

# HI·LIGHTS

NEWSLETTER SPRING 2023

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## WELCOME

Welcome to the spring edition in 2023 of HITRANS *HI·LIGHTS*, our newsletter which keeps you informed about our work.

More detailed information is available on our website: [www.hitrans.org.uk](http://www.hitrans.org.uk) and Twitter @HITRANS\_RTP

## STUDY WILL HIGHLIGHT BEST OPTIONS FOR NEW TRAINS IN THE HIGHLANDS

Consultancy support is to be commissioned to assist in formulating a specification for new trains that we would like to see in our area, with particular focus on the new rural, scenic trains. Emphasis will be on the customer experience, modular layout, cycle and catering provision etc. The background to the study is that in August last year, ScotRail announced its intention to procure new decarbonised trains, replacing 65% of its train fleet (around 675 carriages) between 2027-2035. As part of this programme, SRT will decarbonise our entire train fleet helping Scottish Government deliver a key milestone in transitioning Scotland to a net zero economy. All existing diesel trains will be withdrawn and replaced with new trains powered by overhead electric wires, batteries or hydrogen.

## SOUND OF BARRA/HARRIS FERRY SERVICES - CASE FOR TIMETABLE ENHANCEMENTS

Partnership Board members are hopeful that a review of the Sounds of Barra / Harris ferry services will persuade Transport Scotland to enhance timetables for the benefit of local communities. Traffic forecasts indicate the potential for significant increase in demand on the services between Barra - Eriskay and Berneray - Leverburgh and that some existing trips could now be made at more suitable times, saving both time and costs.

Reference Economic Consultants were appointed by HITRANS, CnES and HIE to undertake the commission with the overall objective of producing an assessment of the socio-economic impacts of timetable enhancements. The work has involved detailed consultation with both Transport Scotland and Cal Mac to help fully understand the operational constraints and opportunities for the timetable including crewing, and any knock on impacts of potential changes. It has also involved detailed analysis of existing carryings and the types of trip being made.

## CASE FOR CHANGE IN IMPROVING TRANSPORT IN THE HIGHLANDS AND ISLANDS: Public Consultation open until 8th May

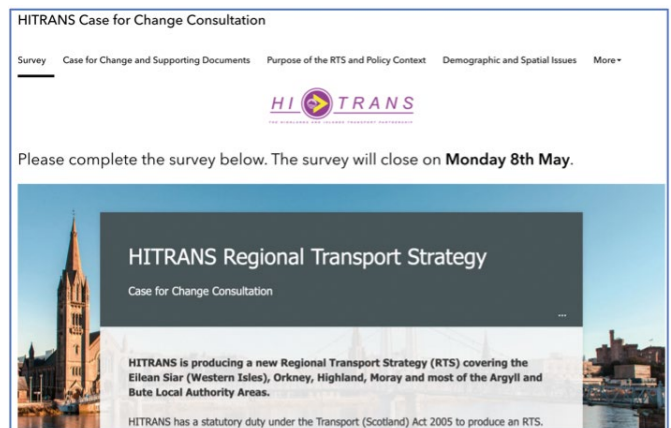
HITRANS, the transport partnership for the Highlands and Islands, is seeking the views of the public on their draft new Regional Transport Strategy which covers the Highland, Moray, Western Isles, Orkney, and most of the Argyll and Bute local authority areas.

Under the Transport (Scotland) Act 2005, HITRANS has a statutory duty to produce a Regional Transport Strategy, which sets the strategic framework for the development of transport, both within and to/from other areas of Scotland over the next 20 years.

Stage one of the three-stage process is to establish a Case for Change, which identifies the transport challenges encountered in such a large and rural area and establishes a set of strategy objectives to address these. An important element of the process is to seek comments and feedback from the public and other organisations.

An online survey has been created by consultants, Stantec, and it will remain open for comments until 5 pm on Monday 8th May. The link to the survey is: [hitrans-case-for-change-consultation-stantec.hub.arcgis.com/pages/survey](https://hitrans-case-for-change-consultation-stantec.hub.arcgis.com/pages/survey)

Those responding must be 16 years of age or over. If you require assistance with completing the questionnaire, please get in touch via [HITRANS@stantec.com](mailto:HITRANS@stantec.com). The link to the consultation for the Regional Transport Strategy is: [hitrans-case-for-change-consultation-stantec.hub.arcgis.com](https://hitrans-case-for-change-consultation-stantec.hub.arcgis.com)



Ranald Robertson, Director of HITRANS, said: “The Regional Transport Strategy aims to deliver connectivity across the region which enables sustainable economic growth and helps communities to actively participate in economic and social activities. The strategy will guide our priorities for action and spending over forthcoming years. Consulting the public is a vital element of the process and I would encourage as many people as possible to respond to the Case for Change.”

The next stage will be an options appraisal, which involves developing and appraising a set of options that help resolve the transport and associated issues identified and deliver the strategy objectives. The outputs from this process will then be developed into a final Regional Transport Strategy.

## PROJECT NEPTUNE CONSULTATION

Scottish Government Ministers have asked Angus Campbell, former Leader of Comhairle nan Eilean Siar and the current Chair of the Ferries Community Board, to lead engagement with local communities on Project Neptune to allow communities to provide input to the future direction of the governance and delivery of lifeline ferry services serving the Clyde and Hebrides. The primary focus of this review is the governance model applied to the Clyde and Hebrides

Ferry Service contract although we would expect any new approach taken to be applied in how the Northern Isles Ferry Service (NIFS) contract is also managed and delivered.

The hope is that Project Neptune offers a route to achieving greater subsidiarity in the delivery of ferry services instead of the centralised system that has evolved to date.

## 25-YEAR CAMPAIGN PAYS OFF FOR FRANK AS NEW RAIL STOP OPENS AT INVERNESS AIRPORT

No one was more delighted to welcome the opening of the new £42 million rail station on the Inverness – Aberdeen line at Dalcross, near Inverness, than our Partnership Manager, Frank Roach. It marked the conclusion of 25 years of lobbying and preparation for the much-needed project, which will serve the nearby airport, business park and the growing local community.



Frank had been chasing the dream of a rail station at the airport since 1998, when he first raised the idea with Highlands and Islands Airports Ltd. The station features two 490ft long platforms and a bridge with lifts linking the two platforms. It also features ramped active travel paths to both platforms and cycle parking on each platform for 20 bikes and a 64-space car park, 10 with electric vehicle charging facilities.



Images of the new Inverness Rail Station in operation and ahead of the opening ceremony with Minister for Transport, Jenny Gilruth and Scotrail Chief Executive, Alex Hynes



## HYDROGEN TRAIN TRIAL FOR CAITHNESS?

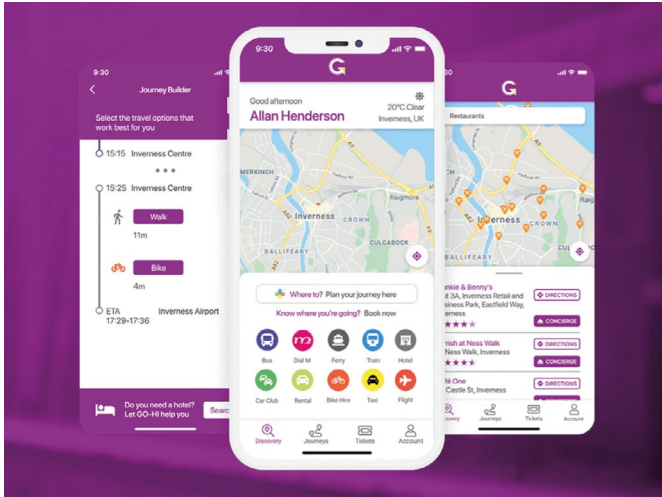
Partnership Manager Frank Roach gave Board members an update on a potential hydrogen train project, which could see a Porterbrook Hydroflex train introduced on the Wick-Thurso route. Frank believes the Wick-Thurso route is a good location for hydrogen train activity as there is capacity in the timetable, the route is remotely signalled 24 hours per day, has no tunnels, is surrounded by renewable energy assets, has a history of energy engineering expertise at Dounreay and has space for stabling and maintenance at Georgemas Junction.

Using Hydroflex, which has almost completed all certification for mainline work, would be a sensible way to develop understanding on fuelling, maintenance and regular main line services which would then help inform Transport Scotland's procurement of fleets to replace the 156/158 fleets.

Frank also says it fits in with the Far North Line Review Team plan for enhanced services between Helmsdale - Thurso to capitalise on the Flow Country environmental experience - currently going through UNESCO World Heritage Site designation. There is also synergy with Inverness Station Masterplan which is looking at the requirements for a hydrogen train maintenance depot.

The socio-economic impact on the area would be significant as the area becomes a key part of Scotland's hydrogen economy following Dounreay decommissioning. It is noted that 2024 is the 150th anniversary of the railway opening to Wick which could provide an opportunity for a Royal Train visit.

## NORTHLINK FERRY SERVICES ADDED TO GO-HI TRAVEL APP



NorthLink Ferries is the latest addition to the suite of travel services available via the pioneering Go-Hi travel app, which aims to improve accessibility of travel information and ease of payment. Passengers travelling to Orkney and Shetland can now plan, book and pay for their travel by air, ferry, rail and on Stagecoach buses in Orkney in the one-stop shop offered by Go-Hi.

HITRANS Director, Ranaid Robertson, said: “We are delighted to welcome NorthLink as one of our valued partners, and for Go-Hi to be the first MaaS platform in the UK that includes a fully integrated ferry offering. NorthLink provides a lifeline service to Orkney and Shetland, so making it more straightforward to link their services with others via Go-Hi will help to improve access to mobility in this rural area.”

Go-Hi was launched in June last year having been supported by the Scottish Government’s MaaS Investment Fund. The

app offers residents, visitors and business travellers in the Highlands and Islands of Scotland improved access to a wide range of public transport and travel services in one place, saving them time and money. Users can plan, book and pay for their door-to-door, multimodal journeys securely by debit card, credit card or PayPal in a single transaction using their smartphone or desktop device. Go-Hi offers instant access to book buses, trains, ferries, taxis, car clubs, car hire, bike hire, flights, hotels, and demand responsive travel (DRT) using a single app.

Serco-operated NorthLink joins the leading transport and accommodation providers already available via Go-Hi, including ScotRail, Stagecoach Bus, Brompton Bike Hire, Enterprise Car Club and Car Hire, West Coast Motors, Inverness Taxis and Loganair.

More new services are planned for Go-Hi with the next planned integrations being Scottish Citylink’s coach network and HITRANS’ new DRT service Moove Flexi, which offers digital booking of on-demand services across the Highlands and Islands.

Go-Hi is funded by the Scottish Government’s MaaS Investment Fund. The MaaS Investment Fund was established to test the concept of MaaS in Scotland. The pioneering Go-Hi project aims to deliver on the Scottish Government’s aspirations of lowering carbon emissions, improving health, and growing digital and innovation within Scotland by developing digital solutions to encourage and enable modal shift to public transport and active travel alternatives. For more information about the Go-Hi travel app visit [www.gohi.app](http://www.gohi.app).

## ISLANDS CONNECTIVITY PLAN UPDATE

The Islands Connectivity Plan (ICP) will replace the current Scottish Government Ferries Plan and will be broader in scope having regard to aviation, ferries and fixed links, as well as connecting and onward travel. ICP will include a high-level strategy covering all islands. Transport Scotland (TS) will develop detailed delivery plans for the Clyde & Hebrides (CHFS) and Northern Isles (NIFS) ferry networks which Ministers are responsible for.

These ICP delivery plans will include a Long-Term Plan for Vessels and Ports that will aim to improve resilience, reliability, capacity and accessibility, while increasing standardisation, cutting emissions and meeting the needs of island communities whilst providing value for money.

# EUROPEAN PROJECTS

We are currently involved in six active European projects, as well as providing support to the Low Carbon Travel & Transport (LCTT) projects. As of January 2023, our total budget for European projects is £ £4,372,387.

The PAV autonomous vehicle project continues to operate at Inverness Campus. Having now had a period of ongoing operations, surveys have been launched with the public to gather views and perceptions around autonomous vehicles and obtain opinions for future use cases.



We want to hear your feedback on Scotland's first driverless bus. Simply follow the QR code to open our survey.

The survey can be accessed here:

<https://www.surveymonkey.co.uk/r/ZD36WPLb> -

you do not need to have used the vehicle or be aware of the trial to complete the survey, as we are looking to obtain general views on autonomous vehicles and travel habits around the region.

We are also exploring the potential to extend the track to include more of the area that can be operated autonomously around Inverness Campus, with the view to assist traffic needs for staff and patients attending the new National Treatment Centre. We are also contributing to the AV Business Case report, analysing the cost-benefits of operating autonomous vehicles on a variety of routes around Inverness and studying best practice around Europe. In Orkney, we are extending our trial on Papa Westray until the PAV project ends on 1st March. This location has been selected due to the success so far and the potential to deliver goods between the market and the shop using a vehicle that has a higher payload, therefore acting as a good use case for the future. This will move us closer to establishing how these small AVs can work in remote and rural areas.



AV Pilot in operation at the Inverness Campus

The eHUBS project is progressing well and we are delighted to welcome Chris Finlay who has joined us as Mobility Hubs Project Officer and who will be leading on our work in the eHUBS and Smart Cities projects. eHUBS are on-street locations that bring together e-bikes, e-cargo bikes, e-scooters and/or e-cars, offering users a wide range of options to experiment and use in various situations. The idea is to give a high-quality and diverse offer of shared electric mobility services to dissuade citizens from owning private cars, resulting in cleaner, more liveable and pleasant cities.

The eHUBS project has a City focus meaning HITRANS initial work will focus on the Inverness City Region. This will allow us to import the European eMobility Hub concept to the Highlands and learn from the experience of delivering through this project to inform how we might pioneer Mobility Hubs in other parts of the region including the application of the concept in rural areas.



A Mobility Hub is a recognisable and easily accessible place which integrates different transport modes and supplements them with enhanced facilities, services and information aimed at

encouraging more sustainable travel, creating sense of place and improving journeys and travel choices.

The Initial project proposal identified the following locations as potentially strong locations to establish eHUBS, namely:-

- Inverness Station / Falcon Square
- Inverness Campus
- Inverness Leisure Centre / Aquadome, Inverness

## European Projects continued

- Eden Court Theatre
- Nature Scot, Great Glen House, Leachkin
- Loch Ness Hub, Drumnadrochit
- Raigmore Hospital
- Culloden
- Hilton, Inverness
- Elgin Station

The enhancement of physical mobility choices through the introduction of new modes/services will be strengthened by offering booking of all services through the GO-HI mobility as a service app. The GO-HI app will digitally present the range of travel choices available at each mobility hub and the app will be developed to include a new resource to allow users to find nearby mobility hubs.

As a further deliverable of the eHubs project there will be a larger number of Enterprise Car Club EV vehicles available throughout Inverness offering car share and continuing to build on the multimodal shared transport system based on the well-established European model.

**FASTER** continues to progress on time and to budget. We are in the process of drafting an installation works schedule, improving terms on the charger maintenance agreement and finalising the contract with our chosen supplier. We have also accepted the majority of SSE new connection quotes for the FASTER sites.

## GREEN FREEPORT STATUS CREATES OPPORTUNITIES FOR TRANSPORT UPGRADES

Great news for our area is the award of Green Freeport Status which will create opportunities for new jobs and significant investment in the Cromarty Firth and Inverness. A spin off will be the requirement for improved transport and infrastructure and we will be seeking discussions with the key partner agencies to ensure that these opportunities are maximised. Opportunity Cromarty Firth is led by Port of Cromarty Firth, Global Energy Group, the Port of Inverness,

Inverness Airport/Business Park and other sites around the Firth. The consortium has over 30 members including many from the energy sector. It aims to create 25,000 jobs and generate £4.8bn in investment, with a focus on floating offshore wind, nuclear and hydrogen.

# ACTIVE TRAVEL UPDATE

## Active travel in Inverness:

This is gaining momentum with the creation of mobility hubs at key locations in the city. Thanks to funding from The Interreg North-West Europe Programme as part of the eHUBS Project there has been further development of the HI-BIKE shared ebike scheme in Inverness.

HI-BIKE has been a great success since its launch in October 2021, with 3 charging docks strategically placed at Inverness Railway Station, UHI Inverness Campus and Great Glen House and 30.

Expansion of the scheme quickly gained momentum due to the high uptake of riders with 4 virtual stations (Eden court, School of Forestry Balloch, Raigmore Hospital and Inverness Leisure Centre) allowing riders to end rides at locations outwith a charging dock. 3 new charging docks were installed in October 2022 as part of the eHUBS project, with an additional 20 eBikes at Charleston Academy, Culloden Library and Hilton Community Centre.

In November 2022, after the expansion to 6 charging docks, there were a total of 1384 eBike hires. Hilton Community Centre became the 3rd most popular dock after only one month open, behind Inverness Railway and the UHI Inverness Campus as the two most popular.

Due to the success of the scheme, there has been noted interest by popular visitor centres to install virtual stations/ charging docks, which could see not only higher levels of shared transport usage for tourism but a cheaper greener alternative to single occupancy car jour-neys for staff.

## Bikes on Buses scheme extended:

A service introduced 18 months ago allowing commuters and tourists to take their bikes on popular Highland bus routes is to be extended to a wider range of routes. A bonus is the introduction of a booking service to guarantee a seat to accompany free carriage of the bike. The pilot service began in summer 2021, and is a partnership between operators Scottish Citylink and Stagecoach and is funded by HITRANS, the regional transport partnership for the Highlands and Islands.

Two reusable bike socks (covers) were made available on coach services provided by Stagecoach between Inverness and Caithness and Ullapool, and by Scottish Citylink on services between Inverness and Skye, Fort William and Ullapool. The covers fit easily over the wheels and chain mechanism, allowing the bike to be safely carried in the

luggage compartment of the coach. Data gathered during the pilot shows that the Ullapool/Inverness route was the most popular for bike carriage, mainly due to people returning from completing the Hebridean Way cycle route. The majority of feedback during the trial period was from potential customers wishing to have the comfort and security of being able to book their bike on the bus when they purchase their ticket.

As a result Scottish Citylink have introduced a booking service which enables travellers to book their bike on the bus at the same time they make their seat reservation, which is now live for travellers in 2023. Bike space can be reserved as an Additional Hold Item when buying a ticket online.

Routes to be included in the service are:

- o 917: Inverness / Portree
- o 919: Inverness / Fort William
- o 961: Inverness / Ullapool
- o 914: Fort William / Glasgow
- o 915: Uig / Fort William / Glasgow
- o 916: Uig / Fort William / Glasgow

## Active Travel Masterplan Delivery:

Construction of a new segregated cycle route in Campbeltown is underway. A storage container has been purchased for Moray Bothy, to give the Bothy a physical base in Cooper Park, Elgin.

## Active Travel Project Design:

Designs are underway for paths in North Islay and developing the initial proposals identified in the Tarbert Town Active Travel Study. For 2023/24 financial year HITRANS has submitted a bid to Transport Scotland for £1,100,000. Transport Scotland has announced an additional Active Travel Transformation Fund for 2023/24, which is available to Local Authorities for delivery of projects ready for construction. HITRANS has encouraged and supported our partner Local Authorities to apply to this fund for capital works. 2023-24 Programmes

## Board meetings schedule for 2023:

Looking ahead, we will meet in Inverness on 21 April; in Orkney on 15 September and in Moray on 10 November.

# HI LIGHTS

WE HOPE YOU ENJOYED  
the latest issue of our newsletter.



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