports	Barra	Fair Isle	Eday	Coll
	Benbecula	Foula	North Ronaldsay	Colonsay
	Campbeltown	Out Skerries	Papa Westray	Oban
	Dundee	Papa Stour	Sanday	
	Inverness	Tingwall	Stronsay	
	Islay	Whalsay	Westray	
	Kirkwall			
	Stornoway			
	Sumburgh			
	Tiree			
	Wick John O' Groats			

17. What are the strengths and weaknesses of the operational model set out in the table above?

In addition to the multitude of authorities overseeing airports, there are even more bodies responsible for PSOs with CNeS supporting the PSO between Stornoway and Benbecula and The Highland Council currently tendering for a PSO to/from Wick John o Groats Airport. A review of this model to understand if there are opportunities to improve provision without increasing costs would be appropriate and allow oversight of the arrangements to ensure best value was achieved. Almost all the airports highlighted in the table above support lifeline services to the communities they serve. It is therefore essential that any new model must ensure that there is local accountability in the governance structure.

18. What changes, if any, do you think should be made to these governance arrangements to improve services?

HITRANS and HIAL welcome a review of governance arrangements but, as in responses to earlier questions, the question posed should be asking what services are needed to support the local economies being served and then how do we deliver an affordable air network to deliver this outcome? Only by taking this objective led based approach will we arrive at the most suitable model.

HITRANS would welcome a collaborative approach to addressing these core issues being adopted with involvement from all the key stakeholders including Local Authorities, Regional Transport Partnerships, Transport Scotland, HIAL and Airlines.

Work is required establish an understanding of the baseline OPEX and CAPEX costs involved in delivering the current network of PSO services but also those indirectly supported through the Air Discount Scheme.

On many of the island routes, a high level of demand for the services is health related with demand from both passengers and carers but also for transfer of staff to and from healthcare facilities on these islands. Through improved engagement between transport operators and the NHS there are opportunities to improve services and reduce costs.

19. What changes, if any, do you think should be made to these governance arrangements to reduce running costs?

In the first instance we would refer you to the answers to Q's 17 and 18.

However, while we see the merit in a comprehensive review of governance arrangements there are a number of areas where there are opportunities to improve governance.

Even with six authorities administering PSOs there are opportunities for collaboration over their procurement. By aligning timescales and ensuring that services and therefore airport operating hours are aligned, improvements can be made to both the services and cost of delivering them. Further opportunities to improve efficiency exist in areas ranging from marketing and promotion to the provision of fire equipment and cross training of staff.

We recognise the likely push back to any form of centralisation but also recommend that at the very least the various agencies involved in either the provision of aviation, of aviation support, of airports, and of technical expertise meet to fully evaluate how the services could be provided in a more coordinated and strategic way, without losing local control.

20. Do you think the Scottish Government should encourage airlines to offer plane - plus train tickets?

Yes / No / Don't know

HITRANS welcomes proposals for the Scottish Government to encourage airlines to offer plane plus train tickets but highlight that this should be extended to other modes – especially bus - but also to car clubs or bike hire. International best practice offers a number of examples that could improve the end-to-end journey experience for passengers but also help reduce the carbon footprint of surface access to and from airports.

Airlines currently benefit from partnering with car hire firms and are therefore actively disincentivised from promoting greener surface transport solutions while the model of revenue at airports is driven by parking charges from short and long stay car parks. More than words of encouragement will be needed to address these issues.

HITRANS has already worked on improving surface transport solutions in at different airports from supporting improved bus services to e-bike hire in Barra. We are keen to work with other stakeholders including airlines to pilot joint ticketing proposals at airports within the HITRANS region. The fact that all passengers on any given flight are likely to be booking the main element of their journey on a single platform should open up the ability to offer them an attractive solution for the first and last <10 miles of their journeys as well.

21. If yes, how do you think the Scottish Government could best do this?

As per our response to question 20, we need to encourage airlines to promote surface transport alternatives that are more in line the Scottish Governments Sustainable travel hierarchy.

Expanding the PlusBus model to an air + Bus or Rail ticket would seem like a logical first step for locations where a plusbus scheme is already in operation.

International best practice offers a variety of models such as the airport transfer shuttle operating at Budapest Airport. With the support of the airlines, there should be scope for similar models to be developed in locations such as Stornoway, where the majority of passengers are travelling from Stornoway itself but there is a limited schedule service connecting to the airport. If passengers could book a shuttle bus which could be reserved when booking the flight or on the flight itself, it should be possible to offer passengers an attractive door to door service.

All existing bus services to island airports are operated with support from the local authority. Current bus funding support mechanisms like the national concessionary fare scheme have an in-built unfairness for rural and island areas and a targeted support for a public transport solution that could provide an attractive alternative enabling passengers in remoter areas to leave their private car at home would offer one such positive compensatory measure.

https://www.hitrans.org.uk/Documents/Rural_Bus_Service_Support_and_Funding_Case_for_Change.pdf

22. What more, if anything, do you think the Scottish Government can do to help promote efficient and sustainable airfreight transport?

HITRANS welcomes the review of the crucial role of airfreight to many businesses in the Highlands and Islands and to work with Scottish government and HIE to understand how changes may reduce both the cost of airfreight but also improve the logistics and timescales and carbon emissions involved.

Similar to the transition to sustainable fuels, there is an important role for the Scottish Government to support pilots unmanned aircraft technology being used for freight such as the West Coast UAV Innovation Logistics and Training Hub project underway at Oban Airport.

Oban airport is a key airfield in the west coast of Scotland providing essential transport services for the region.

The significance of Oban Airport and its strategic importance during Covid-19 was recognised by the military who established a base there for the RAF Tactical Support Wing to serve the west coast of Scotland. Further to this and during Covid-19, Skyports, a UK-based drone delivery company in partnership with Argyll and Bute Health and Social Care Partnership, undertook test trials to utilise Unmanned Aerial Vehicle (UAV) to transport medical supplies from Oban over to the islands of Mull and Coll. This initiative was in direct response to the UK Government's call for help to address and mitigate the health impacts of the COVID-19 outbreak.

Building on their experience, Skyports have been assisting Argyll and Bute Council with the outline case, for a project which forms part of the local authority's Rural Growth Deal, for the provision of a West Coast UAV Innovation Logistics and Training Hub at Oban airport.

The possibilities of using UAV technologies in the delivery of NHS services is thought to be extensive. The use of UAV to transport medical products (such as blood, laboratory samples, medical equipment 2 or supplies) can help to make health care services more time and cost

effective, improving service quality. In the longer term, people could take urgent diagnostic tests at home, at a chemist or a doctor's surgery and rely on a drone to collect samples. Similarly, prescriptions and personal medical devices could be delivered by drone. Potential benefits include time, cost savings, improved efficiency of medical logistics, quicker test results and improved health outcomes for patients. The location of Oban airport and the inner and outer hebridean islands makes the project significant as a test bed in UAV trials.

Royal Mail are also interested in UAVs as part of their service delivery and have undertaken UAV trials with Skyports from Oban out to the island of Mull.

SATE has already established itself at the forefront of future aviation. Recent successes include Ampaire demonstrating the first hybrid-electric flights in Scotland and Windracers trialling autonomous flights for delivering cargo between Kirkwall and North Ronaldsay.

Windracers have developed and flight-tested their ULTRA Unmanned Air Vehicle and obtained Beyond Visual Line Of Sight (BVLOS) permissions from the CAA. Their current aircraft can operate with 100kgs over a range of 1000kms. They will build on their successful trial flights to test and investigate developing the hub and spoke transport model to support local dispersed communities with logistical issues by providing air freight transport solutions.

SATE will now expand to create the UK Centre of Excellence for Sustainable Regional Aviation Systems, enabling pre-commercial demonstrations of novel aviation technologies with proven use cases to commercialise clean innovation in a real-world environment.

23. What else do you think the Aviation Strategy should try to achieve?

An early transition to alternative fuels for domestic services which are served by the type of aircraft which will initially benefit could transform the role of aviation in serving Scotland's islands and the most remote parts of the mainland making routes more economically and environmentally sustainable. This could lead to fundamental shifts in the preferred mode of travel to and from these destinations. Given the timeframe of the Strategy, scenario planning for these changes should be considered.

For example, these developments support the case for re-establishing scheduled air services to Skye (Skye and Lochalsh is the population centre with the longest journey times to Scotland's main urban centres) and aligns with Rural Growth Deal plans for Oban Airport.

As a result of the UK withdrawal from the EU Satellite system, landing minima at airports such as Barra have increased. This urgently needs addressed as it not only impacting on the reliability and cost of existing routes but is a barrier to new opportunities at airports such as Oban and Skye.