

Report to Partnership Board 10 November 2023

RESEARCH AND STRATEGY DELIVERY

Community Bus Fund

PURPOSE OF REPORT

This report provides members with an update on the launch of the Community Bus Fund

BACKGROUND

The Scottish Government launched the Community Bus Fund (CBF) on 22nd September 2023.

The CBF will provide funding of over £5m this financial year to support local authorities to explore the full range of options set out in the Transport (Scotland) Act 2019, including municipal bus services. This funding round has been split between both capital and resource funding with allocations of £5 million capital and £0.75 million in resource funding covering the 2023-24 period.

Capital Funding

The capital funding allocations to each Local Authority (See table in Appendix A) have been automatically distributed through the General Capital Grant to all local authorities on a per capita basis based on levels of transport poverty as defined in the Transport Poverty in Scotland report developed by Sustrans (Transport Poverty in Scotland, August 2016). Below details the objectives for spend for the capital funding:

1. Connectivity to improve access to bus services, for example by upgrading bus stops and installing real time information electronic timetables.
2. Integration between transport modes, for example by installing infrastructure to support integration between modes, such as mobility hubs.
3. Trialling innovative transport solutions or improvements to encourage patronage or create efficiencies, for example by purchasing digital platforms to support Demand Responsive Transport.

Reporting on expenditure will be required to help inform future policy and budget allocations. The details for the reporting mechanisms in association with this grant will be discussed and agreed with COSLA and ATCO representatives following the launch.

HITRANS has had some initial discussions with local authority colleagues and offered our support to in implementing priorities that address the objectives of the fund including those where existing HITRANS manages existing contracts including Demand Responsive Transport, Real-time Passenger Information and other at stop infrastructure.

Resource Funding

In regard to the resource allocation of this fund (£750,000), Transport Scotland has invited Expressions of Interest from either local authorities or Regional Transport Partnerships for

pathfinder style projects aimed at supporting local authorities to complete initial feasibility and preparatory work required for the 2019 Act. The expressions of Interest will be used to identify pathfinder style projects which will complete initial feasibility and preparatory work. Transport Scotland highlight that these projects will provide valuable evidence of level of interest and identify the potential need for support to complete preparatory work to allow local authorities to begin exploration of Transport (Scotland) Act 2019 Powers for future years.

HITRANS has submitted an application to the resource fund for £35,000 to develop an information and ticketing strategy for the HITRANS area. If successful, HITRANS will work in partnership with our five partner local authorities and transport operators to review existing information and ticketing provision within our area with a view to developing an action plan for delivering improvements that will realise core objectives of both the National Transport Strategy 2 and the 2019 Transport Act.

Engagement with COSLA

At the partnership meeting in Orkney, members agreed that HITRANS Partnership Director should write to COSLA to welcome the establishment of the Community Bus Fund and to explore opportunities for it address challenges around transport funding for rural Scotland in general and the Highlands and Islands in particular as identified in HITRANS report on this issue (Rural Bus Service Support and Funding, 2021). A copy of the letter is attached in Appendix B to this report.

RISK REGISTER

RTS Delivery

Impact - Positive

Comment – Local bus services support a number of RTS priorities relating the Public Transport and access to employment, education, healthcare and social inclusion.

Policy

Impact – Positive

Comment – HITRANS report on the Rural Bus Service Support and Funding (March 2021) sets out the variety of challenges facing local bus services not just in the Highlands and Islands but across rural Scotland. The Community Bus Fund offers an opportunity to support local bus services that were unable to benefit from other recent national funding streams.

Financial

Impact – Neutral

Comment – HITRANS has submitted an application to undertake a ticketing and information strategy to the resource element of the Community Bus Fund which offers 100% grant fund to successful applications.

Equality

Impact – Positive

Comment – Local Bus services help improve access to many of the most vulnerable groups within the area and also provide what can be described as a lifeline service to those communities where the local bus service is the only form of public transport available.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Partnership is asked to:

1. Note the report

Report by:	Neil MacRae
Designation:	Partnership Manager
Date:	02/11/2023

Community Bus Fund – Capital Allocation

Local Authority	Allocation
Aberdeen City	£4,000
Aberdeenshire	£288,000
Angus	£110,000
Argyll & Bute	£233,000
City of Edinburgh	£11,000
Clackmannanshire	£121,000
Dumfries & Galloway	£422,000
Dundee City	£9,000
East Ayrshire	£323,000
East Dunbartonshire	£46,000
East Lothian	£98,000
East Renfrewshire	£36,000
Falkirk	£103,000
Fife	£478,000
Glasgow City	£30,000
Highland	£547,000
Inverclyde	£25,000
Midlothian	£101,000
Moray	£215,000
Na h-Eileanan Siar	£115,000
North Ayrshire	£146,000
North Lanarkshire	£231,000
Orkney	£35,000
Perth & Kinross	£199,000
Renfrewshire	£51,000
Scottish Borders	£243,000
Shetland	£44,000
South Ayrshire	£171,000
South Lanarkshire	£303,000
Stirling	£103,000
West Dunbartonshire	£8,000
West Lothian	£151,000
Scotland	£5,000,000

Appendix B



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05 October 2023

Ms Jane O'Donnell and Mr Robert Nicol
COSLA
Verity House
19 Haymarket Yards
Edinburgh
EH12 5BH

Dear Jane and Robert,

Rural Transport Funding

In writing today my aim is to start discussion around transport funding for rural Scotland in general and the Highlands and Islands in particular.

This follows a discussion at the HITRANS Partnership Board in Orkney on 15th September on the Community Bus Fund where a number of concerns and frustrations were raised by officers and elected members about the failure of this fund to offset the disparity in bus funding between urban and rural areas. The action of the meeting was that Members asked me to write to you to raise the concerns of HITRANS and our five partner Councils to see if there is more HITRANS can do to support the process of ensuring rural transport needs in general and the Highlands and Islands in particular are more effectively captured in the future in any emerging funding mechanisms to address the challenges we face?

At the HITRANS meeting reference was made to the fact that the large Bus Partnership Fund with its focus on bus priority will inevitably favour urban areas and in particular it will be skewed towards the largest urban centres while the availability of more bus services means that the national entitlement card attracts up to 9 times more use for a City of Edinburgh Council NEC holder than an Orcadian one.

A general concern noted on the Community Bus Fund was that the expectation taken from the Bute House Agreement was that this fund would be available to support rural bus services. This would have been welcome as service networks and passenger numbers have been in steady decline as a result of pressures on local government funding alongside an increased operating cost for those services secured by Council contract.

Instead, we have a capital fund that is distributed 32 ways relying on a Transport Poverty Study that is dated and was never intended to inform the direction of spend. This is supplemented by a revenue fund limited not to supporting rural transport services but to bring in consultants to prepare pathfinder projects for how local authorities can utilise the powers made available to them through the Transport (Scotland) Act 2019.

The evidence of the unfitness of the Sustrans Transport Poverty Study as a tool to fairly direct funding is clear in the capital allocations each local authority is to receive. The comparison of the Orkney Islands allocation of £35,000 with

the Comhairle nan Eilean Siar allocation of £115,000 is but one clear example that this formula has singularly failed to capture public transport need in a rural context where SIMD datasets does not separate issues in smaller islands like Papa Westray from the data for Kirkwall. I have picked these two local authority examples as they are HITRANS partner Councils.

HITRANS prepared a report on Rural Bus Service Support and Funding in 2021. The report can be downloaded at this [link](#) and I enclose a pdf copy of it with this letter. The report was approved by the five HITRANS partner Councils and was shared with Transport Scotland at the time of publication. The paper 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. The paper captures the impact on rural bus services cross Scotland over the last 15 years and set out a number of recommended actions for Government to consider. One of which was to establish a Rural Transport Fund. No recommendation was made on how this might be calculated but our expectation would have been that the starting point would be the formula used for the Rural Transport Fund that successfully dispensed funding to local authorities from 1998 to 2008.

I appreciate we will need to make the best of the Community Bus Fund this financial year but would welcome the opportunity to work with you both in pursuing a fair funding settlement for local public transport funding support. HITRANS (with support from our five partner Councils) submitted a proposal to the Democracy Matters call for proposals under the Local Governance Review and I believe this opportunity continues to enjoy support of our partner Councils and could be a useful vehicle for greater subsidiarity in the delivery of investment in a number of areas as outlined in our Rural Bus paper.

Yours sincerely,



Ronald Robertson
Partnership Director