

PARTNERSHIP DIRECTOR'S REPORT

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This report provides an overview of achievements and activities since the last Board meeting in December 2022 and upcoming events and milestones. Given that this is the new Partnership's Director's first update to the Board, particular emphasis has been placed on initial observations and emerging plans for the future development of the organisation.

2. REGIONAL TRANSPORT STRATEGY

- 2.1 Development of the RTS is the absolute priority for Regional Transport Partnerships, as it is required by statute. The new RTS – SEStran 2035 – has been approved by Transport Scotland for submission to the Minister, and approval is anticipated to be imminent, subject to the Minister's workload. However, due to the lack of certainty around timescales, there is a risk that the planned update to this Board meeting may have to be withdrawn and submitted to a future Board meeting. It is possible that an Extraordinary Board meeting will be required to note this event.

3. THE SESTRAN TEAM

- 3.1 Given the size of the team and available budget, SEStran has a remarkable delivery record, excellent working relationships with a wide variety of stakeholders, and is held in high regard across the transport environment.
- 3.2 The loss of 3 key members of staff since the start of 2023 – Jim Grieve (Partnership Director, retired 31/12/22), Anna Herriman (Senior Partnership Manager, resigned on 28/2/23 to take up a new role at Midlothian Council), and Jim Stewart (retiring on 31/3/23) will present a major challenge to continuity of this track record, but also an opportunity to align team skills and experience with the challenges ahead.
- 3.3 An external facilitator was engaged to help ensure that the team is ideally placed to manage these challenges and opportunities, by defining and agreeing:
- The purpose of the organisation
 - The key objectives
 - Project prioritisation criteria
 - Required skills and experience
 - Audit of current skills and experience
 - Gap analysis
- 3.4 This work is largely complete and has facilitated recruitment by identifying whether, and to what extent, job descriptions require to be amended so that we target individuals with the right skills, experience and behaviours rather than simply recruiting like for like replacements. The recruitment exercise will begin in week ending 17 March and, in the interim period between then and the posts being filled,

discussions are ongoing with a highly experienced external consultant to work on specific high priority projects.

4. THE PARTNERSHIP BOARD

4.1 The Partnership Director has now had meetings with the majority of Board members and a number of key external stakeholders. The meetings were mainly designed to

- Establish a rapport
- Understand how Board members perceived the organisation
- Understand how we could improve these perceptions (if required)
- Discuss how we engage with Board members, particularly regarding:
 - the initiation, progress monitoring and performance management of projects
 - the administration of Board meetings
- Identify and agree how we could make more use of Board members' skills, experience and capacity to help

4.2 The meetings identified a number of key strengths including:

- The SEStran team is perceived as being highly skilled, knowledgeable and having excellent communication and inter-personal skills
- Project delivery relative to team size and available funding is very impressive
- The organisation plays a crucial role in identifying, securing funding for, and delivering cross-boundary projects

4.3 However there is a strong view that SEStran should do more to publicise its successes, and to raise the profile of, and confidence in, the brand

4.4 In addition, a number of areas of potential improvement were identified. These include considering:

- Other roles that SEStran could adopt e.g. establish or helping to establish a bus passenger lobby group
- Providing consultancy to partners e.g. where local authority partners have lost staff due to financial restrictions, e.g. Road Safety Officer, SEStran could employ a Road Safety Officer and split costs / time across some or all partners

4.5 Board members are generally keen to become more involved with SEStran, and to help achieve the objectives in the RTS. Members made a number of suggestions for improving engagement with the Board, including:

- Adopting a more formal approach to project initiation and sign off, including Board, or sub-committee, approval (see point below)
- Creating a sub-committee, consisting of a small number of Board members to provide project assurance and strategic guidance to the team. In effect, these Board members would perform a similar role to that of Non-executive Directors (NEDs) in other organisations. The sub-committee would meet on a more regular basis than the Board, and as required, to perform dynamic guidance and governance

- Agreeing success criteria and key performance indicators as part of the project initiation process
- Increasing engagement with individual Board members during the scoping of projects – partly based on geographies likely to be impacted by the project but also based on Board members’ skills and interests
- Considering using project gates and informing Board members when each gate has been approved
- Ensuring that projects are described in the context of their contribution to the wider RTS
- Examining whether the size of Board packs could be reduced – it can be impossible for Board members to read all papers in conjunction with other responsibilities
- Including a brief summary of each Board paper – possibly in the form of an Executive Summary – covering the problem to be solved, options considered, recommendation, costs and risks – so that time constrained members are still able to understand the issue at hand and have an informed view in any discussions
- Limiting presentation time at Board meetings to, say, 5 minutes per item - focussing only on problem to be solved, options considered, recommendation, costs and risks. Possibly use slides / graphics to aid discussion
- Avoiding the use of transport jargon wherever possible in reports and at Board meetings
- Making the reason for a Board paper clear e.g. for decision, for information etc
- Encouraging physical attendance at Board meetings, wherever possible
- At Board meetings, including presentations not related to current projects but which will improve members’ knowledge and awareness of the wider transport environment in which SEStran operates e.g. new technologies or initiatives, Scottish Government strategies or targets (e.g. 20% reduction in vehicle km)
- Highlighting areas that feedback would be appreciated even from members who are unable to attend a Board meeting
- Encouraging Councillor Board members who are regularly unable to attend meetings to discuss this with their Councils with a view to sending substitutes or otherwise ensuring that the Council can be consistently represented
- Encouraging Councillor Board members to provide advocacy for SEStran within their Councils and to build strong relationships with key internal stakeholders
- Asking Board members for assistance to identify funding / profile-raising opportunities

4.6 A number of these measures will be introduced before the next Board meeting. Where appropriate, others will be consulted on and reported to the next meeting of the Board, with recommendations for approval.

5. EDINBURGH AND SOUTHEAST SCOTLAND CITY REGION DEAL (EESCRD)

5.1 SEStran and EESCRD are in discussion to optimise the working relationship between the two organisations.

- 5.2 The Partnership Director attended the most recent ESESCRD Directors' meeting, and has agreed to provide options for future ways of working to the next meeting on 6 April. A number of officers either seconded to ESESCRD or working for partner local authorities will assist in compiling the options.
- 5.3 if required, and proposed changes to the current ways of working will be presented to the SEStran Board for approval.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 6.1 The Board notes the contents of this report.

Brian Butler
Partnership Director
10 March 2023