

Transport Committee
Wednesday 23 September 2026
6th Meeting, 2026 (Session 7)

Regional Transport Authorities

Background

1. At this morning's evidence session, the Committee will hear from some of Scotland's Regional Transport Partnerships (RTPs) and the Scottish Collaboration of Transportation Specialists (SCOTS).
2. Scotland has seven RTPs. These are statutory, independent bodies that bring together local authorities and regional stakeholders to coordinate, plan, and deliver regional transport strategies. Some RTPs are also responsible for the delivery of transport services. SCOTS is a collaborative body representing transport professionals from Scotland's 32 local authorities and seven RTPs.
3. The SPICe briefing paper outlines the issues the Committee may wish to explore.
4. This session is part of a series of introductory evidence sessions intended to inform the Committee's future work programme and develop Members' understanding of its remit.
5. The Committee has already taken evidence on [regional air travel](#), [bus services](#), and [rail services](#). It also held an introductory session with the Cabinet Secretary for Economy, Tourism and Transport on the [Scottish Government's transport priorities](#).
6. Next week, the Committee will hear from stakeholders involved in public procurement.
7. The findings from these sessions will help to inform the Committee's wider work programme.

Evidence session

8. The Committee will hear from—
 - Bruce Kiloh, Head of Policy and Planning, Strathclyde Partnership for Transport (STP);
 - Councillor Moraig Lyall, Chair, Shetland Transport Partnership (ZetTrans);
 - Mark Speed, Partnership Director, Tayside and Central Scotland Transport Partnership (TACTRAN); and

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- Ewan Wallace, Chair, Scottish Collaboration of Transportation Specialists (SCOTS).
9. Written submissions were received from the SPT, TACTRAN, and ZetTrans. These can be found at **Annexe A**.

Clerks to the Committee
September 2026

Written submission from the Strathclyde Partnership for Transport (SPT)

Introduction

Strathclyde Partnership for Transport (SPT) would like to thank the Committee for the opportunity to provide this written evidence in advance of our appearance on 23 September. This note provides information on who we are and what we do, our area, and our current key projects and priorities.

About SPT and the west of Scotland

SPT is the Regional Transport Partnership (RTP) for the west of Scotland, an area of about 7000 sq. km with a population of 2.3 million people living in 194 localities. The region covers about three-fifths of Scotland's urban land area but also has significant rural and remote characteristics with around one in every 5 residents living in small towns, rural areas and remote places.

Demographic trends vary across the region, with many rural and coastal areas experiencing depopulation whilst the working age population is increasing in parts of the greater Glasgow conurbation. The region has large challenges in poverty and inequalities, containing around two-thirds of the most income-deprived areas in Scotland, and general health and employment rates continue to fall below national averages. The regional economy has many sectors of national significance including life sciences, tourism, financial services, aerospace technologies and food and drink, supported by several Regional Economic Partnerships co-ordinating and directing support and investment in key sectors, innovation, labour markets and infrastructure.

Travel behaviours reflect this wider context, with stark inequalities in access to private cars between wealthier and less affluent areas and a high dependency on bus services in some communities, whilst transport accessibility is a key factor in rural experiences of deprivation and social isolation. Regional travel to work movements centre on Glasgow, but strategic labour market connectivity is also critical for pan-Lanarkshire movements, particularly Airdrie/Coatbridge- Motherwell – Hamilton – East Kilbride, inter-Ayrshire, and other key cross-boundary corridors such as Faslane/Helensburgh-Dumbarton-Clydebank and Barrhead-Paisley-Glasgow Airport. Further background evidence on the region can be found in our [RTS Case for Change](#).

It is within this wider context that SPT, as a 'model 3' RTP, plans, operates and delivers transport services, systems and infrastructure across the region in conjunction with our council partners, industry stakeholders and communities. A detailed list of SPT's current roles and responsibilities is set out in the appendix.

[A Call to Action: The Regional Transport Strategy for the west of Scotland](#) (RTS) is central to this, providing a framework to identify and develop delivery priorities for the improvement of the transport network across the region geared towards a low carbon future with higher use of public transport and more active travel. Working within this framework, SPT works with partners and communities towards:

- A transport system that is accessible, affordable, available and safe
- A public transport network that is a desirable and convenient choice for everyone
- A transport system that enables everyone to choose walking, cycling or wheeling for shorter, everyday journeys
- A decarbonised and cleaner transport system
- Better strategic connectivity to key economic centres and transport hubs - across the region and to other regions

Our RTS provides a long-term framework to 2038 with delivery priorities set out in 3-year delivery plans.

Our current projects and priorities

SPT has a strong track record of planning and delivering transport services and projects in partnership. Noted below is information on some of our current key projects and priorities: Subway Modernisation; Clyde Metro Case for Investment; Bus Reform and Franchising; Smart and Integrated Ticketing; and Transport Governance and the Regionalisation agenda. We also highlight current and future funding issues which potentially could impact on future delivery.

Subway modernisation

The modernisation of the Subway in Glasgow has ensured the world's third oldest underground railway system continues to support around 35,000 journeys a day around Scotland's largest city and provide an important interchange function for people using the wider bus and rail networks across the region.

The modernisation programme has delivered a smart ticketing system, fully refurbished stations, new rolling stock and a new operational control centre. Current works are focused on the installation of platform screen doors and improved real time information, whilst future deployment of Unattended Train Operation (UTO) continues to be developed.

The needs of the passenger are at the heart of modernisation. SPT consistently achieves very high levels of Subway passenger satisfaction, demonstrating the quality of service delivered whilst the modernisation programme is underway.

Bus reform and franchising

Bus is the most widely used form of public transport in the west of Scotland, with about one in five (20%) of adults using bus at least twice a week and around a million residents having access to 'free' bus travel through one of the national concessionary travel schemes.

The importance of bus to individuals and communities was widely recognised throughout the development of the new RTS, which establishes regional policy to enhance and integrate the bus network, provide reliable, attractive bus services and offer good value for money to passengers. The RTS policies also commit SPT to investigate the local bus powers available through the Transport (Scotland) Act 2019. Following approval of the RTS, SPT committed to develop a specific bus strategy due to the potential extent of change embodied within these policies.

The Strathclyde Regional Bus Strategy (SRBS), approved by SPT Partnership in 2025, aims to change the story of bus from a 'cycle of decline' to a 'cycle of growth' that meets passenger needs, attracts new passengers and places bus at the heart of communities, ensuring we all have good connections to our everyday needs and helping tackle inequalities of access across the region.

The SRBS process identified bus franchising as the most likely way to ensure that these ambitions are achieved and that SPT should pursue development of a bus franchising model in line with the requirements of the Transport (Scotland) Act 2019. This position was strongly supported in consultation by most stakeholders and communities, with 83% of consultation responses in support.

Franchising has the potential to transform local services, particularly in a complex regional market like SPT's, where networks must serve both dense urban areas and more dispersed rural communities. Realising that potential will require a framework that is practical, flexible, and supported by sustained investment in infrastructure & decarbonisation of fleets, affordable fares, and effective system-wide coordination. This would build upon successful bus franchising schemes now delivered in Manchester and Liverpool, and those being rolled out across Yorkshire, the West Midlands and Wales, for example.

SPT has identified ways that a future Better Buses Bill could provide that framework, as part of our current work on taking forward the statutory process for a bus Franchise Framework. These points have been detailed by SPT to Stephen Flynn MSP, Cabinet Secretary for Economy, Tourism & Transport in June 2026, with specific details provided at Appendix 2.

The SRBS also makes the case that bus franchising alone will be insufficient to deliver a bus 'cycle of growth'. Increased investment in bus priority infrastructure, improved cross-regional network management and implementation of wider 'bus friendly' policies is also needed to make buses more reliable and attractive to all types of users. This requires continued partnership working between SPT, councils, operators and other stakeholders.

Clyde Metro

The Clyde Metro is a future mass transit system for the Glasgow City Region that will better connect communities to jobs and services, reduce transport emissions at scale and act as a catalyst for inward investment and economic growth. As a light rapid transit network, Clyde Metro will be a new mode serving high travel demand corridors and strategic centres that complements rail, bus and Subway networks.

Clyde Metro has a strong policy basis nationally as a recommendation in the Strategic Transport Projects Review 2 (STPR2) and a national development in NPF4, regionally in the RTS, Regional Economic Strategy and emerging Regional Spatial Strategy and locally within Local Transport Strategies and emerging new Local Development Plans.

The current stage in the development of Clyde Metro is the Case for Investment (Cfi), which will set out a Programme Level Business Case and arrangements for initial delivery phases. SPT is leading on the Cfi, supported by a wider governance framework provided by the Glasgow City Region cabinet. SPT anticipates completion of the Cfi in 2027.

Resolving funding and governance challenges will be central to the successful delivery of Clyde Metro. The level of ambition currently envisioned is likely to require a complex, multi-partner funding package and use of novel mechanisms such as land value capture. Decisions on the governance arrangements for development, planning and operations roles will be critical, with implications for integration of Clyde Metro with the wider bus, rail and Subway networks. SPT continues to work with Glasgow City Region, Transport Scotland and other industry stakeholders to develop good governance arrangements, including through the Glasgow City Region Transport Devolution process.

Smart and Integrated Ticketing

SPT plays a leading role in the planning, delivery and administration of public transport ticketing across the west of Scotland through setting regional policy in the RTS and through our roles as the operator of the Subway, administrator of the ZoneCard & Roundabout ticketing arrangements and administrator of the Strathclyde Concessionary Travel Scheme (SCTS). SPT works closely on ticketing matters with partners including Transport Scotland, local authorities, operators, the Glasgow City Region Bus Partnership and others.

Subway was an early adopter of ITSO smart ticketing, and more than 110 million journeys have been made on its ITSO ticketing system over the past 10 years. SPT worked closely with Transport Scotland and others to ensure a passenger's smartcard could work on both ScotRail and Subway services. In March 2026, Subway introduced contactless payment by debit/credit card (including mobile devices) to reflect current technology and improve the customer experience by making it easier to access our best value fares. So far, more than two million contactless journeys have been made in just five months.

The ZoneCard ticketing arrangement has existed for over 30 years delivering multi-operator, multi-modal ticketing across the SPT area. The arrangement is administered by SPT whilst the chair of the operator Forum is rotated annually but currently held by SPT. In 2024 SPT worked with the operators to modernise ZoneCard onto a smartcard format with a simplified zone structure and introducing day tickets and flexi tickets for the first time.

ZoneCard is a commercial ticketing arrangement, and its operation is funded by the operators (including SPT for Subway); the delivery of most aspects is provided by SPT, including revenue apportionment, marketing and customer service.

SPT also manage the Roundabout ticket which enables one-day Subway and ScotRail travel throughout the greater Glasgow area.

SPT are represented on (and provide the chair for) for the Glasgow City Region Bus Partnership ticketing working group. This group is working to collaborate on delivery of bus ticketing improvements for customers. This includes monitoring developments relating to Project Coral, which aims to deliver multi-operator contactless fare capping.

SPT is also a board member on the National Smart Ticketing Advisory Board (NSTAB) as the operator of the Subway. NSTAB is progressing a work programme towards a national integrated ticketing system by 2030.

SPT's long term ambition is to deliver a seamless ticketing/payment experience across all public transport modes in the region, with best value for travel automatically available to all customers. SPT has already delivered this for Subway travel through our recently introduced contactless payment system.

Particular barriers to delivery of a seamless ticketing experience for passengers includes the diverse range of technology and suppliers currently in use – ZoneCard uses an ITSO smartcard format because it can be used across bus, rail and Subway which is not currently true for contactless payment cards, or for mobile ticketing. There is also an emerging new challenge/opportunity to integrate shared mobility (e.g. bike hire systems) into ticketing and payments.

Another challenge is minimising cost of operations for efficient delivery. For example, ITSO ticketing carries some fixed overhead costs, while, in some cases, passenger demand for smartcard ticketing is declining. In the short term, operators must retain an ITSO solution to accommodate national concessionary travel. In some areas of smart ticketing (including the ITSO ecosystem) there are a limited number of suppliers in the marketplace, and this can be a barrier to development and innovation.

Integrated transport and regionalisation

Many transport functions and networks operate across local boundaries and interact directly with regional labour markets, economic development, housing, healthcare, land-use and environmental priorities. In these circumstances, the regional level can

provide the most effective spatial scale for integrated decision-making, ensuring the appropriate balance between strategic scale and detailed understanding of place.

In terms of public transport specifically, a seamless, public transport network is a long-standing goal for the region, providing more affordable and accessible transport for communities and a high-quality experience that attracts new users. However, current governance arrangements, with no single entity having responsibilities for planning and co-ordination across all modes, make it difficult to deliver an efficient and well-integrated system. Bringing together the planning and coordination of public transport at the regional level can maximise the benefits of an integrated transport network while ensuring that transport decisions are connected to regional economic, spatial, environmental and social priorities.

SPT believes the statutory basis and collaborative nature of the Regional Transport Partnership model is sufficiently robust, powerful and flexible to provide this regional level of integrated decision-making and co-ordination.

Funding sustainable transport

There is a strong case for moving towards a more consolidated regional transport settlement, linked to agreed regional outcomes. Greater autonomy over a single regional funding pot would allow RTPs to prioritise expenditure according to regional evidence, need and opportunity, rather than requiring regional priorities to be fitted into separate nationally determined funding silos.

This would be a practical application of subsidiarity: national government would retain responsibility for setting strategic objectives and overall funding parameters, while RTPs would have greater flexibility to determine how resources are allocated within their regions to achieve those agreed outcomes.

Multi-year funding settlements for RTPs would support this by eliminating many of the inefficiencies associated with annual budgeting, provide greater financial certainty and enable RTPs and their partners to plan and commit to longer-term programmes and infrastructure projects. Multi-year settlements would also improve the ability to coordinate transport investment with longer-term housing, economic development, spatial planning and net-zero objectives.

In terms of funding for the public transport network specifically, the model should evolve, in line with wider network integration, to a network-wide model with a more joined up approach to fares and concessionary travel across all modes. Securing greater levels of funding through hypothecation of revenues raised through demand management measures should also be further explored.

Conclusion

SPT is proud to lead the way in transforming delivery of transport infrastructure and services to improve the lives of the people and communities of the west of Scotland. As can be seen from this note, we are currently taking forward ambitious projects

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and initiatives of significant scale and scope, to this end. Undoubtedly, with the right funding and powers, SPT has the vision, commitment and experience to do so much more.

Further information on SPT is available at www.spt.co.uk

SPT

14 September 2026

Written submission from the Tayside and Central Scotland Transport Partnership (Tactran)

Introduction

Tayside and Central Scotland Transport Partnership (Tactran) would like to thank the Committee for the opportunity to provide this written evidence in advance of our appearance on 23 September. This note provides information on who we are and what we do, our area, and our current key projects and priorities.

A. Nature of the region

The area covered by the Tayside and Central Scotland consists of the local authority areas of Angus, Dundee, Perth & Kinross and Stirling. The region sits across Scotland's two National Parks.

The region is representative of Scotland as a whole:

- Approximately 9.2% of the Scottish population (507,970 vs 5,545,500).
- 63% of the population living in urban areas / 37% rural (Scotland 72% urban). The region includes 3 of Scotland's 8 cities.
- 67.3% of people in Perth & Kinross, 46.9% in Stirling and 38.4% in Angus live in rural areas, many of whom are dependent on strategic routes to access jobs, services and healthcare.

Where people work (live and play)

The areas people live, work and play in are perhaps best represented by the travel to work data collected by the Census. This demonstrates that there are two strong travel to work areas in the region:

- 79.8% of Tay Cities residents work in the Tay Cities area (inc North East Fife).
- 65.1% of Forth Valley residents work in the Forth Valley area (Clackmannanshire, Falkirk and Stirling).
- *(NB 2011 data, still awaiting 2022 workplace origin/destination data).*
- There are also strong links between the region and North-East Angus and Aberdeenshire; South-West Stirling and North-East Glasgow; North-West Stirling and Oban.

Transport and travel pressures

Almost all surface trips to North-East Scotland and the Highlands and Islands pass through the region:

- Angus, Perth & Kinross and Stirling have a higher than Scottish average proportion of people of pensionable age. These proportions are expected to rise, placing greater pressure on public resources.
- Angus, Perth & Kinross and Stirling all have higher per capita transport CO₂ emissions, compared to the Scottish average reflecting the rural nature of much of these areas (*NB The region is responsible for 12% of vehicle km in Scotland*).
- 37.2% of the population of Dundee, and 7.7%, 5.9% and 12.4% of Angus, Perth & Kinross and Stirling residents live in the least affluent 20% of SIMD data zones.

Further detail regarding the nature and challenges in the region can be found in:

- [Tayside and Central Scotland Regional Transport Strategy 2024-2034](#)
- [RTS Main Issues Storymap](#)

B. The role and responsibilities of the RTP

Tactran is a Model 1 Regional Transport Partnership.

The focus therefore is primarily on strategic transport planning and coordination rather than direct operational delivery.

The team of officers supporting the Partnership consists of seven full-time staff.

Core Roles and Responsibilities

- **Strategic Planning:** Create, maintain, and oversee the delivery of the statutory Regional Transport Strategy for Angus, Dundee City, Perth & Kinross, and Stirling. The RTS seeks to ensure regional transport priorities align with national policy including the National Transport Strategy; the Climate Change Action Plan; “Bringing Hope, Building Futures” child poverty actions plan.
- **Regional Coordination and Support:** Act as a central conduit between local councils, national government, and transport operators to improve cross-boundary connectivity and infrastructure. E.g.
 - **Community Planning:** Engage proactively in community planning and support the implementation of Local Outcome Improvement Plans.
 - **Development Planning:** Participate as a formal Key Agency in the development planning process at regional and local levels.
 - **Sustainable Economic Growth:** The Partnership play an active role in supporting the Tay Cities Deal process by facilitating the Transport

Thematic Board to support and guide the City Deal transport interventions, and ensure transport co-ordination through support of working groups at the management and economic strategy level.

- **Supporting national agencies in planning and delivery:** for example working with Transport Scotland and Scotland's Railways to understand the regional dimension of rail policies and programmes (*see also national working group involvement below*)

Stakeholder Engagement: Supporting local authorities and regional partners to plan integrated local transport. This includes:

- Supporting NHS Tayside and NHS Forth Valley Health Boards.
- Supporting Loch Lomond and the Trossachs and Cairngorms National Park authorities.
- (A regional freight forum is currently in abeyance due to staffing resources).

The [Tactran Public Services Reform Act Statements](#), outlines the partnership's core responsibilities.

Other responsibilities include:

- **National engagement** Engage and support national discussions/working groups promoting interests of region and briefing partnership members to enable input and/or individual responses.

(currently includes National Smart Ticketing Advisory Board / National Accessible Travel Steering Group / NTS Delivery Board / Transport Scotland Car use reduction working groups / supporting Audit Scotland review into car use reduction / Minister of Agriculture and Connectivity's 'Bus Forum' / National Visitor Management Transport Group / Transport Scotland's MaaS Steering Group)

- **Investigating and promoting regional infrastructure interventions:** Such as three Local Rail Development Fund Studies which investigated the potential for new rail stations at: South Stirling; Bridge of Earn; along the Perth-Montrose corridor.
- **Supporting local policy development:** To a greater or lesser extent authorities (inc NPAs) have drawn on officer support to support the development of plans & strategies (ensuring alignment with the statutory RTS and saving time/resources re gathering evidence bases)

Section D below highlights a handful of current priorities being undertaken to support regional.

C. Regional Priorities: The Regional Transport Strategy

The [Regional Transport Strategy](#) (RTS), adopted in June 2024, provides the framework for transport related activity to support national and regional social, economic and environmental priorities. The Transport (Scotland) Act 2005 places a duty on constituent Councils, Health Boards and other public bodies to perform their functions which relate to, or which are affected by transport, consistently with their respective RTS.

The RTS's strategic objectives mirror the priorities of the National Transport Strategy and focus attention on where action should be directed to support these priorities in the region. For example:

Taking Climate Action:

- Encouraging and supporting alternatives for those longer distance trips which generate the most CO₂ emissions.
- Supporting transition to sustainable transport including low emissions vehicles and helping promote a 'Just Transition' for our more vulnerable communities.

Improving Health and Wellbeing:

- Focusing activities which promote healthier lifestyles on those communities with poorer health outcomes.
- Supporting modal shift in the air quality management areas such as Dundee Low Emission Zone and Perth Air Quality Management Area.
- Enhancing transport access to healthcare and social activities for the vulnerable groups, including those living in rural areas.

Reducing Inequalities:

- Enhance travel access to jobs, education, and services for young people, older adults, and rural or disadvantaged communities.
- Promoting inclusive travel for all.

Delivering Inclusive and Sustainable Economic Growth:

In addition to supporting access to jobs and training for young people and disadvantaged communities:

- Promote reliable and improve journey times
 - across Angus, Dundee City, Perth & Kinross, and Stirling

- between the region and the other regions in Scotland

Critically, the RTS recognised:

- that to support the national and regional ambitions in relation to the strategic objectives – particular the climate change and child poverty targets – a step change in activity is required amongst partners
- the limited resources of all partners and the urgency required to meet the timescales of national targets

The RTS therefore proposed that Partners need to:

- **Prioritise:** focus activity on the specific locations and population groups where interventions create the greatest impact
- **Co-ordinate:** co-ordinate activity to have the maximum impact on any one location. This could be described as a whole system approach to provide integrated solutions which provide a realistic door-door alternative to the car

D. Key Activities

A selection of current activities undertaken at a regional level by Tactran which complement and support activity by other partners are outlined below.

Co-ordinate People and Place funds

As is the case for all RTP areas, Tactran co-ordinates the distribution of Transport Scotland's behavioural change [People and Place](#) funding. This regional co-ordination enables the Partnership to help direct funds to those activities where it is most needed to support where activity is most needed (e.g. poorer health communities).

To complement the national process, we have introduced a Social Return on Investment assessment of the programme to help understand the broader benefits of interventions to help achieve best value for money.

Transport to Employment

Along with the Local Employability Partnerships each of the RTPs have been allocated monies by the Scottish Government to help remove the transport barriers to work experienced by those families which are the focus of the child poverty reduction work.

Tactran has been working with the LEPs to provide a solution where:

- Tactran has [secured transport providers](#) who will provide transport to people who need support to access work. This securing transport providers, providing interfaces (website and apps for users) and supporting partners such as the Job Centres and employability support teams make users aware of the service; and we are currently developing digital dispatch tools to maximise efficiency of the transport services provided.
- The LEPs help provide financial support to those users who most need it.

Mobility as a Service (MaaS) Programme

Tactran was one of three RTPs which received funding from Transport Scotland's Mobility as a Service Investment Fund in 2020 to develop and pilot journey planning and booking tools. The Tactran programme developed tools with and for the users of:

- Loch Lomond and the Trossachs National Park
- Dundee & Angus College
- NHS Tayside

The [programme](#) continues to support users plan, book and pay for journeys, whilst also continuing to help identify the different barriers, needs and support required to support different target groups either:

- Navigate and undertake multi-modal trips
- Shift from car to more sustainable modes

Bus Alliances and Bus Development Work

Tactran and the South East of Scotland Transport Partnership (SEStran) have worked in partnership to take a lead and create two bus alliances which operate within and beyond the Tactran region, these are:

- Tayside Bus Alliance
- Forth Valley Bus Alliance

Both alliances have been developed to support bus development, under the Bus Partnership Fund (BPF), and its successor, the Bus Infrastructure Fund (BIF). The Tayside alliance is chaired and facilitated by Tactran, the Forth Valley by SEStran, with mutual support in both instances across alliances.

The [Tayside Alliance](#) is focused on corridors identified under the BPF (13 of) including three sustainable transport corridors (2 in Dundee, 1 in Perth), and further infrastructure developments allied to the original BPF corridors.

Tactran supports the Alliance through:

- Investigation of options to improve bus delivery. This will result in a Bus Development Plan for the region.
- Co-ordination and project management of bus corridor works funded by the Bus Infrastructure Fund.

Car km Reduction

The Government's Climate Change Action Plan includes a target to reduce car km (*the distance driven being the most significant factor in fuel consumed and hence CO₂ emissions*).

Tactran has and continues to undertake work to understand how this reduction could be achieved and the implications of different approaches. Work to date includes:

- Understanding who generates the most car km, where and why
- The relative likelihood of measures to support the target
- The equality and economic implications of demand management measures

As such the Partnership has supported both Transport Scotland and Audit Commissions considerations on this subject and continues to remain at the forefront of investigations to understand the delivery implications of the target.

E. The Way Forward

Integrated transport and regionalisation

Transport functions and networks operate across local and regional boundaries and have a clear impact on key areas including economic development, housing, healthcare, land-use and environmental priorities.

Tactran continues to work with a wide range of partners in the region towards understanding how the limited resources available can be used as efficiently and effectively as possible to take climate action; promote health and wellbeing; support sustainable and inclusive economic growth and reduce inequalities. Tactran therefore looks forward to working with the Scottish Government as it consults and forms its conclusions regarding public sector reform.

Regional level governance and planning can provide the most effective spatial scale for integrated decision-making, ensuring the appropriate balance between strategic scale and local needs. There is an opportunity to bring spatial development planning and coordination of transport at the regional level to maximise the benefits of an integrated transport network while ensuring that transport decisions are connected to regional economic, spatial, environmental and social priorities.

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The statutory basis and collaborative nature of the Regional Transport Partnership model is sufficiently robust, powerful and flexible to provide this regional level of integrated decision-making and co-ordination.

Tactran

14 September 2026

Written submission from the Shetland Transport Partnership (ZetTrans)

Shetland presents a significantly different transport environment from most other parts of Scotland. The geography, population distribution and reliance on lifeline transport results in a wide range of activities in terms of strategic transport planning and transport service delivery.

ZetTrans therefore operates across a broad spectrum of transport activity, combining long-term strategic planning and business case development with the specification, procurement, monitoring and day-to-day management of public transport services.

It specifies and procures the Shetland public bus network, the inter-island air service and the Foula ferry service and specifies the inter-island ferry network. It also works closely with Shetland Islands Council, Transport Scotland, local transport operators and other public and private sector partners in relation to infrastructure, external connectivity and major investment decisions.

The Partnership's role has three principal dimensions:

- direct delivery, through specification and contracting public transport services (across bus, ferry and air);
- partnership working with Shetland Islands Council, Transport Scotland, operators and other stakeholders; and
- engagement and influence in relation to external and national transport policy.

This combination of strategic and operational responsibility is central to the way transport planning is undertaken in Shetland.

Although ZetTrans is an independent statutory body, its staffing, financial, legal and administrative support is provided through Shetland Islands Council. This provides the Partnership with access to the wider Council's professional and corporate resources while retaining a dedicated transport governance structure through the ZetTrans Board.

Current Strategic Priorities

The current programme of work is substantial and reflects both immediate transport pressures and the need to make long-term decisions about the future shape of Shetland's transport network.

Regional Transport Strategy 2040

ZetTrans is progressing the implementation of its new Regional Transport Strategy 2040.

The Strategy provides the long-term strategic framework for transport within Shetland and for Shetland's connections with the Scottish mainland and beyond.

The Strategy recognises that Shetland's transport system needs to be considered as an integrated network rather than as individual modes. This includes:

- public bus services;
- inter-island ferries;
- inter-island air services;
- external ferry and air connectivity;
- active and sustainable travel;
- integrated transport and ticketing;
- accessibility and affordability; and
- the contribution of transport to the economy, communities, health and climate objectives.

The ZetTrans Board approved the Regional Transport Strategy Delivery Plan 2026–28 and associated performance framework in June 2026, demonstrating the value of the connection between strategy, implementation, funding, monitoring and delivery.

Inter-Island Transport Connectivity Programme

One of the most significant pieces of strategic transport work currently being undertaken in Shetland is the Inter-Island Transport Connectivity Programme (IITCP).

For many island communities, a ferry or aircraft is not an alternative mode of transport - it is the road. Our current network includes a fleet of 12 inter-island ferries operating through 17 terminals and connecting mainland Shetland with island communities. Inter-island air services also provide essential connections to Fair Isle and Foula.

The long-term sustainability of this network is increasingly challenging because of ageing assets, capital investment requirements, operating costs, workforce availability, weather exposure and decarbonisation pressures.

The IITCP is therefore examining the future of the whole network rather than individual ferry replacement projects in isolation, considering the appropriate future combination of ferry services, fixed links and other connectivity solutions. ZetTrans has a strategic role in this programme, ensuring that the emerging proposals remain aligned with the Regional Transport Strategy and the wider transport needs of Shetland.

Public Bus Network

ZetTrans specifies and procures the public bus network in Shetland. The network comprises mainline, feeder and dial-a-ride services and is designed to connect communities with essential services and employment.

Unlike many mainland networks, the Shetland bus network supports communities across the islands where the population is too dispersed to generate commercially viable services. The bus network is 100% subsidised and is procured on a five-year

cycle, utilising a full business case process to engage with communities to establish and refresh knowledge of the challenges, design solutions and procure the necessary contracts to deliver services.

In order to promote efficiency, this major programme of work is done in partnership with Shetland Islands Council and includes home to school transport. This enables the opportunity for tenderers to package their bids across the public and school bus network.

The level of stakeholder engagement carried out provides a substantial evidence base for considering service models, including conventional scheduled services, demand-responsive transport and potential hub-and-spoke approaches.

The network is contracted on a minimum cost basis, with all fare income (and therefore the fare risk) coming directly to Shetland Islands Council. The Council also provides all ticketing infrastructure, which is managed by the same staff group responsible for contracting, implementing and monitoring the network.

The procurement and implementation of the next generation of public bus contracts carried out every five years, together with the ongoing monitoring of the network, is therefore a major current workstream.

£2 Bus Fare Cap Pilot

ZetTrans is also participating with HITRANS and the Scottish Government in the £2 Bus Fare Cap Pilot.

The pilot commenced in Shetland on 30 January 2026 and provides a £2 cap on participating single adult and child bus journeys for 12 months.

It provides an opportunity to test whether a simpler and more affordable fare structure can increase bus patronage and contribute to modal shift in an island context.

Due to the geography and ZetTrans' complete control of the model of service provision, timetables and the setting of fares, Shetland is a particularly strong candidate as a test bed for such fare initiatives.

Transport to Employment

ZetTrans is progressing a Transport to Employment programme aimed at addressing transport barriers to employment.

This recognises that transport policy cannot be separated from Shetland's wider economic and demographic challenges. Access to employment is affected not only by whether a bus or ferry exists, but also on timing, connectivity, affordability and accessibility.

The programme includes development of improved digital transport information through an app and website, which will provide a journey planning function, the ability to live track bus services, more map based information as well as timetables and will include all intra-Shetland public transport modes. This work is being fully funded through Transport to Employment funding awarded to ZetTrans and forms part of the Shetland Transport Strategy Delivery Plan.

The project will be completed by 31 March 2027 in accordance with the grant conditions.

Active and Sustainable Travel

ZetTrans continues to develop active travel and sustainable travel activity across Shetland including supporting infrastructure, behaviour change, programme development, monitoring and partnership activity.

The challenge in Shetland is that active travel cannot simply be approached through the same infrastructure model used in larger urban areas. Population density, settlement pattern, weather, topography, road characteristics and the distances between communities all affect the practicality of walking and cycling interventions. Consequently, ZetTrans seeks to support active travel alongside appropriate public transport and other sustainable transport provision.

Decarbonisation

Decarbonisation is increasingly incorporated into transport planning, but Shetland demonstrates the practical challenges of applying national decarbonisation objectives in remote areas.

ZetTrans supported a trial of an electric bus in 2025 (through the Shetland Islands Council project funded through Innovate UK) and continues to consider the implications of fleet decarbonisation.

The electric bus trial demonstrated that electric bus operation may be viable in principle, but also highlighted significant barriers including vehicle cost, electricity grid capacity and charging infrastructure.

The findings suggest that the transition to zero-emission buses in Shetland requires a different timescale and investment model from that applicable in larger urban areas, demonstrating the need for national policies to reflect the realities of island communities.

With all public bus services provided by smaller local bus operators with widely dispersed remote rural bases and funded in their entirety through contracts with ZetTrans, the introduction of a decarbonised public bus network will have a significant impact on the public purse.

Day-to-day activity

Alongside the major programmes, a significant proportion of ZetTrans' work is operational.

This includes:

- managing and monitoring contracted bus services;
- dealing with operational disruption;
- responding to passenger and community enquiries;
- administering and supporting concessionary travel arrangements;
- liaison with NorthLink and other operators concerning connectivity and passenger issues;
- monitoring ferry and air service performance;
- supporting timetable coordination;
- maintaining and improving passenger information;
- administering active travel funding and monitoring delivery;
- managing grant-funded programmes;
- undertaking transport data analysis;
- developing business cases and funding bids;
- responding to consultations on national transport policy;
- supporting emergency and severe weather transport arrangements; and
- providing transport advice to Shetland Islands Council and other public sector partners.

The operational nature of the role should not be underestimated. In Shetland, an issue affecting one bus, ferry or aircraft can have consequences well beyond the individual journey because alternative transport options are often limited or non-existent.

During severe weather, including named storms, officers work closely with partners to maintain communication and continuity of lifeline services.

What makes Shetland different?

The geography is the transport network

In Shetland geography does not simply influence transport demand; fundamentally determines the transport system. Shetland comprises a chain of islands extending approximately 100 miles from north to south, with a relatively small population dispersed across the islands.

Shetland is a completely self-contained geographic entity, with just over 23,000 people and a very extensive coastline. The combination of geography, population and infrastructure creates high per-capita transport costs.

A journey which would be a road journey on mainland Scotland can become a journey involving a ferry, aircraft or both in Shetland.

Transport is often a lifeline rather than a choice

In mainland Scotland, public transport is frequently discussed in terms of modal choice, congestion, modal shift and reducing car dependency. Those issues remain relevant in Shetland, but they sit alongside a more fundamental requirement: maintaining access.

For some communities, the bus, ferry or aircraft is the only practical way of accessing services meaning that transport investment can have a direct bearing on whether communities remain viable.

Small population does not mean a small transport system

Despite the small population, the transport system required is extensive. ZetTrans' public transport responsibilities encompass a substantial bus network, 12 inter-island ferries, inter-island air services and associated transport infrastructure and contracts.

This produces a particular funding challenge. Many transport costs are relatively fixed regardless of the number of passengers carried. A ferry still requires a vessel, crew, terminal infrastructure and maintenance whether it carries 10 passengers or 100. A bus service must operate to provide access for a relatively small population even where passenger numbers would not support a commercial service.

Population-based funding formulas can struggle to reflect the actual cost of providing an appropriate transport network.

Resilience is a core transport objective

For many mainland areas, resilience is principally concerned with managing disruption to a network which has alternative routes and modes. In Shetland, resilience can mean maintaining the only available connection.

Weather disruption, vessel breakdown, aircraft availability, infrastructure failure or staff shortages can have immediate and significant consequences for communities. Resilience therefore needs to be considered as an intrinsic part of transport planning rather than simply as an operational contingency.

Shetland has both internal and external connectivity challenges

ZetTrans has to consider two separate but interdependent transport systems. The first is connectivity between Shetland's communities and islands. The second is connectivity between Shetland and the Scottish mainland.

The two cannot be considered independently. A local bus timetable, for example, may need to connect with a ferry or aircraft departure. A disruption to an external ferry can have consequences throughout the internal transport network.

This makes transport integration particularly important.

Transport is closely linked to population and economic sustainability

Transport in Shetland is directly connected to wider policy objectives around attracting and retaining population, supporting employment, enabling access to education and healthcare, supporting tourism and maintaining communities. The value of a transport service cannot always be measured simply by passenger numbers or fare revenue. A relatively lightly used service may nevertheless provide substantial social and economic value by allowing a community to remain connected.

The value of the RTP model

ZetTrans' experience suggests that the RTP model has significant value because it provides a mechanism for taking a regional view of transport which crosses individual service, modal and organisational boundaries.

The Shetland model demonstrates the particular value of having an organisation whose remit encompasses strategic planning while also having a direct relationship with transport service provision.

This allows strategic decisions to be informed by operational knowledge and, conversely, allows day-to-day service decisions to be considered within a wider strategic framework.

It also provides a single transport-focused partnership through which Shetland can engage with Scottish Government, Transport Scotland, operators and other RTPs. The transport challenges of Shetland are fundamentally different from those of a large urban region, and different again from those of a predominantly rural mainland region.

The RTP framework is strongest when it allows each Partnership to respond to the characteristics of its region while maintaining a clear connection to national transport policy and outcomes.

Funding and capacity

One of the key issues for ZetTrans is the relationship between the scale of its responsibilities and the resources available to discharge them.

ZetTrans operates within a relatively small staffing structure while managing a broad portfolio of statutory, operational and strategic responsibilities.

The Partnership's 2025/26 gross revenue budget was approximately £6.3 million, of which approximately £5.3 million related to scheduled passenger transport services and £1.0 million to core running costs.

This should be considered in the context of the breadth of transport infrastructure and services that must be planned, specified, monitored and supported across the islands.

The cost of providing transport in an island environment is inherently higher per passenger and per head of population than in many mainland areas.

This creates a need for funding mechanisms which recognise geography, sparsity, lifeline requirements and the cost of maintaining network resilience rather than relying solely on population or patronage-based measures.

Conclusion

ZetTrans' experience provides an example of how an RTP can operate as both a strategic transport authority and a practical delivery organisation.

The Partnership's work ranges from long-term strategic planning and major business cases to procurement, contract management, passenger information and day-to-day operational problem solving.

Shetland demonstrates that transport is not simply a means of moving people from A to B. In an island community, transport is fundamental infrastructure which supports economic activity, access to services, population sustainability, social inclusion and community resilience.

The key lesson from Shetland is therefore that regional transport policy needs to be sufficiently flexible to recognise different regional circumstances.

For Shetland, the principal transport challenge is not simply how to encourage people to change modes. It is how to maintain a resilient, affordable and sustainable network across a dispersed island geography while simultaneously planning for major changes in infrastructure, technology, climate and demographics.

RTPs have an important continuing role in meeting these challenges. The forthcoming review of transport governance provides an opportunity to build on the strengths of the existing model, clarify roles and responsibilities, and ensure that regional transport bodies have the powers, resources and flexibility necessary to turn national transport ambitions into effective local delivery.

For Shetland, maintaining that regional perspective will remain essential to delivering a resilient, affordable and sustainable transport network.

Annexe: ZetTrans: Statutory Position, Governance Arrangements and Relationship with Shetland Islands Council

ZetTrans (the Shetland Transport Partnership) is the statutory regional transport partnership for the Shetland Islands. It was established under the Transport (Scotland) Act 2005 and the Regional Transport Partnerships (Establishment, Constitution and Membership) (Scotland) Order 2005 as one of Scotland's seven Regional Transport Partnerships (RTPs). RTPs are independent statutory corporate bodies established to strengthen regional transport planning and delivery across Scotland.

The principal statutory function of ZetTrans is to prepare and implement a Regional Transport Strategy for Shetland and to provide strategic leadership on transport matters. It also exercises a range of transport-related functions transferred from or exercised concurrently with local authorities under statutory instrument. ZetTrans is the body with the statutory duty to provide public transport services in Shetland, including air, bus and ferry services.

Governance Arrangements

Membership of the ZetTrans Board comprises nominated members of [Shetland Islands Council](#), together with representatives of [Highlands and Islands Enterprise](#) and [NHS Shetland](#). Observer and adviser representation is also provided from other relevant organisations. The Chair and Vice-Chair are elected councillors nominated by the Council.

The Board operates under a published governance framework including:

- a Code of Conduct for Members;
- Administrative Regulations;
- Registers of Members Interests;
- published agendas and minutes; and
- annual accounts and governance statements.

As a statutory public body ZetTrans is subject to external audit, public finance requirements, freedom of information legislation and the normal standards of public governance applicable to Scottish public authorities.

Relationship with Shetland Islands Council

Although ZetTrans is a separate legal entity from [Shetland Islands Council](#) the relationship between the two bodies is close and is governed both by statute and by a formal contractual arrangement.

Following establishment of the Partnership certain transport functions were transferred from the Council to ZetTrans by virtue of The Transfer of Functions to the Shetland Transport Partnership Order 2006. The Council and ZetTrans entered into a formal minute of agreement dated 1 November 2006. The agreement recognised

that certain public transport functions previously undertaken by the Council would transfer to ZetTrans or be exercised concurrently but that no Council employees would transfer to the Partnership. Instead, Council staff would continue to undertake administrative, professional and technical functions on behalf of ZetTrans.

The agreement provides that the Council acts as agent for ZetTrans in delivering services and that Council officers providing services to the Partnership may enter into contracts on ZetTrans' behalf.

Part One of the Schedule to the agreement requires the Council to provide the administrative and clerical support necessary for functions including:

- preparation, delivery and updating of the Regional Transport Strategy;
- securing the provision of socially necessary public transport services;
- administering and managing travel concession schemes;
- quality partnership and ticketing schemes;
- publication of public transport information; and
- administration and managing grants for transport facilities and services.

Part Two of the Schedule provides for the Council to provide professional services to ZetTrans, including:

- accountancy, financial and internal audit;
- engineering including traffic and transportation engineering;
- governance;
- human resources;
- legal;
- procurement and tendering;
- project management;
- property management; and
- technical services.

The agreement also allows the Council to provide office accommodation, meeting facilities, and staffing with ZetTrans reimbursing the Council for the costs of those services. (Although that provision may be somewhat academic given section 3 of the Transport (Scotland) Act 2005 provides that the net expenses of a transport partnership shall be paid by the Council.)

Accordingly, while ZetTrans is legally independent, it has historically relied on the Council for much of its administrative, professional and operational capacity. The Council provides the infrastructure through which many ZetTrans functions are discharged, while strategic decisions remain matters for the Partnership itself as a legally separate entity.

Relationships with Other Bodies

ZetTrans also maintains formal relationships with a range of public-sector stakeholders.

[Highlands and Islands Enterprise](#) and [NHS Shetland](#) are represented directly on the Board, reflecting transport's importance to economic development, public services and community sustainability.

At national level, [Transport Scotland](#) works closely with all Regional Transport Partnerships to ensure delivery of the National Transport Strategy and coordination of transport investment and policy.

The Partnership also works with ferry, air and bus operators, community organisations and other public agencies involved in transport provision throughout the islands.

ZetTrans 2040 Regional Transport Strategy

The Strategy replaces the previous RTS, which covered the period 2018-2028, and was developed with support from Stantec UK Ltd. It sets out the strategic direction for transport investment, policy and decision-making through to 2040. It provides a framework for how transport will be planned and developed across Shetland over the lifetime of the Strategy.

Overview

Under the Transport (Scotland) Act 2005 it is the duty of each Transport Partnership to draw up a strategy for transport within its region. The (new) ZetTrans 2040 RTS responds to the changing policy, environmental, societal and economic context, as well as the transport challenges and opportunities facing Shetland.

The Strategy sets out a Vision for transport in Shetland

Shetland's transport networks and the connections to the rest of Scotland support social and inclusive economic prosperity, provide equitable access to opportunities, enable people to live healthy and active lives, facilitate the development of sustainable and inclusive communities, and contribute to our net zero emission targets.

The RTS is structured around eight themes:

1. Enabling and encouraging active travel – improving the public realm and facilitating walking, wheeling and cycling within settlements, as well as active travel connections between them.
2. Improving the quality and affordability of, and access to our public transport – delivering affordable and accessible public transport, including improving infrastructure, ticketing options and information.
3. Extending bus connectivity – improving bus services through increased frequency, extended operating hours, additional services and better connections with other modes of transport.

4. Connecting our islands – improving internal ferry and air connections and exploring the case for fixed links to better connect Shetland's island communities.
5. Enhancing our external connections and supply chain – enhancing external ferry and air connections to Orkney and the Scottish mainland.
6. Decarbonising our transport – supporting the transition to a lower-carbon transport network, including the adoption of zero-emission vehicles, vessels and aircraft.
7. Embracing new technologies – making use of innovation and new technology to improve transport in Shetland.
8. Enhancing network efficiency – supporting the safe, resilient and efficient movement of people and freight across Shetland.

The theme of connecting our islands is particularly topical with recent decisions of both Council and ZetTrans to pursue fixed links demonstrating how both bodies work well together to seek the best transport links for the community.

Summary

ZetTrans is an independent statutory Regional Transport Partnership established under the Transport (Scotland) Act 2005 with responsibility for transport strategy and transport-related functions within Shetland. Its governance is exercised through a board of elected members nominated by Shetland Islands Council, alongside representatives from NHS Shetland and Highlands and Islands Enterprise. The 2006 Minute of Agreement demonstrates that, notwithstanding ZetTrans' separate legal personality, the Partnership operates through an extensive service-delivery relationship with the Council, under which the Council acts as agent and provides the administrative, professional, legal, financial and technical resources required for ZetTrans to discharge its statutory responsibilities.

ZetTrans

10 September 2026