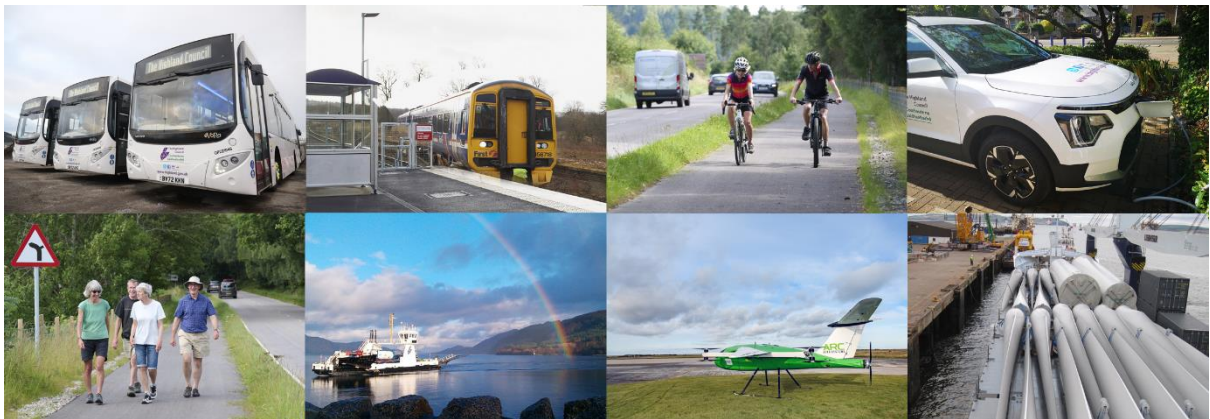


Highland Local Transport Strategy 2025 – 2035

Draft Themes and Policies – Engagement



Introduction

The Highland Council is in the process of developing a new Local Transport Strategy (LTS) for the next 10-year period from 2025 to 2035. The strategy will play a key role in setting out the future direction and policy focus for transport in the Highlands over the coming years.

Highland is the largest council area by geography in Scotland spanning an area of 25,600 square kilometres and the seventh largest in Scotland by population, with 238,060 residents (National Records of Scotland mid-2021 population estimates). Beyond the concentrated city region of Inverness, it is a predominantly a rural area with dispersed communities.

The varied geography of Highland is characterised by a diverse transport system that includes walking, wheeling and cycling networks, rail, bus as well as ferry and air services and road network comprising local routes as well as an extensive trunk road network operated by Transport Scotland.

Together these different modes of transport strive to meet the varying travel needs of the region to provide access to employment, education, health and other services as well connectivity to family and friends. They are also vital to businesses that operate in Highland, both in terms of the movement of goods and the accessibility of the labour market. The transport system in Highland is also important for tourists who come to visit the natural beauty of the area and different attractions throughout the region.

It is within this geographic context that there are diverse and unique considerations for the transport system in Highland and which form a focus of this new LTS to make further positive change to meet the needs of those who live in, work in and visit Highland.

Policy Context

The LTS must seamlessly align with broader local policies, including planning, economic development, environmental, and health initiatives, as well as Scottish national and regional strategies. By doing so, the LTS will play a crucial role in enhancing other local policy areas while contributing to the vision and ambitions outlined in the National Transport Strategy and the HITRANS Regional Transport Strategy. This alignment ensures a cohesive approach to achieving sustainable and impactful outcomes for communities in Highland. Key policies of relevance to the LTS include those shown on the following page.

National Policy

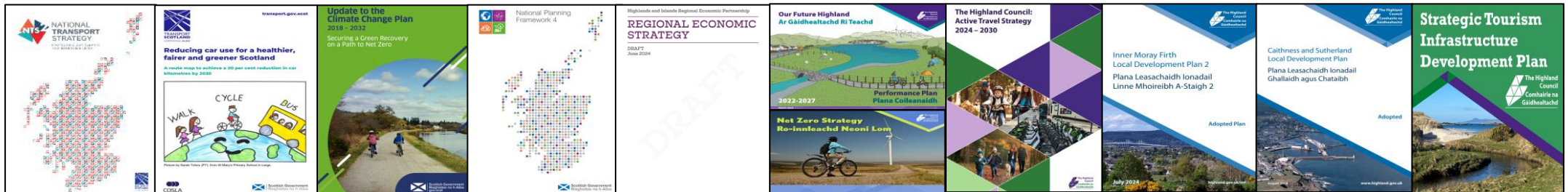
- National Transport Strategy 2
- Strategic Transport Projects Review 2
- 20% Route Map
- Scotland's Road Safety Framework to 2030
- Active Travel Framework
- Accessible Travel Framework
- Climate Change Plan Update
- Climate Change - Scottish National Adaptation Plan
- Cleaner Air for Scotland 2
- Just Transition
- National Planning Framework 4

Regional Policy

- HITRANS Regional Transport Strategy
- Draft Regional Economic Strategy
- Active Highland Strategy

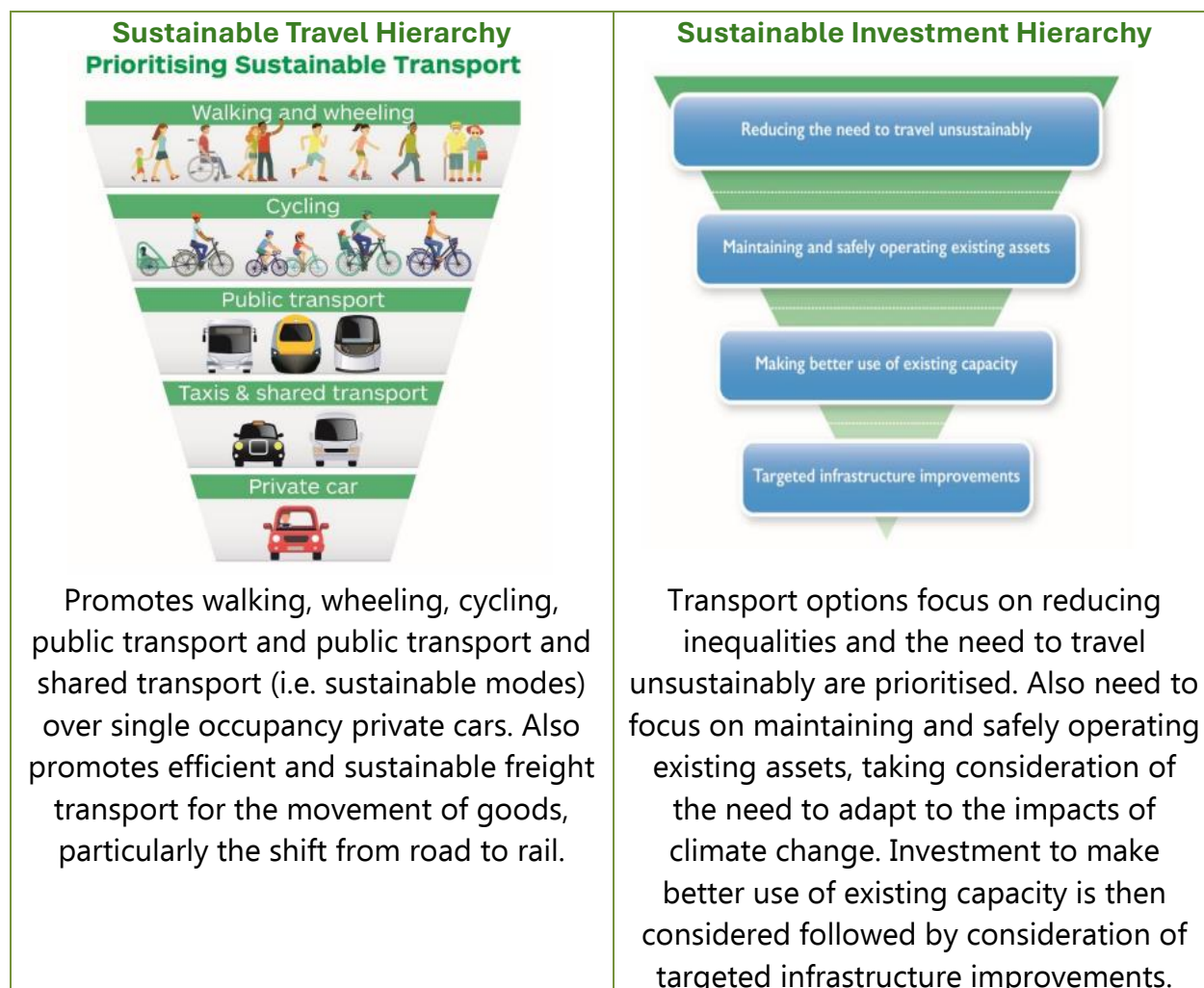
Local Policy

- Corporate Plan
- Active Travel Strategy
- Parking Policy
- Road Safety Plan
- Road Asset Management Plan
- Net Zero Strategy
- Local Development Plans
- Highland Indicative Regional Spatial Strategy to 2050
- Highland Investment Plan
- Strategic Tourism Infrastructure Development Plan



The policy setting has changed since the previous LTS was published in 2010. Most notably, The Highland Council declared a Climate Emergency in May 2019 and as a public body the Council is legally bound to contribute to Scotland’s Net Zero target by 2045.

Linked to the policy context are the **Sustainable Travel Hierarchy** and **Sustainable Investment Hierarchy** as set out in the Scottish Government’s National Transport Strategy¹ and summarised below.



In recognising the climate emergency and Sustainable Travel and Investment Hierarchies in the context of Highland as well as the national target to reduce car vehicle-kilometres by 2030 (compared to 2019 levels), the Council is very alive to the need to balance these policy drivers with the reality of Highland being a rural area and what this means for the transport system and those who use it.

¹ National Transport Strategy, 2020 www.transport.gov.scot/media/47052/national-transport-strategy.pdf [Accessed October 2024]



The LTS therefore strives to provide the policy framework to improve travel as well as to encourage more sustainable freight movements. In progressing this:

- The LTS is not about forcing people out of their car. It is about improving choices so people are not being forced into their car where they own/have access to one or feel there is no alternative to purchasing a car.
- The LTS is about being pragmatic in the transport options available for people. For example, is not about suggesting people walk, wheel and cycle for every journey, rather the focus is to improve travel choices for active travel and public transport to be an option for more people.
- The LTS will not on its own meet user needs nor overcome existing problems and challenges. As people travel to access opportunities (including work and education), services and goods as well as for leisure rather than for the journey itself i.e. the transport system is a means to an end the LTS needs to be embedded in the wider policy setting, so other policies are developed and related decisions are taken with consideration of the impact on why, when and to where people travel and how goods move within and to/from the region.

Transport Problems, Opportunities and Challenges in Highland

A LTS Case for Change was completed by The Highland Council in 2023. This presented an analysis of the problems and opportunities affecting the transport system in the Highlands and feedback was sought from stakeholders and the public at the time. Further information about the problems and opportunities as well as challenges can be found in the LTS Case for Change available on the Council's website [here](#) which has informed the Vision and objectives of the Strategy.

The development of the LTS is now at the stage of identifying the themes and policies, centred around the four objectives of the Strategy.

Local Transport Vision and Objectives

The **Vision** of the LTS is that:

“Our communities, businesses and visitors in Highland will be served by a low carbon transport system that is sustainable, inclusive, safe, resilient and accessible.”

The Vision is supported by **four objectives** that set out the outcomes we want to achieve through the LTS:

To invest in the safety, maintenance and resilience of the transport system to support the future prosperity of communities and businesses within Highland.

To improve public or shared transport options that meet different user needs across the Highland geography.

To improve walking, wheeling and cycling choices for everyone living or visiting Highland to encourage active and healthy journeys.

To reduce emissions from the transport system within Highland.

Themes and Policies

Under each objective are several themes to help identify and frame the policies of the strategy. The **themes** also help to ensure the coverage of the strategy is sufficient, recognising the varied geography of the region ranging from an urban city environment to rural and remote rural areas. The **policies** in turn set out the principles that will guide the actions of the strategy which will be further set out in the Delivery Plan that will be developed by the Council next year to accompany the strategy.

The themes and policies for each objective are set out in the following section.

Objective: To invest in the safety, maintenance and resilience of the transport system to support the future prosperity of communities and businesses within Highland.

Draft Themes	Draft Policies
Maintenance of the existing transport system. Targeted road infrastructure improvements.	Undertake investment decisions with consideration of the Sustainable Investment Hierarchy which focuses on reducing the need to travel unsustainably, then maintaining and safely operating existing assets, then making better use of existing capacity, and finally targeted infrastructure improvements.
Safety of the transport system. Resilience of the transport system.	Deliver a safer road network in Highland, adopting the Safe System approach and related five pillars - Safe Road Use, Safe Vehicles, Safe Speeds, Safe Roads and Roadsides and Post-crash Response. This approach aligns with that adopted by the Scottish Government to achieve Vision Zero where no one is seriously injured or killed on our roads by 2050.
Climate change adaptation. Supporting access needs for economic growth.	Strive to reduce the impact of traffic on communities and reduce casualties through various means, such as speed and traffic reduction measures as well as education in line with the Council's Road Safety Plan.
Strengthening consideration of maintenance needs and costs in design.	Maintain, improve and manage adopted roads, bridges and associated infrastructure in line with the Council's Road Asset Management Plan and projects forming part of the Highland Investment Plan – Roads Infrastructure and Improvement Programme. Investment and maintenance decisions will be taken with cognisance of the Council's Road Network Hierarchy.
	Sustainable transport projects will be subject to an asset management approach, ensuring maintenance and replacement strategies are in place for any ageing infrastructure such as bus shelters as well as bus priority infrastructure such as signage and road markings. Active travel infrastructure will also be designed with consideration of access for maintenance purposes and associated costs to maintain.
	Maintenance of active travel infrastructure will be underpinned by an understanding of what parts of the existing network are adopted by the Council and which aren't. This will help inform maintenance needs going forward and approach.
	The Council will consider ways to lever in funding for the maintenance of adopted assets across all modes, taking into consideration funding already obtained through external means such as developer contributions. This could also include potential efficiencies in pooling resources between partners.
	Continue to engage with partners nationally and regionally on strategic road improvements including the A9 and A96 dualling and A82, A83 and A85 to improve the quality and safety of the road network for all users and unlock regional economic potential.
	Work with partners to enhance the trunk road network that passes through communities to ensure safe, inclusive and sustainable travel options for all.
	Infrastructure will continue to be designed with climate resilience in mind, particularly increased incidences of flooding and higher temperatures.
	Safe and personally secure environments for all will be considered in the design of transport schemes, recognising that some groups suffer particular personal security issues in our built environment and on public transport services.

Draft Themes	Draft Policies
	<p>Maintain the safety and integrity of the local road network while supporting existing and future access needs from different demands/sectors, including renewables, timber industry, Green Freeports and tourism. This includes working with developers to support the future growth of the region. The Council also expects developers to support the transport requirements of their developments and contribute appropriately to the transport system, supported by robust guidance.</p>
	<p>Investigate options to manage tourist traffic at popular destinations in Highland.</p>
	<p>Integrate blue-green infrastructure into the design of transport schemes to provide environmental benefits and improve quality of life.</p>

Objective: To improve public or shared transport options that meet different user needs across the Highland geography.

Draft Themes	Draft Policies
<p>Competitiveness of public transport - journey times, operating schedules and cost.</p> <p>Reliability of public transport.</p> <p>Integration the public transport network within the transport system, including between different public transport modes as well as with active travel and also private car/vehicles.</p> <p>Public transport will support local living and 20-minute neighbourhoods, creating connected and compact neighbourhoods where people can meet the majority of their daily needs within a reasonable distance of their home, preferably by walking, wheeling or cycling or using sustainable transport options. Within more urban areas and larger towns in Highland this will focus on encouraging access by public transport where active travel isn't feasible. For more rural areas, it will be about connecting communities to public transport and shared transport hubs/points to access services and facilities in larger settlements.</p>	<p>Bus service operations will be underpinned by a sound understanding of existing needs and service provision.</p>
	<p>Work with bus operators to ensure adequate provision of public transport for those school pupils who need it as per the Council's educational policies, balanced with the wider needs of communities.</p>
	<p>Continue to participate in the Highland Bus Service Improvement Partnership (BSIP) to support improvements in bus services by partnership working with operators and HITRANS. Through this the Council will continue to explore opportunities to invest in facilities, such as bus lanes and traffic signal priority and other measures designed to support bus use. This includes exploring alternative funding streams if the pause on the Scottish Government's Bus Partnership Fund continues beyond the 2024/25 financial year. A further aspect will be to work with partners to progress bringing forward a minimum acceptable standard for bus services in Highland that is part of the BSIP Plan.</p>
	<p>Work with partners to continue to progress improvements to the rail network in Highland, supporting both the movement of passengers and freight.</p>
	<p>Work with partners to support the case for investment in ferries infrastructure and service improvements that meet the needs of communities and businesses in Highland. This includes completing the next stages of the Corran Ferry replacement project.</p>
	<p>Continue to work with partners to encourage sustainable surface access to and from ferry services in Highland.</p>
	<p>Continue to work with partners to encourage sustainable surface access to and from airports in Highland.</p>
	<p>Work with partners to support the case for improvements to air travel, including enhancements to existing services and the establishment of new services recognising the role of aviation within Highland in getting people to hubs and across the region as well as supporting economic development. This should include consideration of using the Public Service Obligation (PSO) contracting system.</p>
	<p>Public transport services will be complemented by fit for purpose infrastructure e.g. waiting facilities/provision, information underpinned by a sound understanding of requirements.</p>
	<p>Work with partners to ensure that the public transport network in Highland is inclusive in line with policy, guidance and standards set out in the Equality Action 2010. This includes access to vehicles and stops/stations as well as information and communications about services, fares etc. This includes ensuring all groups with protected characteristics are considered and have the opportunity to input. A factor to this is also the ageing population in Highland and what this means in terms of provision.</p>
<p>The public transport system will be developed with account taken of the needs of both younger and older people to give them access to sustainable, safe and affordable options.</p>	
<p>Encourage integration between different public transport and shared transport options as well as active travel. This includes integration of services as well as ticketing and how services can be booked, harnessing the opportunities presented by technology</p>	

Draft Themes	Draft Policies
	<p>and different types of service delivery. In the adoption of technology, it will be important to ensure there is not digital exclusion, such as how people can access information and take advantage of a more integrated offer.</p>
	<p>Continue to explore opportunities for mobility hubs in Highland to support connectivity between different public transport and shared transport options, building on the success of existing hubs such as at Torvean. This includes exploring alternative funding streams if the pause on the Scottish Government's Bus Partnership Fund continues beyond the 2024/25 financial year.</p>
	<p>Work with partners and operators to promote awareness of lower public transport fares options and support continued work in this area. This includes the Highland rail card and also links to integrated ticketing across modes and different operators within Highland and also to/from the area.</p>
	<p>Work with HITRANS to ensure fairness in the funding of rural transport. This links to the concessionary travel system operated by the Scottish Government, both in relation to the level of reimbursement received by more rural areas such as Highland and mechanism for reimbursement in relation to affordability for fare paying passengers.</p>



Objective: To improve walking, wheeling and cycling choices for everyone living or visiting Highland to encourage active and healthy journeys.

Draft Themes	Draft Policies
<p>Invest in active travel infrastructure which is inclusive for all.</p> <p>Invest in behaviour change to encourage mode shift to active travel for all or part of journeys.</p>	<p>Deliver safe, direct, cohesive and inclusive active travel infrastructure. This includes both within communities to support local living as well as between settlements, particularly where distances allow active travel to be feasible in more populated and less remote areas of Highland. Network planning will take account of desire lines to meet needs and encourage use as well as opportunities to enhance access in relation to areas of deprivation. This will also include consideration of the integration of active travel infrastructure with other modes and maximising opportunities such as the redevelopment of Inverness Rail Station.</p>
<p>Integration of the active travel network within the transport system, including between different active travel modes as well as with public transport and also private car/vehicles.</p>	<p>The Council will strive to progress active travel scheme delivery on a network basis to support the roll out of a cohesive network rather than individual schemes, subject to the current funding approach of being scheme based and single year.</p>
<p>Active travel will support local living and 20-minute neighbourhoods, creating connected and compact neighbourhoods where people can meet the majority of their daily needs within a reasonable distance of their home, preferably by walking, wheeling or cycling or using sustainable transport options. Within more urban areas and larger towns in Highland this will focus on encouraging walking, wheeling and cycling. For more rural areas, it will be about connecting communities to public transport and shared transport hubs/points to access services and facilities in larger settlements utilising walking, wheeling and cycling routes at the start and end of their journey.</p>	<p>Design new active travel infrastructure in line with policy, guidance and standards, such as the Equality Act 2010 and Cycling by Design. This includes ensuring all groups with protected characteristics are considered and have the opportunity to input into designs. A factor to this is also the ageing population in Highland and what this means in terms of provision.</p>
	<p>Active travel infrastructure will be designed with consideration of different road users, including those who walk, cycle and wheel, bus operators and passengers, drivers of cars and other private vehicles as well as access requirements of businesses and other services local to a new route.</p>
	<p>New cycle infrastructure (cycleways, parking and storage) will be developed to accommodate non-standard cycles including adapted bikes and cargo bikes. This will also require the consideration of associated maintenance costs at the outset.</p>
	<p>The Council's processes will align with supporting active travel infrastructure, such as the position on the process for the consideration of new pedestrian crossings and their implementation.</p>
	<p>The Council's approach to development planning and development management will be in line with the Sustainable Travel Hierarchy. The Council therefore expects that active travel is incorporated into development layouts from the start and not designed in retrospectively.</p>
	<p>Continue to support walking, cycling and scooting to school where this is a feasible choice for pupils to travel to school. Staff should also seek to travel actively where possible, aligning with the Council's wider Sustainable Business Travel Action Plan.</p>
	<p>Continue to enforce the ban on pavement parking within Highland to support safe negotiation of footways by those walking, wheeling and cycling as well as explore other opportunities to remove barriers to active travel. This could include the implementation of banning double parking and parking at dropped kerbs as enabled by powers in the Transport (Scotland) Act 2019.</p>
	<p>Invest in behaviour change initiatives to promote the use of active travel infrastructure and with consideration of different users. This covers awareness raising of both the physical and mental health benefits as well as education of active travel users and drivers around safety and using the network together (including consideration by cyclists of pedestrians and vice versa).</p>

Objective: To reduce emissions from the transport system within Highland.

Draft Themes	Draft Policies
<p>Provide opportunities for people to have the choice to travel less where practical. This will seek to provide opportunities for people to work and study remotely and access services online where feasible. This though is not about mandating how and when people travel, as it is recognised there are different reasons people travel and wider social well-being factors, but rather focused on giving opportunities that remove or reduce the need to travel.</p> <p>Provide opportunities for people to have the choice to travel shorter distances to access employment, education and services.</p> <p>Provide opportunities for people to have less reliance on the car for journey, both for the entire journey or as part of a journey.</p> <p>Reduce emissions from motorised journeys.</p> <p>Reduce emissions from transport related construction and maintenance.</p>	<p>The Council will continue to support the roll-out of broadband and mobile networks to improve digital connectivity.</p>
	<p>Continue to decarbonise the Council's in-house fleet and replace vehicles with low emission alternatives. This includes buses operated by the Council, fleet cars/vans and Heavy Goods Vehicles for gritting and refuse collections so far as is possible in terms of logistical considerations and associated cost. This links to the Council's Sustainable Business Travel Action which includes a focus on rationalising the fleet and replacing vehicles with low emission alternatives. The Council will also work with bus operators and other partners in the region to support decarbonisation of their fleet.</p>
	<p>Continue to explore ways to reduce the carbon impact of Council-related travel, including both the journey to work as well as business travel. This links to the Council's Sustainable Business Travel Action which includes a focus on behaviour change and promoting sustainable travel as well as reducing the use of grey fleet (use of private vehicles for work purposes).</p>
	<p>Invest in infrastructure to support travel by alternatively fuelled vehicles for those who live in, work in and visit Highland. This includes the public EV charging network as well as requirements of homeowners who do not have private driveways but wish to charge at home.</p>
	<p>The impact of investment on climate change will form part of the Council's transport decision-making process.</p>
	<p>The Council's approach to development planning and development management will be in line with the Sustainable Travel Hierarchy and set out to ensure that developments contribute appropriately to the transport system to support the delivery of the local transport strategy, supported by robust guidance.</p>
	<p>The Council shall strive to work with organisations so they consider the impact of their decisions on how services are provided and where facilities are located. This includes consideration of accessibility in line with the Sustainable Travel Hierarchy and carbon implications of changes to where people need to access services to support delivery of the local transport strategy.</p>
	<p>The transport system will support 20-minute neighbourhoods and the roll out of the Council's community Points of Service Delivery approach. Within more urban areas and larger towns in Highland this will focus on encouraging walking, wheeling and cycling for shorter everyday journeys. For more rural areas, it will be about connecting communities to public transport and shared transport hubs/points to access services and facilities in larger settlements utilising walking, wheeling and cycling routes at the start and end of their journey.</p>
	<p>The Council will continue to keep under review the approach to parking to support the efficient operation of the road network within Highland, including in both urban and more rural areas, as well as contribute to wider policies to support sustainable travel.</p>
<p>The Council will continue to keep under review options for demand management to help optimise the operation of the existing transport system for all, including those who travel by public transport and non-motorised modes of transport.</p>	

Draft Themes	Draft Policies
	Freight movements should be as sustainable as possible and alternatives to road based transport used where feasible, such as cargo bikes for last mile deliveries and railheads and waterways for longer haul freight journeys.
	The Council will continue to support proposals of the Scottish Government to decarbonise the rail network within Highland.
	The Council will continue to support partners in their work to build on the success of the Sustainable Aviation Test Environment (SATE) project and Scottish Government aspiration for the Highlands & Islands to be the world's first zero emission aviation region.

How to Give Your Views

With the transport system used by everyone living in, working in and visiting Highland, input from stakeholders and the public is important to the development of the new LTS and the Council wants to hear your views.

You can share your views on the draft themes and policies by completing the feedback form [here](#). The form will remain open until **Tuesday 3rd December 2024**.

If you would prefer to receive a hard copy of the feedback form and submit your response by post then please contact the LTS team at The Highland Council on 07909 277 604.