

GoSEStran Future Approach

1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 At its meeting of 1st December, the Board received a report on GoSEStran, updating on progress in this pilot project to trial Mobility as a Service (MaaS) and Digital Demand Responsive Transport (DDRT). The Board agreed:
- 1) To note the progress made since the last meeting;
 - 2) To agree to receive updates on the project as appropriate;
 - 3) To agree to SEStran participating in a procurement exercise in partnership with Tactran and other [Integrated Mobility Partnership](#) (IMPs) partners and entering into such licence and other agreements as are necessary to secure the continuation of the GoSEStran and other IMPs partners apps, subject always to appropriate levels of funding being secured.
- 1.2 The DDRT trial which formed part of the overall pilot, being an on-demand bus between Humble and Haddington, is to continue after March with East Lothian Council's support but without the digital app and therefore no longer forms part of SEStran's project.
- 1.3 The purpose of this report therefore is to update on recent progress with funding discussions for the MaaS part of the project, and to ask the Board to approve a six month extension of the GoSEStran project, taking into account the risks and opportunities involved in doing so.

2 PROGRESS

- 2.1 The MaaS element of the pilot has continued to show promising results, despite a very limited marketing budget and the focus to date on a restricted geographical target area within the SEStran region. Total downloads of the app stand at 3800. Promotional efforts have been reduced in recent months due to the uncertain future funding of the app. Appendix 1 shows high-level data on overall performance of the app.
- 2.2 The final report on the pilot project was delivered to Transport Scotland (TS) in January. This showed the success of the pilot and lessons learned during the period funded by the MaaS Investment Fund and beyond. The report has been circulated to the Board and forms a background paper to this report. Fundamentally the report's conclusion is that MaaS apps of this nature do help to promote sustainable transport, but that national leadership is required to drive progress forward.
- 2.3 In December 2023, a contractual dispute between Fuse, the supplier of the tech for GoSEStran, and Ember, a joint venture partner who provided the tech services as

a subcontractor, was resolved with the assistance of SEStran staff. The outcome of negotiations was that Ember took on Fuse's responsibilities as tech supplier and an agreement to that effect was signed on 20th February 2024.

- 2.4 Following the Board decision in December, funding bids were made to Smarter Choices Smarter Places (SCSP) and TS. Officers met with TS, who were keen to explore the timescales required to procure an extension to the current licensing arrangements, and the funding that would be required to cover this period. TS have given an estimation of three months for them to evaluate the findings of the MaaS Investment Fund and to make a decision on their position on MaaS, so are unable to commit long-term funding or resources until that decision has been made.
- 2.5 On 4th March 2024, officers received confirmation from TS that the MaaS Investment Fund grant offer letter will be varied to show an increase in funding of £42,000 to enable the extension of the MaaS platform for SEStran and Tactran for 6 months. The outcome of the bid to SCSP is still awaited at time of publication of this report.
- 2.6 A successful meeting with the Minister for Transport (now Cabinet Secretary for Transport) took place in East Lothian on 31st January. SEStran officers were able to update Ms Hyslop on the progress of the MaaS and DDRT pilots and to offer a practical demonstration of the GoSEStran app. The SEStran Chair and Vice Chairs were then able to meet with the Minister and discuss a range of topics. The Minister has written since then expressing her appreciation of the meeting.
- 2.7 Discussions have also been held with constituent authorities of both SEStran and Tactran, as well as NHS Tayside, SPT, Nestrans and University of St Andrews about potential funding contributions from them. Members will recall that, since June, GoSEStran has been used by the University's 'St Andrews MaaSterplan' project, and that this has already drawn in some £72,000 of additional funding for the app's further development, as well as allowing extra marketing for the app via the University's consultants, Urban Foresight. This has seen a large increase in user numbers, particularly in the Fife area, bringing the total up to 3800 users.
- 2.8 It seems likely that at least one constituent authority in the Tactran area may be able to make a significant financial contribution to the joint project going forward. However, that has not been confirmed in writing as yet, and any caveats or conditions which may be associated with this contribution are still to be discussed.
- 2.9 The SCSP bid was complicated by the announcement that this fund will not be renewed in the next financial year. Accordingly, there is only a limited pot of money left to allocate before the fund closes this year. It is understood that some 46 applications are pending with SCSP officers, and discussions have been held with them to clarify the nature of the bid. Although the bid is for £100,000, any award will only fund a short-term extension to the Licence of a year at most.
- 2.10 SEStran and Tactran are having ongoing discussions with TS to ensure resources are not duplicated and support the Smart Ticketing project, and the Digital Data Travel Services (DTDS) project amongst others.

3 RISKS AND OPPORTUNITIES

- 3.1 The current licence which SEStran holds on behalf of itself and Tactran for the digital platform and the apps, including GoSEStran, GoNHS Tayside, My D&A Travel and the National Park Journey Planner, runs out at the end of March 2024, i.e. this month.
- 3.2 The preferred option had been to carry out a procurement exercise in time for the new supplier to take over running of the platforms and apps by 1st April 2024. However, given the continued uncertainty over funding, that is not going to be possible.
- 3.3 It is officers' strong recommendation that any new licence be for a multi-year period, to avoid the constant need to procure and re-procure tech services, and to avoid uncertainty over the apps' continued existence hampering marketing and promotion of them. Ideally any new contract with a supplier should be for a minimum of three years. However, that again presupposes multi-year funding being made available by TS and/or others such as constituent authorities.
- 3.4 To maintain the apps' existence meantime, one option would be to extend the current contract with Ember (following their taking over the contract from Fuse, as explained at 2.3). TS have indicated they are not able to confirm the future funding position until the outcome of their evaluation of all the MaaS pilots, and that a final decision may not be forthcoming till June at the earliest. Given the need to carry out a further procurement exercise once the position on funding is known, it is likely that an extension to the existing contract would need to be for a minimum of six months.
- 3.5 Extending the contract with the current supplier is not without risk:
 1. SEStran and Tactran have spoken to a number of tech suppliers as part of a market discovery exercise to inform procurement. SEStran has already extended the contract and published a Voluntary Ex-Ante Transparency Notice (VEAT Notice) in 2023, to confirm award of contract to the existing supplier without going out to tender. This was necessary then, as now, because of funding uncertainties. At the time, SEStran received a query from a future potential bidder, who were reassured that any wider procurement would be fully advertised. If the contract is extended for another 6 months then a further VEAT notice would be published. There is a risk that this could be challenged.
 2. The project has been resource heavy for SEStran. Throughout it has needed the input of a project officer more or less full time; the services of a part-time consultant; specialist legal input; and further consultancy support at various points for project management etc. There is an agreement in principle with Tactran that they will assume responsibility for procurement and management of the new contract. However SEStran will require assurances that Tactran will devote sufficient resources to ensure that SEStran will have no involvement in day to day aspects of the contract management. As a result, a service level agreement (SLA) would need to be put in place to assign responsibilities to Tactran. Establishing this SLA is one of the key success criteria for the project.

- 3.6 An opportunity to secure a contract, fully funded, to extend GoSEStran's operation for a number of years may yet come to pass.

If the Board decides not to proceed further, then the key associated risks are:

1. The chance for SEStran to be at the forefront of MaaS in Scotland will be lost.
2. All partners involved believe we are at the early stages of understanding what the public need in such tools, how to make the tools attractive to the target audience and how we can use these tools to achieve local, regional and national transport objectives. If a decision is made to withdraw SEStran's involvement whilst we wait for Transport Scotland's decision then users and partners will lose trust in similar products in the future, there will be a lack of focus on ensuring these tools help focus on policies and a higher cost will be associated to begin the MaaS journey again in the long term.

- 3.7 As mentioned in 2.5, other RTPs and organisations have shown an interest in IMPs, and the MaaS platform. If a decision is made for SEStran to continue and once funding is confirmed, there is the potential for GoSEStran to be rebranded as part of the procurement process to a more generic name (such as ThistleGo), resulting in the one app being utilised across a wider area.

CONCLUSIONS

- 4.1 The table at Appendix 2 sets out the relative risks of proceeding with a temporary extension to the existing GoSEStran supplier contract, and those of bringing the project to an end at this stage.
- 4.2 Whilst extending the contract is not without risk, ending the project at this stage will also have consequences – particularly if funding subsequently becomes available to run an extended contract for the existing apps. Part of the IMPs project going forward would be about ensuring that conversations around a 'national' MaaS app are progressed. In that context there would be considerable benefit in SEStran being able to take a lead role in those conversations.

5 RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that the Board:

- 5.1 Note the risks and opportunities for SEStran in relation to the continuation of the GoSEStran MaaS project;
- 5.2 Subject to the above, agree to SEStran continuing to participate in a procurement exercise in partnership with Tactran and other IMPs partners, and entering into such licence and other agreements as are necessary to secure the continuation of the GoSEStran and other IMPs partners apps, subject always to appropriate levels of funding being secured;
- 5.3 Note that a report detailing the outcome of the funding bids and, if appropriate, the procurement exercise, will be put to the September Board.

It is proposed that progress against the following key success criteria will be reported to the Partnership Board in September. If any of the criteria have not been met, then officers will recommend that SEStran withdraws from the MaaS pilot:

1. Long term funding committed (at least 3 years)
2. Successfully concluded procurement exercise to confirm future partners
3. Service Level Agreement in place with Tactran and other IMPs partners to confirm responsibilities, including project management.

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8th March 2024

Policy Implications	The project is in line with the new RTS as set out in the 2 nd December 2022 Board report.
Financial Implications	The funding position is as set out in the report.
Equalities Implications	The project has been subject to an Equalities Impact Assessment (EQIA).
Climate Change Implications	The project will contribute to overall aims to reduce CO2 emissions, by pointing users to the most environmentally friendly mode of transport for their chosen mode. These are quantified in the journey options set out in the app.
Appendices	1. Overview of GoSEStran data; 2. Risks table
Background Papers	The following background papers were relied on in the production of this report: GoSEStran Final Report (March 2024)

Appendix 1: GoSEStran summary data

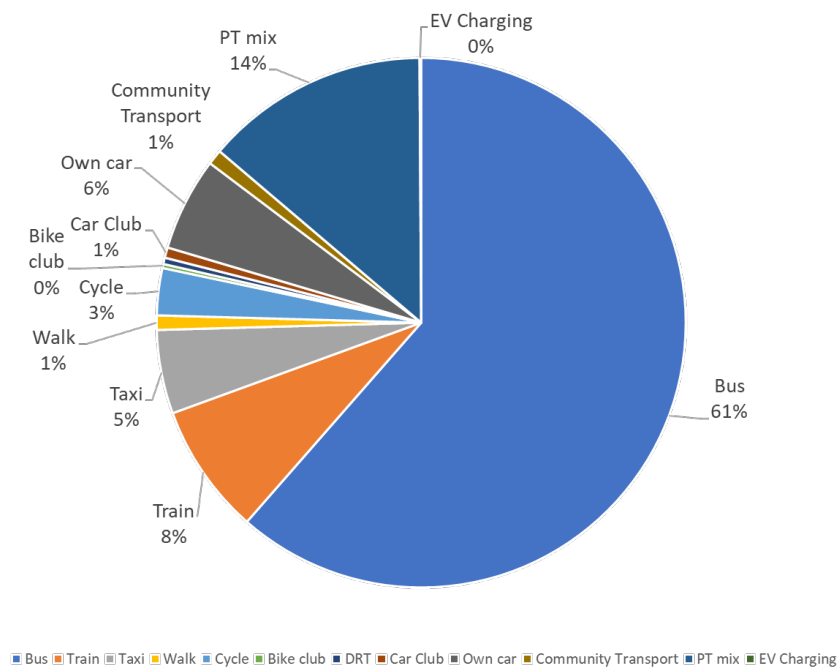


Figure 1 Pie chart to show modal split of users on GoSEStran

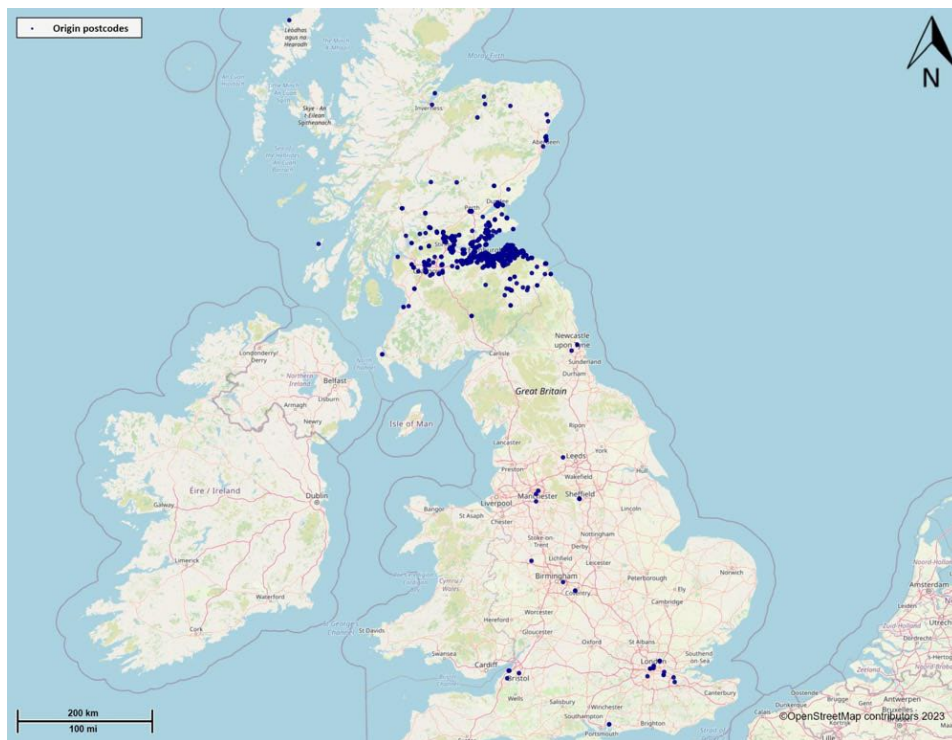


Figure 2 Blue dots showing origin postcode of journey searched by users

Appendix 2: Risks table

Risk	Consequences	Impact	Likelihood	Treatment
<p>Risk of Proceeding Failure to carry out procurement exercise by end March results in challenge by other potential tenderers</p>	Financial risk as well as resource implications of defending challenge	H	L	Explain to potential suppliers need for extension to current contract to allow funding discussions to conclude. Negotiate three month extension with option for further three month extension to minimise risk. Issue a VEAT notice and advise potential tenders of forthcoming procurement.
<p>Risk of Proceeding Resource challenge of taking on extension to contract</p>	Acting as lead funding recipient/contract lead may have implications for other areas of work	M	H	Conclude robust SLA with Tactran to ensure resource challenge is spread.
<p>Risk of Proceeding Other, commercial apps create a market where public sector led apps no longer have relevance</p>	<p>Public sector money being spent where the private sector has provided a viable equivalent solution.</p> <p>Creation of an effective private sector led MaaS app would however be a desirable outcome.</p>	M	M	The IMPs project creates the opportunity for a single, public sector led app by which policy makers can ensure maximum public benefit from behaviour change tools.
<p>Risk of Not Proceeding Lost opportunity to progress project if pull out now</p>	The GoSEStran app will disappear from users' phones on 31 st March. Funding may be made available later in the year. By cancelling the project now, SEStran lose the opportunity to help lead MaaS in Scotland.	M	M	If SEStran withdraw at this stage, would have to be very clear with all partners as to why.