SEStran Taxicard Review

Final Briefing Paper

Report

SEStran Taxicard Review

Final Briefing Paper

Report

SEStran Taxicard Review

Final Briefing Paper

Report

Contents Amendments Record

This document has been issued and amended as follows:

Status/Revision	Revision description	Issue Number	Approved By	Date
Final		1	Iain Sherriff	09/05/2008

Contents

Tables and Figures

Executive Summary

JMP was commissioned by SEStran to consider the establishment of a regional taxicard that would allow holders to undertake a limited number of journeys, without the need to have direct access to a private car whilst providing consistency of provision and equality amongst all SEStran constituent authorities, specifically for the mobility impaired.

This is the final report for the SEStran Taxicard Review; and is an updated version of the briefing paper previously issued in March 2008. Based on the available evidence gathered during the course of this review, JMP considers that there is limited scope for a comprehensive SEStran-wide taxicard scheme, however certain elements could benefit from a regional focus. JMP have, therefore, made a number of recommendations based on the aspect of regional standardisation.

Recommendation 1: Introduce Electronic Recording System

The introduction of an electronic recording system (ERS) is essential to the deliverability of a regionwide taxicard scheme, however the stand alone business case for an ERS is currently at the margin. Current national initiatives supporting the use of the National Entitlement Card (NEC) would significantly enhance the business case for introducing a taxicard ERS throughout the SEStran area.

The National Entitlement Card Programme are considering a project proposal to

"rationalise the various taxi schemes in use throughout Scotland, to produce a standard use of the NEC to operate a taxi scheme in any local authority, and to migrate current schemes from standalone smartcards onto the NEC". JMP believes that there would be insufficient buy-in from the fifteen local authorities to move the NEC project forward however there is the opportunity to undertake a pilot study within the SEStran area. Given this, our first recommendation is as follows:

It is recommended that SEStran is authorised to engage fully with the NEC Forum with specific regard to assisting in the proposal; but amending the proposal to remove "throughout Scotland" and to include the phrase "by the introduction of the pilot project in the SEStran area". A detailed project proposal should be prepared for SEStran along with any physical and or financial implications arising.

Recommendation 2: Minimum Standard Criteria

There are significant differences in eligibility criteria between the current SEStran taxicard schemes. Some authorities have chosen to adopt eligibility rules of the national concession scheme, whilst others allow applications based on self assessment with confirmation from a health professional.

JMP recommends adopting a minimum standard for eligibility to improve equity across the region. It is suggested that the most appropriate criteria is that based on qualification for a companion card for the national bus scheme, this is known as the C+1 criteria to be eligible for individuals must be in receipt either of the higher or middle rate of the care component of DLA, in receipt of Attendance Allowance or certified registered blind.

Although adopting this standard could have budgetary consequences for most of the constituent authorities, it is not felt that this would generate a significant additional number of members onto the respective schemes because a high percentage of those in receipt of the benefits are currently members of their local taxicard schemes.

The use of C+1 criteria provides a minimum standard of eligibility and some authorities may choose to add additional criteria to ensure all those not in receipt of benefits or with severe mobility difficulties are able to apply for a Taxicard.

It is therefore recommended to adopt a minimum standard for eligibility to improve equity across the region, that this is based on the C+1 criteria of the national bus scheme. It should be noted however that some individual current clients could be disadvantaged.

Recommendation 3: Standardise journey entitlement

With regards to journey entitlement, there are differences between the constituent authorities, however, the majority offer 104 journeys per annum the equivalent of a return journey a week. There is evidence to show most taxicard users do not consume their full entitlement, therefore reducing the number of journeys to 104 (or in the case of Fife increasing the entitlement) will not have a significant impact on travel patterns of the majority of taxicard users, and therefore will not affect current expenditure levels by the authorities.

SEStran should request a standardisation of taxicard journey numbers amongst the constituent authorities at 104 journeys per year per person.

Recommendation 4: Consideration of alternatives to taxicard

Throughout the review it has been highlighted that taxicard is only one component within a wide range of demand responsive transport services, and despite its benefits is not always the most appropriate transport solution for the mobility impaired. Many local authorities have recognised this and have chosen to provide other types of DRT within their areas, which they feel are best suited to local needs and conditions.

SEStran constituent authorities will be best placed to determine the need for a taxicard scheme within their area. There should be no inference of compulsory participation.

Recommendation 5: Regional standards of service quality

When compared to the general high standard of service provided by DRT services such as dial-a-ride, service quality offered by private taxi operators can fall short. To redress this ongoing issue in the variation in quality of service offered by taxi operators, given there may be scope to develop regional standards of quality as part of a SEStran-wide taxicard scheme, these could include:

- vehicle quality, including an increase in the number of accessible vehicles;
- driver training, particularly in the safe restraint and carriage of wheelchairs; and
- equipment.

The suggested standards are not intended to replace the remit and responsibilities of council taxi licensing authorities, but are simply minimum standards that participating taxicard operators should aspire to achieve and should be considered as part of raising standards in the industry.

A minimum standard of service delivery and training is to be agreed with the relevant constituent authority departments for taxi operators and drivers participating in a taxicard scheme.

1   Background

1.1   Taxicard schemes allow individuals to travel in licensed taxis at a significantly discounted rate, drawing on the availability of taxis as a pre-existing, flexible, on demand service but also taking account of the fact that low disposable incomes of many disabled people mean that taxi fares can be an economic barrier to mobility.

1.2   One of the key objectives of SEStran's Regional Transport Strategy (RTS) is to improve accessibility for those with limited transport choice (including those with mobility difficulties) or who have no access to a car, particularly those who live in rural areas. Improving access to employment, health facilities, retailing, leisure, social and education as well as making public transport more affordable and socially inclusive are all measures which will aim to achieve this accessibility objective.

1.3   One of the region-wide measures detailed in the RTS, in this case Topic 28, is to "*review and consider what scope [SEStran] feels a region-wide taxicard offers in terms of delivering the RTS objectives, and as part of the rural transport hierarchy…and with respect to systems currently in operation. This is a **medium priority** for SEStran, both given the requirement to consider it under the guidance and the potential to deliver schemes or services that offer the potential to address inclusion and accessibility issues*".

1.4   The following policies of the RTS are particularly relevant when investigating the potential for a regional taxicard:

- **Policy 17** – SEStran will seek to ensure that communities with poor access to employment by public transport and low car ownership/high deprivation will be the subject of targeted measures to address this;

- **Policy 18** – In selecting interventions as part of the RTS, SEStran will seek to pay particular regard to the need to reduce problems caused by peripherality in rural and other areas of the region that are less well served by public transport;

- **Policy 19** – Where improvements in accessibility are found to be required, the RTS will seek, in the first instance, to deliver these by enhancing conditions for pedestrians, cyclists and public transport users (including community transport /DRT); and in particular

- **Policy 26** – SEStran will seek to ensure that people who have difficulties in using conventional public transport due to disability will be the subject of targeted measures to address this.

1.5   SEStran residents do not currently enjoy equality of access to taxicard schemes as only seven out of eight of the SEStran constituent authorities offer schemes and significant differences exist in their delivery. Other than a common requirement for residency in the local authority area, none of the constituent authorities adopt the same eligibility criteria. Differences exist in the amount of subsidy payable by the local authority, and similarly with journey entitlement; whilst the majority offer 104 journeys, some authorities are offering 80 or 624 journeys per year.

1.6   Therefore, SEStran has commissioned this review with a view to improving social inclusion throughout the area and to remove the inequality of provision that currently exists across the eight constituent authority areas.

1.7   SEStran asked that JMP review existing taxicard schemes as operated by the constituent authorities to identify the benefits and disbenefits for a regional scheme, including the use of an electronic recording system. Consultation was undertaken with each of the local authorities and a wide range of key external stakeholders.

1.8   SEStran have also anticipated that in the development of a regional taxicard, there will be potential for increased economies of scale with a centralised administrative function and with the purchase and deployment of an electronic recording system.

2   Benefits of a regional taxicard scheme

2.1   During the extensive consultation undertaken as part of the review, the key benefits of existing scheme and impacts of a regional scheme have been identified in terms of their consequence for SEStran and the constituent local authorities.

Table 2.1 Benefits of a Regionwide taxicard scheme

	Description of benefit	Local Authorities	SEStran
Social inclusion	Taxicard schemes can enhance accessibility and social inclusion for a targeted market helping to achieve objectives set out in the RTS and LTSs.	✓✓	✓✓
Flexibility	Is the most on-demand transport available, operating 24 hours a day seven days a week, compared with other DRT services that generally operate between 08.00 and 22.00.	✓✓	✓✓
No Stigma	Taxicard users are not stigmatised in the same way as compared with those using dial-a-bus type services.	✓✓✓	✓✓
Infrastructure	The taxi fleets are already in place.	✓✓✓	✓✓✓
Administration	The majority of administrative burden falls on the taxi operators.	✓✓✓	○
	Paper based administration is expensive and time consuming for authorities.	✗	✗
	An electronic recording system would improve/establish an audit trail and users information profiles (e.g. journey purpose) currently not available and could ease paper based administration costs.	✓	✓✓
Economies of Scale Central Purchasing	Significant economies of scale in procurement of an electronic recording system could be realised through the potential buying power of eight authorities and taxi operators.	✓✓	✓✓
National Entitlement Card	Platform of National Entitlement Card can be used to develop electronic recording system for regionwide taxicard.	✓✓	✓✓
Standard Quality/Eligibility	The current similarities in a number of schemes could encourage standardisation in terms of service quality and entitlement.	✓	✓✓
	Differences in eligibility criteria between seven SEStran schemes.	✗	✗✗

	Description of benefit	Local Authorities	SEStran
Additional Funding	Main journey purpose is for health reasons, with the revision of patient transport services there is a potential to lobby for additional funding for taxicard schemes.	✓✓	✓✓
	Additional funding was provided by Transport for London towards conformity on standard eligibility and service quality in London. There may be opportunities to approach the Scottish Government for funding through the Modernising Government Fund, National Entitlement Card or request monies on a social inclusion agenda.	✓✓	✓✓
Journey Entitlement/Discount	Even if a standardised discount was introduced, inequality would still exist between rural and urban areas.	✘✘	✘✘
	Different journey entitlement between SEStran schemes.	✘	✘✘
Budget Control	Cost effective to authorities, who are able to suppress demand by attaching journey or cost limits.	✓✓✓	○
	Limited budget available to deliver existing schemes.	✘	✘
	Concessions not keeping pace with increase in taxi fares. An increase in budget would be required in the near future to redress this imbalance.	✘✘	✘✘
Taxi operators/vehicles	Lack of accessible taxis has led to the reduced effectiveness of taxicard schemes for certain clients in some areas.	✘	✘
	Patchy coverage within council areas.	✘	✘
Licensing	Different licensing conditions in all constituent authority areas. (e.g. some authorities stipulate that licence is subject to joining the taxicard scheme).	○	✘✘
	Different licensing bodies leading to issues of cross border travel	✘✘	✘✘
Loss of local control	Loss of local control when moving to a regionwide scheme.	✘✘	○

Key to Table 2.1:	✓✓✓	Very significant benefit	✘	Weaker disbenefit
	✓✓	Significant benefit	✘✘	Significant disbenefit
	✓	Weaker benefit	○	No, or negligible, impact

3 Social implications of taxicard schemes

3.1 There are often many barriers to accessibility that prevent people with limited mobility experiencing the same opportunities as the rest of society. Older and disabled people are less likely to have their own transport, instead relying on family and friends to provide lifts, or on public transport and demand responsive transport. They are most likely to be disadvantaged through a lack of access to transport.

3.2 With public transport, difficulty getting to a bus route, uncertainty over whether accessible vehicles will be available, a lack of assistance by staff and personal security issues can create significant disincentives to travel. Older and disabled people, therefore, can be prevented from accessing employment, health, shopping and leisure and face social exclusion.

3.3 Individuals living within the SEStran area will be socially excluded in a variety of ways – exclusion may be physical due to age or health; or geographical with rural residents particularly disadvantaged in terms of access to services and opportunities. Many older and disabled people have lower than average disposable income and affordability of fares is an issue, therefore they face an economic barrier to inclusion.

3.4 Taxi fares are expensive for many people with low incomes, and taxicard schemes aim to address this by offering a discount, however it is recognised that even fares using a taxicard discount are still outwith the means of many, especially as the discounts offered by the SEStran authorities have never increased since inception of the schemes, despite ongoing rises in taxi fares. Therefore, taxicard is more likely to be used to make essential journeys.

3.5 Lack of transport to healthcare means that older and disabled people are more likely to face poorer health and disruption of treatment, and are less likely to be able to exercise choice in seeking healthcare. Transport problems contribute to the high number of missed or cancelled appointments, which incur costs to the NHS and Scottish Ambulance Service in terms of wasted resources and missed opportunities for early treatment or preventative healthcare. With national trends predicting a significant increase in our ageing population, it is anticipated that there will be an exacerbation of these problems.

3.6 This review has found that health related trips form a significant proportion of taxicard journeys (circa 40%) in the SEStran area therefore the current local schemes are playing an important role in enabling people to access healthcare. This highlights the on-demand availability and door to door nature of taxis for people who need to make journeys to health facilities that other modes of transport cannot offer.

3.7 The introduction of the national concession scheme in 2006 has benefited the significant number of Scotland's older population who are sufficiently mobile to allow them to make use of free bus travel. However the scheme appears to have had little impact on those with the greatest need, for whom conventional public transport is simply not an option and who require alternative solutions to address their mobility requirements. It is difficult to know the extent of those vulnerable groups whose needs are not being met, as these are the people who are often less vocal.

3.8 Disabled people often experience less flexibility in their travel opportunities, as they very often have to plan ahead, for example booking dial-a-bus type services days in advance, so it is more difficult to make unplanned journeys. Taxicard can address this problem by

enabling people to book a taxi as they require it, or even just from the taxi rank in certain cases, and so allowing greater freedom of travel.

3.9 Urban based taxicard schemes tend to be more effective due to the abundant supply of operators and vehicles and generally because shorter journeys are being made. However, schemes are not as effective in rural areas due to the limited availability of operators and the distances involved in travelling and therefore higher fares per journey. Even with some elements of standardisation across the SEStran area, there would still be inequality of provision between urban and rural areas, which is an issue that needs further consideration in term of rurality and peripherality. These two areas are outwith the scope of this study.

4 Recommendations

4.1 In conclusion, JMP considers that from prima-facia evidence there is very limited economic scope for a comprehensive regionwide taxicard scheme; however there are certain elements that would benefit from a regional focus. In describing a regional taxicard scheme, we are referring to the standardisation of eligibility, journey entitlement and level of discount across the whole SEStran region.

4.2 The taxicard schemes within the SEStran area have quite correctly developed as a result of local issues and demands. The variations that exist between them can be explained by differences in available budgets of each of the authorities and the geographical nature of each of the areas as well as a range of other factors including demographics and availability of finance (revenue budgets).

4.3 Without, therefore, significant national policy change and a centralised (national) funding scheme similar to the approach taken on the national concession scheme for older people, the taxicard schemes would need to remain under the financial control of the local authorities. This should however not preclude, sometime in the future, the need to examine apparent inequalities of transport accessibility between people because of age and or ability to use conventional public transport. .

Recommendation 1: Introduce Electronic Recording System (ERS)

4.4 An ERS is considered by many of the stakeholders to be the single preferred outcome of any regional scheme. Without the introduction of an ERS, JMP feels that a SEStran wide taxicard scheme is not deliverable. The stand alone business case for the introduction of an ERS is at the margin however there are currently national initiatives such as "Customer First" which support the introduction and increased use of the National Entitlement Card (Smartcard) and the introduction of a form of electronic purse which would positively contribute to the social and economic business case for an ERS for taxicard in the SEStran area (further information on these national initiatives is detailed in paragraphs 4.9 to 4.12).

4.5 An ERS would deliver the objective of achieving economies of scale though a regional scheme, mainly due to increased buying power of the constituent authorities and significant numbers of operators wishing to procure a system either because of the commercial applications possible and/or the taxicard schemes. However to achieve true economies of scale, there needs to be full coverage of a system across the entire region.

4.6 The move towards all operators requiring clock/calendar type taxi meters (such as the F1 + meter) and associated card readers for both debit and credit cards means that this is a major commercial step (business case) towards achieving coverage on a wider basis with the smartcard readers being compatible with these meters and an additional cost only at the margin.

4.7 There would also be some reduction in complex and time consuming administration for local authorities, taxi operators and taxicard users, compared with the existing paper based schemes. There is evidence of revenue savings being achieved following the introduction of an ERS due to the reduction in the potential for fraudulent claims made by a small minority of taxicard clients and or taxi operators/drivers.

4.8 An ERS is able to accurately record journey information allowing a transparent system for monitoring and auditing purposes, allowing for easier operator invoicing and

reimbursement and robust statistical information on usage and quality control records. This would also allow immediate intervention on excess usage of the concession by some individuals along with the potential for detecting any fraudulent activity on the part of any participants in the scheme.

4.9 Any ERS must be capable of ITSO accreditation allowing use of the National Entitlement Card platform, thus eliminating the need for a second card whilst contributing to the national drive to enhance the growing applications and use of the National Entitlement Card. The National Entitlement Card Programme are considering a project proposal to

"rationalise the various taxi schemes in use throughout Scotland, to produce a standard use of the NEC to operate a taxi scheme in any local authority, and to migrate current schemes from standalone smartcards onto the NEC".

4.10 JMP feel that the level of buy-in required from the fifteen local authorities currently operating taxicard schemes in Scotland would impact negatively on the outcome of the proposed NEC project. However if concentrated in the SEStran region, we feel this would make a positive contribution towards the business case for this review. We have concluded that any attempt to rationalise a taxicard scheme across the fifteen participating local authorities at this stage would be an impossible task. However given the current opportunity within the SEStran area, this would allow a focused, robust and controlled environment to build a platform for a subsequent national roll out programme across Scotland.

4.11 The National Entitlement Card (NEC) Programme is an initiative to establish a unified approach to the access and delivery of services for Scottish citizens using one card (a smartcard) to replace many. National Entitlement Cards are just one element of a wider programme called "Customer First" which is supported and funded by the Scottish Government. Customer First aims to provide support for, and work in partnership with all 32 of Scotland's councils to:

"Deliver more convenient and responsive public services. Encourage the take up of public on-line access to services. Ensure that core service requests can be dealt with at the first point of contact".

4.12 The NEC Forum is a self governing body whose aim is to improve practitioner involvement in the Programme as well as to develop relationships and communications between all involved parties. The Forum's objectives are to:

- Provide networking opportunities for sharing experiences;
- Improve awareness, identify best practices, and exchange ideas and information;
- Broker ways of working together within the public and private sectors; and
- Bring forward to the NEC Forum Management Group, proposals for application developments or other system enhancements.

4.13 Implementing an ERS would mean that greater budgetary control could be exercised by alternative methods such as capping journey entitlement or imposing a pre-determined monetary value onto the smartcard. The technology would enable a decrementing scheme in each case and once exhausted, the card is no longer usable for that particular period.

4.14 JMP considers that if agreement is made to introduce an ERS, there may be some benefit gained by the SEStran authorities pooling their taxicard budgets at the beginning of the

financial year and SEStran delivering the administrative function required as part of an ERS. This recommendation is based on how the Concessionary Operators Payment Scheme (COPS), reviewed in a previous report, is managed.

4.15 SEStran could be responsible for monitoring of the system and for reimbursement of taxi operators. This would ease the administrative role that the authorities play, whilst again helping to deliver economies of scale and uniformity of service provision as desired with a regional scheme and acting as an exemplar for others to follow.

> **It is recommended that SEStran is authorised to engage fully with the NEC Forum with specific regard to assisting in the proposal as displayed in paragraph 4.9 amending the proposal to remove "throughout Scotland" and to include the phrase "by the introduction of the pilot project in the SEStran area". A detailed project proposal should be prepared for SEStran along with any physical and or financial implications arising.**

Recommendation 2: Minimum standard of eligibility using C+1 criteria

4.16 As highlighted above, there are significant differences in eligibility criteria between the current SEStran taxicard schemes. Some authorities have chosen to adopt eligibility rules of the national concession scheme, whilst others allow applications based on self assessment with confirmation from a health professional.

4.17 JMP recommends that adopting a minimum standard for eligibility would improve equity across the region, and we suggest that this is based on the C+1 criteria of the national bus scheme. C+1 is the lettering used to identify an individual entitled to a Companion Travel Card as part of the concession scheme. Individuals whose mobility is such that they require to be accompanied on public transport when travelling, can apply for a C+1 card if they are either:

- in receipt of the higher or middle rate of the care component of DLA;
- in receipt of Attendance Allowance; or
- certified blind and on a register maintained by or on behalf of a council.

4.18 Although the adoption of a minimum standard of C+1 across the region could have budgetary consequences for most of the constituent authorities, it is not felt that this would generate a significant additional members onto the respective schemes. This is because a high percentage of those on the current schemes are in receipt of either the higher or middle rate of the Disability Living Allowance or attendance allowance. If taking Clackmannanshire as an example, the current total membership is 230 (with 46 regular users) whereas there are nearly 3,000 individuals in Clackmannanshire who qualify for a C+1 card. As the Clackmannanshire current scheme however closely matches the C+1 category it is not anticipated that the current membership will increase dramatically from the current figure. Where eligibility is tighter such as in East Lothian the budgetary implications are likely to be higher.

4.19 Using the C+1 criteria as the minimum standard will have a detrimental effect on some individuals who currently qualify for taxicard under existing scheme rules, as they would not be eligible for a Companion Travel Card yet still could face significant mobility problems. The use of C+1 criteria provides a minimum standard of eligibility and some authorities may choose to add additional criteria to ensure all those with severe mobility difficulties are eligible for a Taxicard.

> **It is therefore recommended to adopt a minimum standard for eligibility to improve equity across the region, that this is based on the C+1 criteria of the national bus scheme. It should be noted however that some individual current clients could be disadvantaged.**

Recommendation 3: Standardise journey entitlement

4.20   Journey entitlement does vary somewhat between authorities, with the generous entitlement in Clackmannanshire and Falkirk exaggerating the differences. However, the majority of the authorities offer 104 single journeys per year.

4.21   In addition to the above, information provided by the authorities confirms that in most cases, regular taxicard users are not making use of their full allocation of journeys. Table 4.1 shows the average annual number of journeys made in each of the taxicard schemes, based on usage during 2006/2007.

Table 4.1 Journey entitlement versus usage in current schemes

Local authority	Journey entitlement (single journeys per year)	Actual usage (average single journeys made per year)
Clackmannanshire	624	135
City of Edinburgh	104	103
East Lothian	104	70
Falkirk	624	168
Fife	80	31
Midlothian	104	92
West Lothian	104	98

4.22   Based on the information above, it is apparent that imposing a restriction on journey entitlement to 104 journeys (or in the case of Fife allowing greater consumption) will not have a significant impact on travel patterns of the majority of taxicard users.

4.23   In Clackmannanshire and Falkirk Councils' current usage suggests that if entitlement was reduced to 104, there would appear to be a significant reduction in journeys being made. However, as the number of regular users in these areas is small, the reduction in journeys would only affect a relatively small number of individuals.   It also has to be questioned whether taxicard is the most appropriate solution for the heaviest users, or whether other forms of transport are more appropriate. For example, users who make frequent hospital visits, either as patient or visitor, can quickly use up their entitlement, but they may be able to use alternative modes to enable them to make these journeys.

4.24   For the majority of authorities, there will be no change in expenditure should the option to standardise journey entitlement be implemented, and for Clackmannanshire and Falkirk Councils' reducing the number of journeys offered may result in a reduction in expenditure if current discounts are maintianed.

> **It is therefore recommended that SEStran request a standardisation of taxicard journeys numbers amongst the constituent authorities at 104 journeys per year per person.**

4.25   It is widely recognised that taxicard schemes are not the only solution to enhancing accessibility for the mobility impaired, but a range of other services should form part of the overall mix of demand responsive transport (DRT) services, defined by the National Transport Strategy as:

"any form of transport where day to day service provision is influenced by the demand of users. All DRT operations can be defined in terms of the flexibility of the routes, the stopping points and service types. DRT can involve taxis/private hire vehicles, shared taxi/taxibus, community car schemes, non-emergency patient transport, 'joblink' services, ring and ride, social services transport, education services transport, dial-a-ride, community buses, flexible public transport buses and many other related services"

4.26   Taxicard cannot offer some of the benefits of other demand responsive transport schemes in terms of the high level of service from professionally trained drivers and in most cases, the provision of accessible vehicles. However, taxicard users benefit from being offered a door to door service that is highly flexible and operates 24 hours a day, seven days a week, whereas dial-a-bus type services offer a less direct route between origin and destination. Consequently, users pay a levy for the benefit of this premium service. In addition, there is often a stigma attached to dial-a-bus type services, but with taxicard, this stigma does not exist.

4.27   Most of the SEStran constituent authorities offer a range of DRT services in addition to their taxicard schemes. Scottish Borders Council is the only SEStran authority that does not currently operate a taxicard scheme; instead opting for a mix of DRT services, community transport and social car schemes to meet transport needs for those with limited mobility. Requests for a taxicard scheme have been few, and those requests have arisen mainly due to the recognised inequality compared with the rest of SEStran areas. However, due to a limited number of operators, particularly in the deep rural areas, taxicard provision in the Borders would be limited.

4.28   There is a noticeable east-west divide in taxicard provision within Scotland. Authorities in the west of the country do not operate taxicard schemes, instead choosing to promote dial-a-bus type services, perhaps reinforcing the rural nature of many of theses authorities, where taxicard is not the most appropriate form of providing transport for the mobility impaired.

> **It is therefore recommended that the constituent authorities will be best placed to determine the need for a taxicard scheme within their area. There should be no inference of compulsory participation.**

4.29   Ongoing issues exist in the variation in quality of service offered by taxi operators, particularly when compared with the service provided by many DRT services. Given this, there may be scope to develop regional standards of quality as part of a SEStran-wide taxicard scheme. These could include:

- Vehicle quality, including an increase in the number of accessible vehicles;
- Driver training, particularly in the safe restraint and carriage of wheelchairs; and
- Equipment.

4.30   The suggested standards are not intended to replace the remit and responsibilities of council taxi licensing authorities, but are simply minimum standards that participating taxicard operators should aspire to achieve and should be considered as part of raising standards in the industry.

It is therefore recommended that a minimum standard of service delivery and training is to be agreed with the relevant constituent authority departments for taxi operators and drivers participating in a taxicard scheme.