

News release – for immediate release

**Strategic Transport Projects Review  
HITRANS response to Minister's Statement to Parliament 10 Dec 08**

HITRANS, the Regional Transport Partnership for the five Council areas in the Highlands and Islands, welcomes the announcement by Stewart Stevenson, Minister for Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change of the completion of the Strategic Transport Projects Review by Transport Scotland. We will now study the findings of the Review to better understand its implications for the Highlands and Islands. We welcome the clear recognition that there is a need for investment in the Highlands and Islands transport network as shown by the significant level of funding identified against projects in this region. In developing this Review to a point where particular projects are to be delivered we look forward to working closely with our local government partners to advise and support Government.

On initial sight we welcome the proposals to improve rail services between Inverness to Aberdeen and Inverness to the Central Belt. This will encourage modal shift within these corridors. We equally support the pledge to improve the A96 between Nairn and the A9 as this will enable economic development within the Inner Moray Firth, and the proposed dualing of the A9 between Perth and Inverness although we would wish to discuss the proposed programming to ensure the first sections progressed deliver the greatest benefits for economic growth and road safety.

HITRANS are concerned by the limited commitments to improve the A82 between Glasgow and Inverness which do not appear to be of sufficient scale to be the catalyst to deliver economic growth at the rate the West Highlands and Islands desperately need. The other strategic routes west of the A82, which serve large areas of the Highlands and Islands, are simply to be managed on a route by route basis with no substantial investments to improve access identified.

We welcome the commitment to look at introducing dual carriageway from Inverness to Nairn but are concerned that the important bypassing of the key settlements of Elgin and Keith is a missed opportunity in reducing end to end journey time between Inverness and Aberdeen.

The links to the North Highlands are vital to the nation's economy with the ever greater importance of Caithness and Orkney to the development of renewable energy particularly centred on the Pentland Firth. We are concerned that this important corridor has not attracted any improvement as part of the review.

HITRANS however welcomes the commitment from the Minister to engage with Stakeholders including Councils and Regional Transport Partnerships to set priorities for investment from 2012.

Duncan MacIntyre, the Chair of HITRANS said, "We have waited for some time for the conclusion of this process and we will now have to take time to study the findings and establish how the Review fits with our regional needs. It appears at first sight that record levels of investment could be made to our transport network although this could perhaps be better focused and we look forward to working with our local government partners

and Scottish Government to ensure the appropriate interventions are progressed as soon as possible to support the Government's national purpose."

"We are encouraged by the opportunity for stakeholders to engage with Government in developing effective integrated and sustainable transport services and networks across the Highlands and Islands and look forward to working with Government to achieve our common aims."

**Ends**