

Case for Change: SEStran Regional Bus Strategy

1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to inform the Board of the progress of the SEStran Regional Bus Draft Strategy. It is accompanied by a video series, shared with local authorities to work through the draft policies shaping our work.
<https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/d6fd80763fd84b6fb84d27dedbe22c7a>
- 1.2 There will be a slide pack to garner feedback, to be presented at the Partnership Board meeting.

2 CONTEXT FOR THE REGIONAL BUS STRATEGY

- 2.1 At the June 2023 Sestrans Partnership Board, the board agreed with the recommendations of the Item A5(d) Towards a World Class Bus Service, which included the action to begin progress on a bus strategy for the region.
- 2.2 The decision to begin the strategy was made in the context of a strong policy landscape, with bus highly commended in the Regional Transport Strategy, national documents like NTS2 and the legislation following on from the Transport (Scotland) Act of 2019.
- 2.3 At the SEStran board meeting of June 2024, the Case for Change was agreed by the Board. It is summarised below.

3 Key findings of the case for change

- 3.1 The Case for Change is strong. This is particularly true because doing nothing will result in ongoing decline in patronage and network.
- 3.2 There is wealth of environmental and transport policy, which could be better realised by strengthening the bus sector. In actual fact however, bus patronage and network size are down, whilst private car ownership and usage continue to increase.
- 3.3 Local authorities are subsidising weekend and evening services to maintain functioning bus networks, but budget constraints are reducing this year by year. Bus journey times in some parts of the region are triple that of the same car trip, making bus unattractive.
- 3.4 The picture in Edinburgh is brighter, due to the strength of Lothian Buses and the density of population, but buses from surrounding authorities are slowed entering the city by congestion and of course, become part of the traffic themselves.

- 3.5 Population growth, major housing developments, under-22 concessions and the policy environment make now an ideal time to improve bus in the region.
- 3.6 There are significant constraints around funding and public behaviour change, which will present a challenge.

4 Key policies of the Draft Bus Strategy

- 4.1 The Vision for our Bus Strategy, developed at the end of our Case for Change is: *To provide a high quality, affordable, accessible and available bus network for the whole region which is fully integrated with other forms of transport and increases passenger numbers and passenger satisfaction, to support the social, environmental and inclusive economic development of the region.*
- 4.2 This vision flows into three core policy areas to consider, which in turn support the fundamental transport outcome for the strategy – that more people choose to travel by bus and more people can use bus to meet their everyday needs. The three core policy areas will have a focus on movement at a regional level and to neighbouring authorities and include:
- Improve Level of Service – this policy area considers how, where and when the bus network operates. For this regional level strategy, this consists of network principles around connectivity, setting out minimum connectivity requirements based on settlement typologies.
 - Improve Affordability – the policy will set out ambitions related to the affordability of travel by bus across the region.
 - Improve Service Quality – the policy will focus on the other important aspects that help the SEStran region move towards a high-quality bus service. This includes topic areas such as information, ticketing, driver, and network performance.
- 4.3 The suggested policies under these three core areas can be considered here: <https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/d6fd80763fd84b6fb84d27dedbe22c7a>

5 NEXT STEPS

- 5.1 SEStran officers will continue to work with Systra and Stantec to develop the strategy and options to appraise.
- 5.2 SEStran will next consult with operators on the policy areas

6 RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that the Board:

- 6.1 Note the video summaries of the policy areas and provide feedback at the December 2024 board.

6.2 Respond to follow-up surveys emailed to members

6.3 Continue engaging with and supporting the strategy process

Rachael Murphy
SEStran Strategy Manager
27th November 2024

Appendix:

Updated timeline and programme order can be found in attached excel document.

Appendices

1. Case for Change
2. Slide deck to be presented at board.

Background Paper:

1. Implementation of Part 3 (Bus Services) of the Transport (Scotland) Act 2019, Partnership Board Meeting Friday 24th September 2021.

<https://sestran.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/2021-09-24-Item-A7-Implementation-of-Part-3-Bus-Services-of-the-Transport-Scotland-Act-2019.pdf>

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| Policy Implications | The aspiration for a regional bus strategy to facilitate a World Class Bus Service aligns with objectives and actions in SEStran's Regional Transport Strategy and the National Transport Strategy 2. |
| Financial Implications | SEStran applied to and won £150k from the TS Community Bus Fund in November 2023, to fund the Regional Bus Strategy. Thus, the actions proposed in the report will have no new financial implications, any subsequent proposals will be brought back to the Partnership Board for approval. There is a risk if we do not progress the strategy, that bus becomes too costly for LAs to sufficiently subsidise. |
| Equalities Implications | The proposed Regional Bus Strategy will support the equalities objectives in the Regional Transport Strategy. Without this work, there is a risk that a key facilitator of equalities is impinged. |
| Climate Change Implications | The aspiration for a regional bus strategy to facilitate a World Class Bus Service will support and positively impact on SEStran's Climate Change objectives as outlined in the Regional Transport Strategy. Without improving our public transport offering, we risk increased private car use and corresponding worsening climate. |

