

Item:

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## **Report to Partnership Meeting 24 June 2022**

### **RESEARCH AND STRATEGY DELIVERY**

#### **Rural Bus Service Support and Funding**

#### **Purpose of Report**

To update Board Members and Advisors on developments around Rural Bus Service Support and Funding related to HITRANS Case for Change report which was published on the HITRANS website on 24 March 2021 at the following link:

[https://hitrans.org.uk/documents/Rural\\_Bus\\_Service\\_Support\\_and\\_Funding\\_Case\\_for\\_Change.pdf](https://hitrans.org.uk/documents/Rural_Bus_Service_Support_and_Funding_Case_for_Change.pdf)

#### **Summary of Report**

HITRANS completed a piece of work in 2021 that sought to make the case for funding interventions to allow ambitions around mode shift from the private car to be realised in rural and island areas. This followed on from the National Transport Strategy's positive Vision that commits to be a Transport Strategy for all of Scotland recognising the different needs and challenges the country faces, reaching out beyond the silos that exist in terms of responsibility of Scotland's transport infrastructure, services and assets. Local bus services across Scotland have been in sharp decline for the last 15 years.

HITRANS report recognised issues affecting rural bus which stemmed from a reduction in funding to support local transport authorities ability to maintain let alone extend local bus service provision and the relative paucity of funding for rural bus in comparison to support for interventions in favour of urban passenger transport.

The report set out a number of recommended actions that Scottish Government could take that would allow Transport Scotland, RTPs, Local Authorities and Community Transport groups to work together to deliver a pipeline approach that would make a real and lasting difference for sustainable travel in rural areas. The recommendations are listed below:

- a) Recognition that the national concessionary fare scheme has an in-built unfairness for rural areas. Consider utilising the Bus Service Operator Grant as a mechanism to deliver equity for rural bus services.
- b) Introduce a Rural Transport Fund delivered at RTP level
- c) Introduce RTP capital passenger transport grant. In the past HITRANS received £3.5m each year to deliver these types of improvements and this level of support would allow us to make a real difference to the infrastructure, interchange and travel information experience offered to passengers.
- d) Introducing an Enhanced DRT funding stream administered at RTP level and developed collaboratively with local authorities and community anchor groups.
- e) Work with bus manufacturers to develop an affordable multi-purpose accessible bus design that is fit for purpose for rural bus service.
- f) Investigate the potential for more regional collaboration on Public Transport and DRT management and operations.

The report was shared with the Cabinet Secretary for Transport, Infrastructure and Connectivity who instructed officials to meet with HITRANS officers and Chair. This meeting took place but there has been no subsequent engagement with HITRANS.

## **Rural Bus Service Recovery**

The move towards greater workplace flexibility and home working offers an opportunity to reduce congestion but we need to encourage more of those still travelling to do so sustainably. The ambition in line with the National Transport Strategy should be for Active Travel and Public Transport to grow to higher levels than before the pandemic. With Scottish Government policy clearly promoting sustainable travel and a commitment to reduce vehicle kms by 20% by 2030 it is essential that tools are available to develop alternative ways to travel for every journey and in every part of Scotland.

While a commitment has been made to a £1Million Community Bus Fund this already seemed to be an inadequate sum to effect change for rural bus. The latest information shared with partner Councils is that this fund will now be directed to develop the case for local authority bus fleets and municipal operation and not as expected to support the delivery of bus services.

The Active Travel Transformation programme and significant increase in Government intervention to support this provides a route map to increasing activity through active travel. A similar message is needed for Shared Mobility and Passenger Transport. The earlier HITRANS paper attempted to capture the challenge from the perspective of this region however the issue is being felt throughout rural Scotland. Officers have considered how we can take forward this issue to ensure constructive engagement with Transport Scotland and Ministers. It is evident that the HITRANS paper in itself had limited impact on policy. It is therefore suggested that we seek to engage other RTPs, ATCO (the Association of Transport Coordinating Officers), SCOTS, CPT (Confederation of Passenger Transport) and bus user representatives to develop a Rural Bus Action paper that seeks to set out a Transformation Programme that improves connectivity in rural and island areas giving a true alternative to the car.

## **Recommendation**

1. Members are asked to note the report.
2. Members are asked to approve officer engagement on the development of a broad alliance to develop a Rural Bus Transformation Programme.

## **Risk Register**

### RTS Delivery

Impact - Positive

Comment – The report sets out the case for change in support for rural passenger transport ensuring this offers a fairness in support to rural areas when compared to interventions in urban areas.

### Policy

Impact - Positive

### Financial

Impact – Positive

Budget line and value – This item sets out the case for increased support of rural passenger transport services recognising that this must fit within a constrained budget environment but that it would strongly fit with the NTS 2 Vision and priorities.

Equality

Impact – Positive

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<b>Date:</b>	16 <sup>th</sup> June 2022