

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide the Partnership Board with an update of the SEStran communications and marketing work that has been taking place over the last eight months. It also includes an overview of the recent Thistle Assistance marketing campaign and People and Place case study videos.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 Effective and impactful communications and marketing is needed to support the work of SEStran, including realising the ambitions of the Regional Transport Strategy 2035.
- 2.2 A key objective of the communications and marketing officer role is to raise awareness of both SEStran's work and the organisation. In the last eight months, targeted communications and marketing activity has taken place to begin to achieve this objective.

3. COMMUNICATIONS AND MARKETING

- 3.1 During the last eight months we have focussed our SEStran-wide marketing and communications work on:
- LinkedIn – growing our followers
 - A monthly newsletter to raise awareness of our work with stakeholders
 - Developing website content
 - Developing a SEStran blog
 - Creating topic factsheets
 - 2024/25 Annual Report
- 3.2 Alongside this, work has also taken place to promote Thistle Assistance and to create People and Place case study videos.
- 3.3 **LinkedIn**
LinkedIn is our primary social media channel as this is the channel the majority of our stakeholders use. To grow followers, it is important to post on LinkedIn regularly. We now post a minimum of three times a week. Posts use relevant hashtags and link to our website for more information.
- 3.4 Since October 2024:
- The number of people following SEStran has grown by 62% (from 656 to 1,065 followers).
 - Our LinkedIn posts are reaching **315%** more people.
 - There's been a **475%** increase in the number of people clicking on our posts.

Our LinkedIn page can be viewed here:
<https://www.linkedin.com/company/sestran/>

3.5 **Newsletter**

In December 2024, we launched our monthly e-newsletter. We began by sending it to all members of our Partnership Board and the forums. We are now working to grow and develop this audience. The newsletter contains short pieces of information about relevant important topics with links to the website for more information. It is an important tool to help raise awareness of our work and the impact it is having, as well as a way for us to keep people up to date with our work.

3.6 The open rate of the newsletter is high amongst partner organisations but is currently lower with Partnership Board members.

3.7 To grow the readership of the newsletter we have recently begun promoting it on LinkedIn. So far, this has resulted in 39 new readers.

3.8 Our newsletter click through rate to our website is 41%. This means that 41% of the people who open the newsletter then click through to read further information on our website. The most recent newsletter can be view here: [May news from the team at SEStran](#)

3.9 **Website**

Work has been ongoing to improve the content on the website. Improvements include:

- A series of new People and Place pages
- Improved top menu navigation
- More links to content added to the home page
- Work to improve search engine rankings
- New page layout options

3.10 **Blogs**

To provide more context and detail about areas of our work, we have created a new blog feature on our website. This allows content focussing on specific topics which can be used on social media and in the newsletter. The helps us to promote our organisation and employees as experts in the transport sector whilst also growing our audience.

3.11 We have so far published five blogs on our website:

- [Our ambitions and intentions for 2025/26](#)
- [Good transport is essential for accessible healthcare](#)
- [How we are looking at our organisational climate footprint](#)
- [Celebrating 20 years of regional transport partnerships in Scotland](#)
- [Building better connections: People and Place in 2025/26](#)

The blogs can be found in the news section: sestran.gov.uk/news/. News is pulled onto our homepage which helps us keep our homepage dynamic.

3.12 **Factsheets**

We are developing a programme of topic-based factsheets to explain areas of our work. These are promoted on social media and in the newsletter and can be used by Partnership Board members to share with colleagues / constituents to help improve understanding of our work.

We have so far produced two factsheets:

- [The SEStran region in numbers](#)
- [All about buses](#)

3.13 Annual Report 2024/25

The 2024/25 Annual Report will be ready to be published very soon, having been approved at the March Board meeting. It is significantly shorter this year and has been written and designed to be easier to read and digest. The final version will be made available to Board members as soon as it's available.

3.14 We will promote the Annual Report on social media, in our newsletter and on our website.

3.15 Thistle Assistance digital marketing campaign

Thistle Assistance is our initiative to help people feel safer and more confident using public transport. It is a free card or app that can be personalised to show public transport staff what extra support might be needed.

3.16 During 2024/25, take up of the card and app had been low, so to tackle this, we ran a marketing campaign. Historically, we have tried various print and broadcast approaches, however, given the popularity of digital media, we chose to take a digital marketing approach. Digital media campaigns are good as, compared to traditional marketing channels, it is easier to measure impact and success.

3.17 The campaign ran from 21 March to 30 April 2025 and focussed on improving awareness and take-up of Thistle Assistance.

3.18 We ran digital ads on:

- Meta (Facebook and Instagram): these were targeted by audience interests and were video and static image ads
- Newspaper websites, targeted by audience interests: these were video ads
- Apple app store
- Google search results (based on key words and search query phrases)

3.19 The campaign was actively monitored and designed to be dynamic. At the midpoint we noticed that the Apple app store and Google search ads were not performing as well as the Meta ads, so we moved their remaining spend over to Meta, to maximise their success.

3.20 The campaign worked very well, with most card requests and app downloads came from the Facebook ads.

- 3.21 **Results:** 21 Mar to 30 Apr compared to preceding period (9 Feb to 20 Mar):
- Card requests: 3,376 vs 131 (**2,477%** increase).
 - App downloads: 1,784 vs 34 (**5,147%** increase).
- 3.22 **Website views:** 21 Mar to 30 Apr compared to 9 Feb to 20 Mar:
- www.thistleassistance.com: 23,586 vs 2,580 (**814%** increase).
 - www.thistleassistance.com/get-the-card: 9,325 vs 261 (**3,472%** increase).
 - www.thistleassistance.com/get-the-app: 3,788 vs 138 (**2,644%** increase).
 - www.thistleassistance.com/card-request-complete: 3,728 vs 99 (**3,665%** increase).
- 3.23 **Meta results**
- 4,463,093 impressions (advert appearing for someone to see)
 - 25,765 link clicks
- 3.24 **Newspaper websites ads**
- 34,976 completed views of video.
- 3.25 **Feedback**
- The success of the campaign was further validated by positive comments on Facebook.
- Comments on Meta included:
- “Just got mine this morning but not had the opportunity to use it yet. It’s a very useful idea for all of us with limited mobility.”
 - “Applied for card. It will be a great help for me. Thank you.”
 - “I used mine and the drivers were all very good and gave me time to sit down etc which they didn’t do before.”
- 3.26 The results of this marketing activity have been very encouraging, and we are using the learnings to inform our plans for the marketing aspect of the Thistle Assistance programme in 2025/26.
- 3.27 **People and Place case study films**
- We have produced three People and Place case study films showcasing projects in the Scottish Borders Council area, East Lothian Council area and City of Edinburgh Council Area. Alongside this, we also produced a general introduction film.
- 3.28 Here are links to the films:
- [Walk It](#) – Scottish Borders Council
 - [Folding bike hire](#) – East Lothian Council
 - [Thistle Outdoors](#) – City of Edinburgh Council
 - [Introduction to SEStran’s People and Place work](#)

These films have been featured on our social media channels, in our newsletter and on the website. They have also been shared by the relevant local authorities and community groups. On the SEStran

LinkedIn page, these videos have so far been viewed almost 3,000 times.

4. RECOMMENDATIONS

4.1 The Partnership Board is asked to:

- Note the communications and marketing activity that has taken place
- Provide, where appropriate, commentary on the above report
- Note the availability of the newsletter and social media channels and share with others where appropriate

Sarah Junik

Communications and Marketing Officer

Policy Implications	None
Financial Implications	None
Equalities Implications	None
Climate Change Implications	None