

Union Connectivity Review

Response on Behalf of SEStran

Assessing the need for cross-border connectivity

- 1. If you represent a place, what is your current strategy for growing the economy and improving the quality of life there? Please provide a summary, but you are welcome to append or link to published strategies.**

This response is made on behalf of the South East Scotland Transport Partnership (SEStran) established in terms of the Transport (Scotland) Act 2005.

All RTPs have as one of their functions the production of a Regional Transport Strategy (RTS). In terms of the Act, these are set out at [section 5\(2\)](#). In summary, the Strategies should set out how transport in their area should be provided, developed or improved having regard to various issues including well-being, social inclusion, sustainable development and 'to integrate with transport elsewhere.'

SEStran's RTS Executive Summary can be found [here](#). This is now to be further refreshed in the light of the most recent [Main Issues Report](#), published in June this year.

There is strong alignment between the RTSs and the [National Transport Strategy for Scotland](#) (NTS2).

- a) What is necessary to achieve this strategy and what evidence do you have that improved connectivity is needed in this instance?** We expect that transport is not the only factor necessary to achieve regional strategies and would like to understand what else might need to be in place to see benefits from improvements in connectivity.

The [Delivery Plan](#) for SEStran's current RTS sets out what is necessary to achieve the Strategy.

- 2. Please provide any information you hold about current multi-nation journeys within the United Kingdom.**

Please provide information relating to current journey volumes, assessments of future demand, journey reliability and locations/corridors of particular strategic importance. In particular, please provide information about current journey levels, assessments of future demand, locations of important strategic transport corridors and the reasons for importance

[Tactran's Monitoring Framework 2018 Progress Report](#) contains information regarding travel to/from major destinations in Scotland (pages 27 to 33).

3. In general terms, is there a need for new or improved transport links between the nations of the United Kingdom?

If so, please explain why and provide evidence to support your view. Please ensure that your response relates specifically to multi-nation transport links and not to improvements in connectivity in general.

Rail

The north of England and Scotland will be severely disadvantaged if the benefits of HS2 infrastructure being gradually extended northwards in increments from a London base do not reach the north of England and Scotland until well into the 2040s. An earlier investment in high speed rail infrastructure in the north of England should align with the Scottish Government's ambition for high speed rail in Scotland to release the latent economic growth potential that is being suppressed by relatively poor connectivity.

Sea and Air

There are detailed responses from other Scottish respondents which cover the Scottish position in general. However, in relation to SEStran, protecting and enhancing the role of Edinburgh Airport will be important.

In addition, developing the role of the ports in the region - particularly Grangemouth, Rosyth, and Leith, will have positive benefits for the transition to low carbon and sustainable modes of transport both for passengers and freight.

Restoration of the passenger and freight ferry to Rosyth would provide a direct link to mainland Europe from the region.

In addition, cross-border connectivity corridors of interest would be

- Cross Rail services including sleeper services - increase in sleeper services
- Freight access by rail in and out of Scotland, issues with network constraints, limited existing rail services to Grangemouth intermodal rail terminal
- Potential for direct ferry routes from the East of Scotland to near continent ports with early forward investment by Government to enable viability.
- Access to deep sea ports by rail or road or from existing port facilities such as Rosyth and Grangemouth.
- Improvement of the A1 corridor (see below).

Multimodal Hubs: Developing a network of multimodal hubs across Scotland and the UK, serving rail, road and water traffic, to allow for the consolidation of freight and movement through sustainable modes of transport.

Rail Freight Enhancements: Interventions to remove the barriers preventing the growth of rail freight in Scotland, particularly with regards to improving capacity alongside passenger services, and putting gauge enhancements in place to allow the transportation of larger containers.

4. What are the main obstacles and challenges in improving transport connectivity between the nations of the United Kingdom?

Please provide evidence relating to any specific challenges that prevent or hinder the development of additional or improved transport links. Please consider socio-economic, political, organisational and practical issues.

The [Borders Transport Corridors Study](#), published in March 2019 by the Scottish Government, sets out, in some detail, the context for the appraisal of transport options for the Scottish Borders and its key connections to Edinburgh, Newcastle and Carlisle.

5. What evidence exists to demonstrate the potential impacts of improved transport connectivity between the nations of the United Kingdom?

Please ensure that your answer relates directly to transport connectivity between the nations of the United Kingdom and not to transport connectivity in general. Please consider economic, social and cultural impacts and provide documents or links. Please also highlight specific potential growth areas such as housing or wages.

Major housing expansion is anticipated across the SEStran area over the next 10 – 20 years.

Fuller reference to evidence to support the contention that transport connectivity improves the economy is referenced in the joint RTP response to this consultation.

Transport connectivity is a fundamental element of The Borderlands (Dumfries & Galloway, Scottish Borders, Northumberland, Carlisle and Cumbria) Growth Deal and the indicative Regional Spatial Strategy (iRSS) for the South of Scotland. Full information is available at <https://www.borderlandsgrowth.com/> and <https://dumfriesgallowayintranet.moderngov.co.uk/documents/s23664/South%20of%20Scotland%20Regional%20Spatial%20Strategy%20-%20Appendix.pdf>

The combined investments of the UK and Scottish Governments will commit up to £350 million to the Borderlands Growth Deal. Local authority partners will contribute up to £44.5 million towards the deal. Taken together this will result in a significant overall growth deal package worth up to £394.5 million for the region.

The Growth Deal recognises the following key points in relation to transport:

- Transport Connectivity is vital for joining up the communities and maximising the economic potential of the Borderlands region.
- The UK and Scottish Governments will work together through the deal to consider the potential to extend the Borders Railway.
- Up to £5 million of funding will be made available by each Government through the deal to progress the evidence base, options appraisal and feasibility work on Carlisle to Tweedbank rail options.
- The Scottish Government will progress the evidence base through the Strategic Transport Project Review process already under way through Transport Scotland.

The UK Government Department for Transport will progress complementary feasibility work on these options with a wider UK perspective.

- The two Governments will work together to align their work, enabling a shared understanding of the cross border benefits and challenges of these options.

As regards the penultimate bullet point, the STAG appraisal already undertaken by consultants on behalf of the Scottish Government identifies differing appraisal and delivery mechanisms for transport schemes between the two national transport authorities, as well as other differences in such things as planning policies and funding sources, as potential restraints. That makes the last bullet point even more relevant.

Similar evidence linking the need for transport infrastructural improvements to help drive other economic benefits can be found e.g. in the Edinburgh City Deal strategies. It is understood that the Edinburgh City Deal Joint Committee is making its own response to this consultation.

6. When making transport investment decisions which aim to improve connectivity between the different nations of the United Kingdom, does the current appraisal framework capture all the potential impacts?

Please provide evidence such as links to existing reviews or analysis that may have already considered this.

A robust and consistent appraisal framework would be required that would be suitable for the whole of the UK.

The Scottish Government are currently consulting on a Draft Infrastructure Investment Plan which covers the financial years 2021/22 to 2025/26 and outlines their approach to delivering on the National Infrastructure Mission, recognising the role infrastructure has to play in enabling inclusive, net zero and sustainable growth. The full consultation is available through <https://www.gov.scot/publications/national-mission-local-impact-draft-infrastructure-investment-plan-scotland-202122-202526/>

Opportunities for Improved Transport Connectivity between the nations of the United Kingdom

7. Which specific journeys would benefit from new or improved transport links?

Please identify two or more specific points within the United Kingdom for each journey and provide details as to why each journey has been identified. Please list these journeys in order of priority. Please ensure that these journeys traverse two or more nations. If none then please go to Question 8.

Two key journeys for the SEStran region would be, firstly, the journey both north and south to Aberdeen and London which is principally served by the East Coast Main Line; and, secondly, the connection between the region and the cities in the north east of England such as Newcastle, which is principally served by road.

Both of these journeys are crucial to the economic well-being of the region.

As regards the rail based journey to Aberdeen and London, SEStran has seen, and is supportive of, the Transport North East (TNE) response to this consultation. The work undertaken by East Coast Mainline Authorities (ECMA) identifies the interventions required and the benefits this will bring to the economy. It is understood that ECMA will be responding separately to this call for evidence, and rather than duplicate that response, it is noted that it is supported.

As regards the road based journey to the north eastern English cities, again the TNE response and the Borderlands study referenced above make the case for improved links. Specifically, the A1 between Newcastle and Edinburgh is a key route and would, ideally, be dualled completely.

A fully sustainable road/dedicated public transport/Active Travel link which is future proofed for the low carbon EV, autonomous and High Speed Rail future should be a UK wide priority delivered at RTP level. Future infrastructure will need to blend an enhancement of existing networks as well as new, bold and sustainable solutions.

Specifically, an improved EV charging network that ensure compatibility throughout the whole of the UK, and consideration of how to incorporate the rapidly evolving hydrogen based technologies into future developments would be beneficial.

There are interdependencies across all public policy areas from Climate Change, Planning, Transport to Public Health. An assessment of how they need to change is the remit of devolved administrations.

8. Is there a need for the development of a national strategic transport network to replace the European TEN-T network within the UK?

Please consider the specific strategic benefits of a replacement national network which would connect strategically important regions, and places in the United Kingdom in order to support economic growth and quality of life. View maps of the existing TEN-T [inland waterways and ports](#) and [railways and airports](#) network within the UK.

a) How should such a network be defined?

Please consider which criteria should be considered when identifying transport links for inclusion and how these should be assessed. Please also consider which specific transport modes should be included.

b) What would be the potential impact of such a network?

Please consider possible economic, social and environmental impacts

c) How should a network of this nature it be managed or financed?

Please consider the role of the Government, Devolved Administrations and local transport authorities in your response.

d) Do you have any further comments on the potential development of a national strategic transport network?

SEStran and Transport Scotland's respective strategies are seeking to improve connections between sea and air ports, urban and industrial areas, and creating multimodal platforms to improve logistics: principles that are core to TEN-T.

The freight sector tends to lead on new freight sector innovation, with a need for the public sector to provide supportive infrastructure / investment in sustainable links to / from freight and commerce locations.

It is important that any 'replacement' to TEN-T extends to cover all of Scotland and therefore links the whole country to the broader UK-wide network, and that it covers all modes, including ports within the SEStran region.

Connections to Northern Ireland

9. With reference to the unique geographical position of Northern Ireland please set out how best to improve cross-border transport connectivity with other nations

Please consider all possible transport options including maritime, air and rail or road via a fixed link and provide evidence as to the cost, benefits and environmental impact of these options.

There should be good road/rail/freight connections between the SEStran region and Northern Ireland to link into broader national network. In this regard, improvements to the A75 would improve connections from the region to Cairnryan and beyond to Northern Ireland.

10. Other than geographic, are there any other specific restrictions to improving connectivity between Northern Ireland and other nations in the United Kingdom?

Please consider legal, policy and practical restrictions. Please set these out and provide evidence as to how they may limit opportunities for improved transport connectivity. Please also consider this in the context of the United Kingdom's departure from the European Union.

As above.

Final questions

11. What else can be done to support greater transport connectivity between the nations of the United Kingdom?

Please consider legal, political, structural and economic factors in your response as well as other opportunities for the UK Government to directly support improvements to transport connectivity.

Clearly close working between the UK and Scottish Governments will be crucial to some of the suggested improvements being delivered.

12. Do you have any further comments?

Whilst this review focuses on physical transport connectivity, the COVID pandemic and pre-existing gaps in digital infrastructure provide a clear argument for digital connectivity to both property and premises level to be a significant economic enabler. For communities which experience issues of physical connectivity to the wider UK geography and economy, investment in reliable digital infrastructure can enable the creation of new, and growth of indigenous, businesses, supporting local jobs and supply chain opportunities.

The pandemic and attendant reduction in travel has yielded significant carbon reduction and efficient digital infrastructure reduces both the need for routine business travel, and maintenance expenditure for road infrastructure. This needs to be sustained in the future and form part of future investment decision-making.

In the new 'normal' it is likely mobility in all its forms will need to address safety and public health for all modes of travel with capacity issues a major concern particularly for the private sector operators and impact on revenues. Public Transport with rail and bus in particular has been hit hardest with the pandemic and it is likely operators will need to change business models significantly to return to some degree of normality. The role of national and local government may also be required to radically change its relationship with the private sector. Greater flexibility of services, increases in demand responsive services and more effective contractual arrangements mitigating risks will all likely have to play a part in the new normal for operators.

Building on the UK Government's smart motorways investment programme, digital infrastructure requires to be built into major transport infrastructure investment, with consideration of sensor and Internet of Things based opportunities for more productive use of existing infrastructure, and provision of real-time data on usage, asset condition and traffic status to both reduce inspection revenue costs and information decision making on maintenance and investment.