



NP Mobility Partnership Programme Update

Agenda Item 7

National Park Authority Board Meeting

Monday 8 December 2025

Paper for information

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1. Purpose

- 1.1. To provide an update on progress with the National Park Mobility Partnership programme, designed to secure the investment, expertise and resources needed to deliver an efficient, inclusive, and lower-carbon transport system across the National Park, contributing to the overall vision of a thriving, nature-positive, and carbon negative Park.
- 1.2. Following on from the paper presented to Members in March 2025, this update presents:
 - 1.2.1. A summary of progress during 2025-26
 - 1.2.2. An outline of priorities for 2026-27
 - 1.2.3. The key risks to the programme

2. Recommendation(s)

- 2.1. Members are asked to **note** the contents of the report.

3. Contribution to National Park Partnership Plan and/or Our 5-year Plan

3.1. The work detailed in this report progresses delivery of the National Park Partnership Plan 2024-2029 following objectives:

- Develop a new strategic transport partnership approach
- Make sustainable travel choices more attractive
- Improve travel routes and services

3.2. These objectives sit within the 2045 outcome 'An Inclusive, Low-Carbon Travel Network', section 'Low-Carbon Travel for Everyone' and delivery framework 'Creating a Low-Carbon Place'.

4. Funding in 2025/26

4.1. The programme secured £249,000 of funding in **2025/26** to support resource allocation, delivery of studies and the Trossachs Explorer bus service. Funding was secured from partners outlined in Table 1.

4.2. This compares to £220,000 of funding received in **2024/25**. The slight increase, particularly from local and regional partners, is recognition of progress being made across the programme in terms of strengthening relations and demonstrating impact.

Table 1:

Funder	Allocated to	Award
National Park Authority	Trossachs Explorer and Car Park Study	£78,000
Strathclyde Partnership for Transport (SPT) People and Place	Band E (1 FTE), Band C (0.2 FTE) and Park & Ride Options Appraisal	£100,000
Tactran People and Place	Trossachs Explorer	£56,000
Stirling Council	Trossachs Explorer	£10,000
Callander Community Council (from Braes of Doune Wind Farm Community Fund)	Trossachs Explorer	£5,000

5. Governance

5.1. The **Leadership Group**, comprising of representatives from the National Park Authority (NPA), Local Authorities, Regional Transport Partners and national bodies continue to meet quarterly to define the programme, governance and finance arrangements. These meetings have had a high level of involvement

from partners. Engagement outside meetings continues to be mixed but should develop over time where opportunities align.

5.2. The Leadership Group is supported by **Working Groups** which have been established to focus initially on the following areas:

5.2.1 Bus travel to identify gaps in the network, the role of Demand Responsive Transport (DRT)/community transport and data.

5.2.2 Parking to identify current charges and costs (including maintenance and enforcement), future approaches to efficiencies and revenue sharing opportunities.

5.2.3 Data and digital to identify journey demand, review ticketing opportunities and journey planning applications and use of Automatic Number Plate Recognition (ANPR).

5.3. A further group focussing on funding is being scoped which would map the funding landscape and identify gaps, match funding and opportunities for joint bids.

5.4. A **Stakeholder and Insights Forum** has also been established, bringing together representatives from communities, businesses, third sector, the rural transport sector and young people offering local insights, shaping direction and aligning a diverse range of interests.

5.5. The last meeting of the forum included presentations from Argyll and Bute's Community Planning Partnership, Destination Helensburgh and Helensburgh Pier Company, McLaren Communities Futures Group, Scottish Rural and Islands Transport Community and the National Park Youth Committee. The breadth of transport related work being developed locally and more widely is positive and supports ongoing discussions at a strategic level.

5.6. This forum has met twice in 2025 and will continue to meet 3-4 times a year.

6. Studies

6.1. The **East Loch Lomond Car Park Study**, funded by revenue generated by the Trossachs Explorer in 2024, was delivered in April 2025 by consultants SCP and Ansons Consulting. This study looked at consolidating data and economics of future car park operations across the East Loch Lomond corridor (between Drymen and Rowardennan).

6.2. The study focussed on public car parks operated by Stirling Council, the Park Authority and Forestry and Land Scotland. All car parks currently have different enforcement procedures and charging price points.

- 6.3. The study identified opportunities for partnerships to offer efficiencies, cost savings and a clearer, more consistent approach to chargers across car park owners. However, there are differing priorities across partners from financial sustainability to re-investment of revenue back into transport services.
- 6.4. The study identified a range of scenarios for future management of parking including:
- 6.4.1 Do nothing: maintain the fragmented approach to car park management with minor operational improvements.
 - 6.4.2 Do minimal: standardise parking charges across the corridor and explore additional charging structures.
 - 6.4.3 Scenario 1: establish a more coordinated approach to car park management, either through shared enforcement or subcontracting enforcement responsibilities to a single operator.
- 6.5. Scenario 2: introduce dynamic pricing mechanisms to manage demand, encourage use of specific car parks while optimising revenue generation to support infrastructure improvements and new transport services. Scenario benchmarked against approaches in Pembrokeshire and Snowdonia National Parks.
- 6.6. Depending on the approach, the above scenarios could generate an annual net operating surplus of between £80k to £400k however there is recognition that this needs to form part of a wider demand management solution for the corridor.
- 6.7. The **East Loch Lomond Park and Ride Options Appraisal**, funded by SPT, is currently being delivered by consultants WSP after a competitive tendering process resulted in 9 bids being received.
- 6.8. This study will take forward work to date, including the East Loch Lomond Strategic Tourism Infrastructure Development Framework (STID), car park study and Stirling Council's Sustainable Mobility Strategy, to address access challenges and car dependency across East Loch Lomond. This will look at the viability of a park and ride and new transport services to support modal shift, ultimately improving the local environment and visitor experience in the area.
- 6.9. Engagement is proposed to take place with partners and key stakeholders including the East Loch Lomond Visitor Management Group (including community groups and businesses), Regional Transport Partners, landowners and transport operators. The study will be completed by March 2026.

7. Trossachs Explorer Pilot

7.1. Building on a successful pilot in 2024, this year's Trossachs Explorer bus service featured **improvements** based on learnings from the previous year, including extending the route to Drymen, improved connections to wider transport services, and lower-emission buses. This year's service was operated by McColls following an accelerated procurement process.

7.2. Key **highlights** include:

- 5,926 passengers travelled on the service (15% increase from 2024)
- 49% travelled for free through the National Entitlement Card
- 100% of scheduled trips ran (not including postponed services during the amber weather warning on 4th August) with 7% running early and only 2% late
- 180 respondents to the public survey
- 4 dedicated and enthusiastic drivers

7.3. **Evaluation** is underway including an analysis of feedback received and ticketing data. Officers are working with Tactran to define the social return for investment including the impact on the environment, economy and health. An evaluation report will be published in the early part of 2026.

7.3.1 Early feedback suggests the following **successes**:

- Experience: 95% of respondents to the public survey either had a very positive or positive experience of using the Trossachs Explorer.
- Quality: praise for the comfort of buses and interaction with drivers.
- Reliability: recognition of significant improvements to reliability, strengthening public confidence in using the service.
- Promotion and branding: recognisable service that communities and partners feel proud to promote.
- Connections: providing a direct public transport link between the Trossachs and East Loch Lomond.

7.3.2 Early feedback suggests the following **improvements** should be made:

- Communication: earlier confirmation that the service is running to help businesses, communities and visitors plan.

- Journey planning: simplify the timetable to help passengers plan their journey more easily.
- Ticket pricing: improve the legibility of prices and incorporate a structure which works for passengers wanting to travel one way.
- Capacity: explore opportunities for buses to carry bikes to make the service more attractive.
- Connections: work with other operated services to better align timetables.

7.4. The learnings from the Trossachs Explorer alongside Stirling Council’s C60 bus service pilot are continuing to shape ongoing discussions with partners and stakeholders as part of the wider National Park Mobility Partnership.

7.5. The project was supported with **funding** from the Park Authority, Tactran, Stirling Council and Callander Community Council through the Braes of Doune Wind Farm. Revenue from ticket sales covered the shortfall in funding. Resources to manage and deliver the project were provided by the NPA and Stirling Council.

7.6. The total **cost** of the project was £156,825 which is broken down in Table 2. Officers took the decision to go with a three-bus operation this year to strengthen reliability and increase capacity on peak days. This ultimately increased costs.

Table 2

Item	Cost	
	2024	2025
Bus operations	£ 103,263.61	£ 143,745
Engagement and comms	£ 9,458.52	£ 3,955
Infrastructure	£ 8,698.72	£ 645
Branding	£ 10,771.20	£ 8,480
External technical advice	£ 4,826	n/a
External legal advice	£ 1,197	n/a
Evaluation	£ 4,620	n/a
Total	£ 142,835.05	£ 156,825

7.7. The service generated £16,449.72 in **revenue** from ticket sales. This compares to £14,917.90 revenue generated in 2024.

Given the clear and continued support for the service, work is underway by the Park Authority and Stirling Council to secure the **return of the Trossachs Explorer in 2026**, subject to securing the necessary funding. Continuing to build momentum into next year and beyond is crucial, ensuring this becomes a permanent service that runs year-round (increasing in frequency during the

peak season) without reducing the quality of user experience built over the last two years.

- 7.8. The Park Authority has led the delivery of the Trossachs Explorer over the last two years with integral support from Stirling Council. In the long term, services like the Trossachs Explorer are best delivered by transport authorities with support from the National Park Mobility Partnership.
- 7.9. While work is ongoing to unlock revenue from car parks, securing funding from public and private sources is critical in the short term. Officers are engaging with businesses and community groups to seek commercial partnerships, donations and local grant funding. Money has also been set aside by Stirling Council through a community transport fund.
- 7.10. A Prior Information Notice was issued to the market in October, and this has attracted interest from 6 operators so far which is a great indication of the growing credibility of the service.
- 7.11. Officers would like to thank Members for their ongoing support in delivering this service.

8. Mobility Route Map

- 8.1. A key output for the programme this year is to take forward the [Sustainable Transport Optional Appraisal and Modal Shift Report](#) and [National Park Partnership Plan](#) (NPPP) to set out a joint delivery plan across the National Park Mobility Partnership.
- 8.2. The Mobility Route Map will use the recommendations from the Ansons report and the *low-carbon travel network* delivery framework within the NPPP to schedule out activities for the short term (2025-2027), medium term (2027-2035) and long term (2035-2045) against:
- Objective 1: Develop a new strategic transport partnership approach (governance and finance arrangements)
 - Objective 2: Make sustainable travel choices more attractive (transport services and incentivisation)
 - Objective 3: Improve travel routes and services (sector capacity and delivery models)
- 8.3. Workshops to develop this are underway with the Leadership Group and Stakeholder and Insights Forum. Individual sessions have also taken place with National Park Authority teams and senior representatives from VisitScotland. Feedback received will support the development of the Route Map in early 2026.
- 8.4. Officers intend to present the Route Map to Members in June 2026.

9. Priorities for 2026/27

9.1. As part of the 2026/27 programme, Officers will continue to work towards securing funding and defining a programme of work.

9.1.1. Applications for **funding** are either underway or being explored with the following partners:

- National Heritage Lottery Fund (as part of the current 'Landscape Connections' bid)
- Transport Scotland People and Place Programme (administered by Regional Transport Partners)
- Local transport authority partners
- Local channels (including community grants and commercial partnerships)

9.1.2. Development of **governance arrangements** through ongoing meetings of the Leadership Group, Stakeholder and Insights Forum and Working Groups. Maintaining momentum of working groups is key to demonstrating the potential of creating efficiencies through partnership working.

9.1.3. Launch of the National Park Mobility Route Map.

9.1.4. Subject to funding, the following **studies** will be scoped:

- Water transport integration study: to assess the feasibility of a low carbon water transport network and integration with multi-modal connections (including bus, rail and active travel).
- Transport sector capacity review: to undertake an analysis of current and future capacity across the local transport sector.
- East Loch Lomond next steps: to take forward recommendations from this year's Park and Ride Options Appraisal.

9.1.5. Subject to funding, the following **services/pilots** will be scoped:

- Trossachs Explorer: to extend the running of the service across the peak (June to September) and shoulder (October to May) season.
- East Loch Lomond Revenue Sharing: to test opportunities for increased efficiencies and pooling of revenue across public car park owners.

- West Loch Lomond shuttle bus/DRT: to test appetite for increased connectivity between Luss, Tarbet, Arrochar and Lochgoilhead.

9.1.6. Officers remain committed to providing **ongoing support to partners** including Stirling Council’s C60 and Demand Responsive Transport pilots.

9.1.7. Development of methodology for measuring the following **NPPP Low-Carbon Place indicator**:

- Monitor rural transport provision. Reduce transport emissions from travel to and from the National Park by at least 61% from the 2019 baseline by 2030.

10. Key risks

10.1. The key risks to the programme are outlined in Table 3.

Table 3

Description	Category	Mitigation
<u>Funding</u> Uncertainties around the ability to secure the required funding (incl. key personnel) may result in significant delays to the overall programme.	Operational Reputational Political	Proactive engagement with funders. Diversify funding model. Proactive communication that transport is not currently a business-as-usual activity for the Park Authority.
<u>Partner capacity</u> Lack of capacity across partners along with individual competing priorities / strategies may result in delays in delivery or not meeting original objectives.	Operational Reputational Financial	Engagement with Leadership Group about capacity needs. Monitor required resources. Engagement with Transport Scotland on opportunities for a placement. Proactive engagement with funders.

<p><u>Partner roles and responsibilities</u></p> <p>Unclear roles and responsibilities across partners may result in delays to delivery and the NPA becoming the main delivery body.</p>	<p>Operational Reputational Financial</p>	<p>Ongoing discussions through the Leadership Group. Aligning visions through the developing Mobility Route Map. Ongoing 1-2-1s with partners.</p>
<p><u>Public support</u></p> <p>Phasing of the work may result in pushback from the public over where and when the work is delivered.</p>	<p>Public Reputational Political</p>	<p>Ongoing discussions through the Stakeholder and Insights Forum. Aligning visions through the developing Mobility Route Map. Proactive engagement through other Park Authority forms to set out delivery plan.</p>

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