

Annual Report

2024/25



Welcome



Welcome to the SEStran 2024/25 Annual Report, highlighting our activities and ongoing initiatives to promote active and sustainable transport across the south-east of Scotland.

This is my first Annual Report as Chair of the SEStran Board – a role I was delighted to take up in October 2024. It is a privilege to play an active part in the development of a transport system that provides everyone living in the region with improved access to healthcare, education, public services and employment opportunities, whilst also enabling businesses to function effectively.

As you will see in this Annual Report, 2024/25 was a busy year for us and we worked on a wide range of projects to improve transport in our region. This work takes us another step forward in realising the objectives and ambitions of our Regional Transport Strategy.

2024/25 was the first year for our People and Place active travel programme, funded by the Scottish Government. This was an exciting and busy time as we distributed £5.3 million to projects across the region that delivered against the plan's key programme areas, including projects in schools, workplaces and local communities.

During the year, we were delighted to grow our team to include two new projects officers, and to welcome a temporary projects intern and part time community projects officer.

I extend my gratitude to the SEStran team, the Board, local authority officers and the communities we serve for their unwavering support and contributions. Together, we are making significant strides towards a more connected, sustainable, and prosperous south-east Scotland.

Cllr Sally Pattle
SEStran Chair



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Who we are and what we do

We are the South East of Scotland Regional Transport Partnership (SEStran), one of seven regional transport partnerships in Scotland, created as a result of the Transport (Scotland) Act 2005. We cover eight local authorities – City of Edinburgh, Clackmannanshire, East Lothian, Falkirk, Fife, Midlothian, Scottish Borders and West Lothian.

There are a wide range of transport issues across our region, and we are responsible for producing a Regional Transport Strategy that looks to tackle these whilst also moving the region towards a more

sustainable and efficient transport network.

We work closely with a range of partners on a wide variety of projects. This annual report sets out our achievements over the 2024/2025 year, demonstrating how each project ties back to our Regional Transport Strategy.

You can read more about who we are and what we do (including more information about our Board and governance) on our website: www.sestran.gov.uk

**There are a wide range
of transport issues
across our region.**



Key stats



Population
1,619,460



Households
738,714



Car ownership
>870,000



Kms of road
11,671



Passenger journeys
on local buses
135 million



Train stations
63



Vehicle kms
12,623 million



23% of population have a limiting long-term physical or mental health condition

19% of population over 65 with significant growth in elderly population anticipated in the future

In 2023, the average number of trips per day for disabled people was **1.39**, a fall from 2019 when the average was 1.58.

In 2022–23, the average (median) journey distance was **3.3** km for disabled people compared to **4.4** km for non-disabled people.

Regional Transport Strategy

Our Regional Transport Strategy has four key objectives, and throughout this Annual Report, we will demonstrate how our programmes of work and projects relate back to these.

Regional Transport Strategy objectives:

Objective 1: Transitioning to a sustainable, post carbon transport system.

Objective 2: Facilitating healthier transport options.

Objective 3: Transforming public transport connectivity and access across the region.

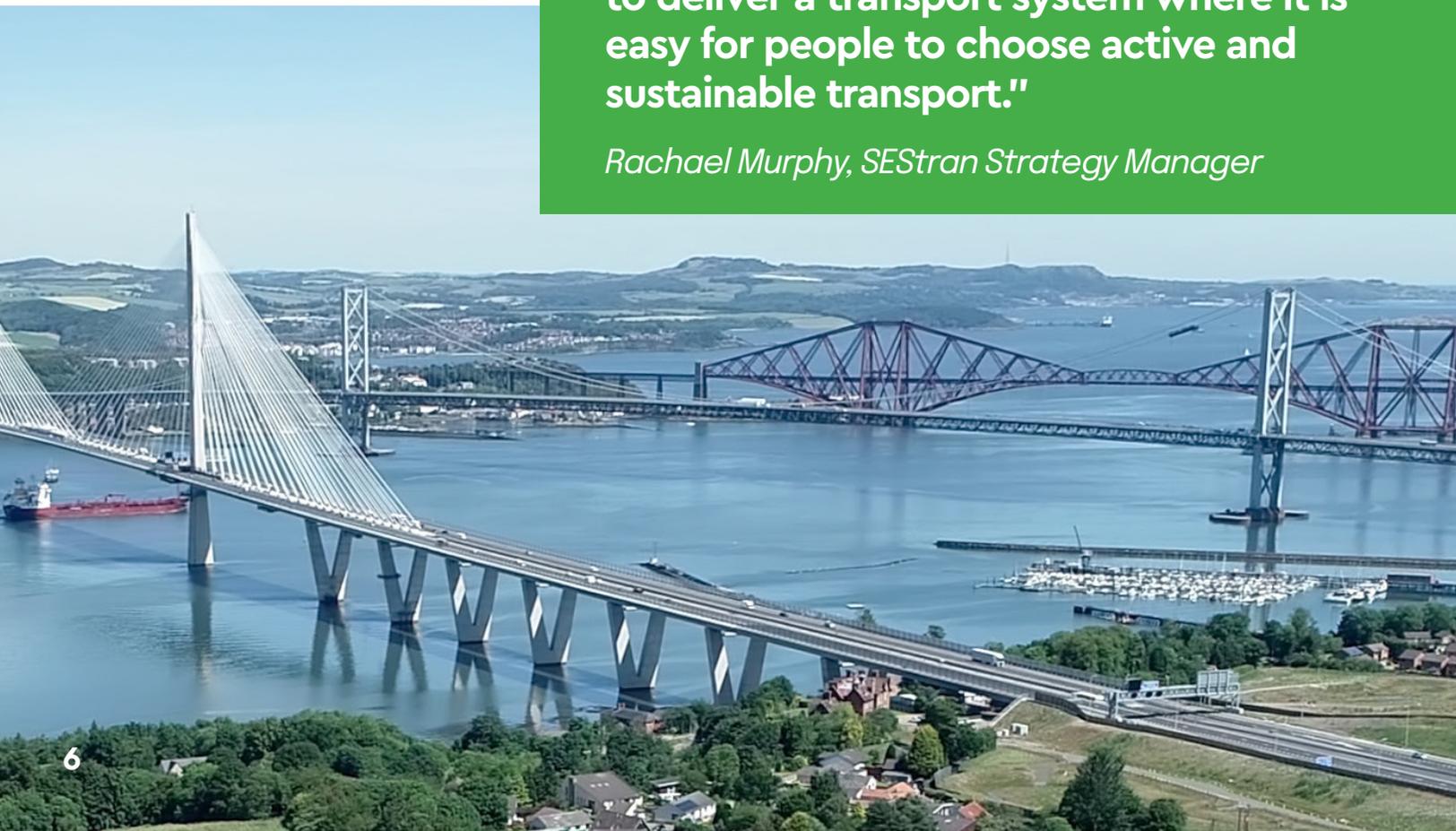
Objective 4: Supporting safe, sustainable and efficient movement of people and freight across the region.

Read more about our Regional Transport Strategy:

www.sestran.gov.uk/sestran-2035-regional-transport-strategy/

"The Regional Transport Strategy looks to deliver a transport system where it is easy for people to choose active and sustainable transport."

Rachael Murphy, SEStran Strategy Manager





People and place

In 2024/25, Transport Scotland set out their new regional approach to funding active travel behaviour change across Scotland, passing funding to each of Scotland's seven regional transport partnerships. The programme supports activity that gives people the knowledge, skills and confidence to choose to walk, wheel and cycle more often.

We developed our People and Place Plan and through this distributed £5.3million of funding to 17 delivery partners, including our region's eight local authorities. This funding focused on:

- Schools and young people
- Workplaces
- Accessibility and inclusion
- Capacity and capability building

Through the funding, our People and Place work has:

- Delivered increases in walking, wheeling and cycling, by both enabling and encouraging people that don't make these choices to start to do so, and those that do so already to do more.
- Raised awareness of the benefits of active travel to many other people, making them more likely to choose active travel in future.
- Worked in many of the region's communities, schools, and residential settings, plus built capacity and capability for further change.

RTS objectives: 1, 2 and 4

More detailed information about the first year of our People and Place funding is available on our website.

Schools and young people

This theme focuses in and around schools. It is for projects that deliver holistic solutions to create an environment where active travel choices are not only an option, but the most desirable way for young people and families to travel.

Projects we funded included:

- Two regional projects to work intensively with schools to support young people to choose active travel more often.
- The WOW project, allowing 49 schools across the region to incentivise more children to walk to school.
- Six local authorities to deliver a range of cycle storage improvements in their primary and secondary schools.
- Six local authorities to provide access to bikes for young people.
- Fife Council to purchase 13 adaptive cycles for young people.
- A bike library for children to loan bikes for free in Edinburgh.

Projects: 27

Funding: £2,386,586

We funded the schools WOW (Walk Once a Week) programme run by Living Streets.

Participation levels rose steadily through the year, increasing from 10,256 pupils in quarter 1 to 11,477 in quarter 4.

For the schools taking part, active travel rates remained consistently high throughout, averaging above 87%



We funded the Bike Station's Kid's Bike Life programme in Edinburgh. Their work focussed on nine schools in three Edinburgh school cluster areas, where they ran:

- Cycle training
- After school cycle clubs
- Dr Bike sessions

There was some great feedback:

"This is the most fun I've had in my life!"

"I thought I was just a scooter girl, but now I think I'm a bike girl."

Workplaces



Both the City of Edinburgh Council and Midlothian Council ran step count challenges to encourage their workforce to walk more.

- Participants increased their step counts by an average of **139%** during the challenge.
- **83%** of participants reported consciously increasing their activity levels.
- Midlothian Council saw participation grow from **165** in 2022/23 to **257** in 2024/25.
- In the City of Edinburgh Council, the challenge catalysed long-term behaviour change.

The workplace theme is for projects which are focussed in and around places of work and that make active travel choices a realistic solution for commuting.

Projects we funded included:

- TravelKnowHow Scotland to support employers in the region to enable their staff to travel by more sustainable modes.
- Improved cycle storage facilities and an e-bike hire scheme for staff at Victoria Hospital in Fife.
- Midlothian Council's project to encourage staff to walk more with a series of lunchtime led walks and council wide step count challenges.
- East Lothian Council to install additional cycle storage facilities for staff.

Projects: 10

Funding: £269,404

We funded the University of Edinburgh to run themed lunchtime walks to encourage staff to walk more. The project lead commented:

"It's been a nice opportunity to sort of say, well, ok, different environment, you're not in the city any more, you don't have access to all the amazing kind of cafes and restaurants and shops at lunchtime. But what you do have is this amazing park that you can enjoy at lunchtime and there's more to it than just walking down a path and admiring the view, you could get involved in the nature there."

Accessibility and inclusion

This theme is for projects that support accessibility and inclusion, and create opportunities for everyone to make the choice to travel actively.

Projects we funded included:

- Seven projects to audit streets / areas with high pedestrian, wheeling and cycling potential and remove barriers where needed.
- Cycling UK's Connected Communities project in East Lothian.
- Two organisations to deliver walking and cycling activities for their local communities to encourage participation in active travel.
- Access to cycles projects across the region to support cycle repairs, bike recycling and purchase of new cycles.

Projects: 46

Funding: £2,375,232

Via the City of Edinburgh Council, we funded Thistle Outdoors, who provide adaptive bike sessions for people with long term health issues and disabilities.

They had **607** people with long-term physical and mental health conditions take part in their outdoor activities.



Forth Environment Link used their funding for their E-bike library.

They commented:

"We're seeing widespread engagement across different demographics, and we have seen a surprising number of people who were using the bike for commuting rather than just for leisure."

Capacity and capability building



Our funding has enabled Falkirk Council to bring in a Strategy Officer, for active travel. Falkirk Council commented:

"The Falkirk Behaviour Change Strategy 2026–2031 covers Falkirk's vision and values for active travel and the objectives of the Active Travel Strategy. It identifies the key journeys and audiences to focus on interventions."

This theme is for projects that build the knowledge base and deliver capacity and capability of the sector itself (including SEStran, local authorities, the third sector and beyond).

We funded:

- A strategy officer to work with Falkirk Council to develop a comprehensive behaviour change strategy for active travel.
- A shared learning workshop for all local authorities in our region.
- The creation of a public dashboard to share information on funding distribution and project delivery.

We also:

- Organised a visit for the Cabinet Secretary for Transport to funded projects in Edinburgh.
- Worked with our partners to create a future delivery plan for People and Place.
- Commissioned an evaluation of the 2024/25 People and Place programme delivery.

Projects: 10

Funding: £333,834

Edinburgh City Council has created a 'Feminist City Working Group' to improve women's and girl's safety in the city. Part of this work involves promoting safety in public spaces. People and Place funding was used to foster collaboration amongst decision makers to create safer spaces for women.

Regional bus strategy

We want a world-class bus service for our region. Pre-covid, almost half of residents in our region used a bus at least once a month. The impact of covid saw this reduce drastically and combined with rising costs and driver recruitment challenges, a perfect storm is brewing. In this context, 2024/25 saw the beginning of the process to shape a bus strategy for our region.

RTS objectives: 1, 3 and 4

RTS actions:

- Undertake a Regional Bus Connectivity study for non-Edinburgh travel to identify settlement pairs where travel demand is high and bus services are poor, as a means to promoting new routes and connectivity (in partnership with other policies).
- Undertake a Regional Bus Priority study which will identify regional, cross-boundary, quality bus corridors and key bus priority interventions to reduce bus journey times and improve bus journey time reliability where Edinburgh is likely to be a focus.
- Deliver the bus priority interventions funded by Transport Scotland's Bus Partnership Fund and subsequently identified by the Regional Bus Priority study.
- Review the bus powers detailed in the Transport (Scotland) Act 2019 and identify if they could be implemented across all or parts of the region within an integrated strategy to enhance the bus network.

At the beginning of the year, we procured consultants Stantec and Systra and engaged our local authorities and bus operators in the bus strategy development process. With ongoing engagement from our local authorities, bus operators, Partnership Board and a group from our Integrated Mobility Forum, we have worked through a Case for Change and consulted on draft strategy policies and actions. This work will continue into 2025/26.



Transport to health

Getting to and from an appointment at a hospital, at the local doctor's surgery or other healthcare setting can be difficult for many people.

We're working with healthcare partners across our region to better understand the issues and find ways to tackle them. By connecting key stakeholders, we hope to enable positive and educational conversations, leading to more joined-up and strategic thinking on this complex subject.

During the first half of the year, our focus was on developing relationships with our four health boards (Fife, Lothian, Forth Valley and Borders), NHS Assure and the Scottish Ambulance Service. Following this, we set up a transport to health project group and began meeting regularly to share best practices and discuss current challenges.

During the second half of the year, we began working with Public Health Scotland to grow engagement and knowledge of the key relationship between transport and health. We presented our work at the Public Health Scotland conference in November 2024 and held a joint stakeholder event in February 2025. This event brought together transport, planning and public health colleagues from across the region to address our shared ambitions to improve health, take climate action and reduce inequalities.

RTS objectives: 1, 2, 3 and 4

RTS actions:

- Support the delivery of bus services and infrastructure measures which ensure access to healthcare for all.

"Delighted to have partnered with you on this enthusiastic and productive discussion, SEStran! Thank you for a great event!"

Public Health Scotland

"I really enjoyed today's workshop – some great discussions and it was lovely to meet others working on similar pieces of work across the region."

Sustainability Officer from NHS Fife



Regional Transport Strategy delivery plan

The Regional Transport Strategy delivery plan provides a mechanism to assess and prioritise regional projects required over the next ten years to realise the ambitions of the Regional Transport Strategy, supporting the economic and net-zero goals of the [Regional Prosperity Framework](#).

The Regional Transport Strategy delivery plan dovetails with the Strategic Transport Projects Review 2 (STPR2) to support the delivery of a transport network that:

- Takes climate action.
- Addresses inequalities and accessibility.
- Improves health and wellbeing.
- Supports sustainable and inclusive economic growth.
- Improves safety and resilience.

The Regional Transport Strategy delivery plan complements STPR2, highlighting projects within and outside the plan that contribute to our shared vision with the Edinburgh and South East of Scotland City Region Deal.

RTS objectives: 1, 2, 3 and 4

RTS actions:

- Partner councils work with SEStran through the statutory planning processes to implement RTS policies with regards to major developments.

Over the course of the year, we have been working closely with colleagues from both the Edinburgh and South East of Scotland City Region Deal and local authorities to develop a matrix of regional projects, agree scoring and weighting that brings regional equity across our eight authorities. Those priorities are now mapped to demonstrate how rich our region is with opportunities.

“Linking the regional economic ambitions to the way we deliver transport infrastructure and services is essential to maximise the opportunities across the region, while ensuring we deliver an infrastructure first approach enabling people to access these opportunities sustainably in the future. Working in partnership with SEStran to deliver the Regional Transport Strategy Delivery Plan continues to strengthen the approach of putting people at the heart of everything we do and using data to help inform decision making.”

Ewan Doyle, Workforce Mobility Manager at Edinburgh and South East of Scotland City Region Deal



Electric vehicle charging infrastructure

To help support the move to electric vehicles (EVs), we have been working with seven of the eight local authorities in our region (East Lothian Council is working independently) and Dumfries and Galloway (SWestrans region) to develop documentation and explore opportunities to procure regionally for public EV charging infrastructure. The aim is to deliver efficiencies by creating a bigger market for suppliers in the final tender process, and to support a joined up network for the public.

The beginning of the year saw us putting into place the formal governance structure needed to run the project, along with the procurement of a consultant to develop documentation and support local authorities. We worked with Transport Scotland to identify the grant available to each local authority and understand the available budget.

The second half of the year was focused on agreeing a lead local authority (Edinburgh City Council) and running regular steering group and working group meetings to determine the best route forward.

"This collaboration offers the opportunity to expand public electric vehicle charging across the south of Scotland to ensure that communities and businesses benefit from the transition to electric vehicles, through a combination of grant funding from Transport Scotland and significant additional private sector investment."

Alastair Young, Scottish Futures Trust

RTS objectives: 1 and 4

RTS actions:

- Engage with the Scottish Government for effective national strategy / guidance / specifications on fleet decarbonisation and rollout of appropriate and future-proofed supporting infrastructure. This should include legislation to manage on-street charging provision and the provision of chargers in new developments.
- Work with the private sector and partners to develop a regional electric vehicle (and e-bike) investment and charging strategy, with associated technical guidance, including a spatial strategy across the area for long journey, rapid-charging facilities and for local area hub/community charging.



Real time passenger information

Reliable real time passenger information is vital if we are to encourage people to move towards more sustainable travel methods rather than use their car. We work with local authorities and operators in our region to provide real time, and accurate, information for bus users. The screens can also be used to advertise local campaigns and information.

A focus for the year has been the integration of live Lothian bus information to the network of screens across the region. We've worked with Journeo to provide training for local authorities so new staff members can report faults, track the status of screens, add imagery and adverts to screens, and track performance.

We were pleased to be able to use the screens in advance of Storm Eowyn in January 2025 to inform public that there would be no bus or tram services running during the region's red weather warning.

94 indoor screens in libraries, community centres and transport exchanges.



RTS objectives: 1, 3 and 4

RTS actions:

- Deliver improved public transport information in a variety of formats, supported by appropriate wayfinding infrastructure on the transport network.
- Introduce real time passenger information for public transport services through mobile applications, stations and stops and across all parts of the region.

Thistle Assistance

Thistle Assistance is an initiative to help people feel safer and more comfortable when using public transport. The free Thistle Assistance card and app are recognised by many public transport operators across Scotland, and the initiative allows people, in an easy and subtle way, to request the extra support they would like. We manage and operate Thistle Assistance for the whole of Scotland, and on behalf of the other regional transport partnerships.

RTS objectives: 1, 3 and 4

RTS actions:

- Deliver improved public transport information in a variety of formats, supported by appropriate wayfinding infrastructure on the transport network.

The focus for Thistle Assistance has been to understand how the Thistle Assistance card and app are currently being used and where improvements may be needed. To do this we worked with Disability Equality Scotland and distributed a questionnaire to their members. We also promoted the questionnaire more widely across our own channels. The results of this work will enable us to improve Thistle Assistance going forward.

We have also been focusing on marketing Thistle Assistance, working with a media buying agency to advertise to target audiences across a range of digital channels.



The marketing campaign achieved:

- **2,477%** increase in cards requested.
- **5,147%** increase in app downloads.

Go e-Bike

Go e-Bike enables people to access e-bikes through a variety of ways, including e-bike trials, bike share initiatives, bike training and bike maintenance training.

RTS objectives: 1, 2 and 4

RTS actions:

- Expand the provision of bike-sharing initiatives across the region.
- Identify locations where the implementation of shared mobility solutions could be beneficial and reduce the level of 'forced' car ownership.

E-bike trials

During 2024/25, e-bike trials took place at East Lothian Council, St John's Hospital and Persimmon Homes in West Lothian, and at Skills Development Scotland in Edinburgh. The trials are in partnership with West Lothian Bike Library and give access to a fleet of e-bikes for staff to use for four weeks.

"Having access to the e-bike gave me the confidence to try commuting to work where before I'd have felt it was 'too far', and that it'd be 'too hard' before a day in the office.

"I soon realised my preconceptions were wrong. My journey to and from work was really enjoyable, energising and helped me deal with the mental stresses and strains of the day."

Ailsa Morgan, Skills Development Scotland

Bike share

During the year, we began trialling Brompton bike lockers in two locations. The lockers provide access to Brompton's folding bikes, which can be hired for up to 60 days at a time. The bike lockers are at Sheriffhall park and ride in Edinburgh and Queen Margaret University in East Lothian.

Bike training and maintenance

We provided cycle ride leader training to staff at the Social Bite Village in Edinburgh to support the use of the e-bike fleet with both staff and residents. We also delivered bike maintenance and cargo bike training to Porty Community Energy to support volunteers with the e-bikes available to loan.



Rail

The rail network has an important role to play in helping people travel sustainably around the south-east of Scotland. Our work includes exploring how improvements to the rail network can help people travel in a more sustainable way. This can include more direct services between locations, reducing the need for interchange on existing routes, and increased frequencies on particular routes or at key times of the day.

RTS objectives: 1, 3 and 4

RTS actions:

- Work with key stakeholders (Transport Scotland & Network Rail) to develop new rail infrastructure supported by appropriate appraisal and business case development.
- Opportunities should be explored with partners to introduce new services, including more direct links across the region, national boundaries and cross-city connections.

The main focus of our rail work during 2024/25 has been supporting the Newburgh community in Fife in the quest to get the railway station in the town reinstated, and working with the community in Winchburgh, through their monthly steering group, on the case for a station in the town following substantial house building and development.

During the year, and in response to comments from Transport Scotland, we completed work to enhance the existing STAG appraisal for Newburgh including a stakeholder workshop. This has now been submitted to Transport Scotland for review.

The Winchburgh work is progressing with both the development of the business case and the design of the new station. We are a member of the steering group, which meets monthly.



Freight

As set out in the Regional Transport Strategy, we will support, where appropriate, the development of new or enhanced rail freight services in our region. We are currently exploring an innovative idea to incorporate freight on trams in Edinburgh. We are also looking at how our region can support improved road freight services with better driver facilities and using non-traditional fuel for HGVs and LGVs as we transition to a post carbon transport system.

RTS objectives: 1 and 4

RTS actions:

- Work with partners to identify, through the further development of the SEStran Freight Strategy, locations where Freight Consolidation Centres could be located.
- Work with partners to identify, through the further development of the SEStran Freight Strategy, locations where gauge clearances should be increased to enable new and enhanced rail freight services to operate in the region.
- Identify opportunities to implement innovation and automation in the freight and logistics industry in the region, including the delivery of relevant pilot projects.
- Further develop proposals for new rail freight services, including a potential multi-user freight train running from Grangemouth and use of converted passenger trains for freight, as part of the development of the SEStran Freight Strategy.



During the year we have been working to achieve funding for two proposals:

- Access to goods proposal in partnership with the University of the West of Scotland.
- Edinburgh Tram for Freight proposal – part of the wider Freight and Urban System Integration for Optimised Networks (otherwise known as FUSION), which aims to cut average travel delays by 30%, reduce transport energy consumption, and lower greenhouse gas emissions through simulations and pilot programmes.

Unfortunately, due to a very competitive funding market, we have not yet been successful in securing funds, but we'll continue to explore opportunities to improve freight transport in our region.

We are also working with the Forth Green Freeport partners on enhanced freight links between Rosyth and Alloa.

Go SEStran

Go SEStran is a pilot regional journey planning app. It has been designed to prioritise sustainable travel. This approach is often referred to as Mobility as a Service (MaaS). We received funding from Paths for All to run a pilot to assess the viability of MaaS in the south-east of Scotland and have been working with Tactran, our neighbouring Regional Transport Partnership, who are developing similar pilots.

RTS objectives: 1, 3 and 4

RTS actions:

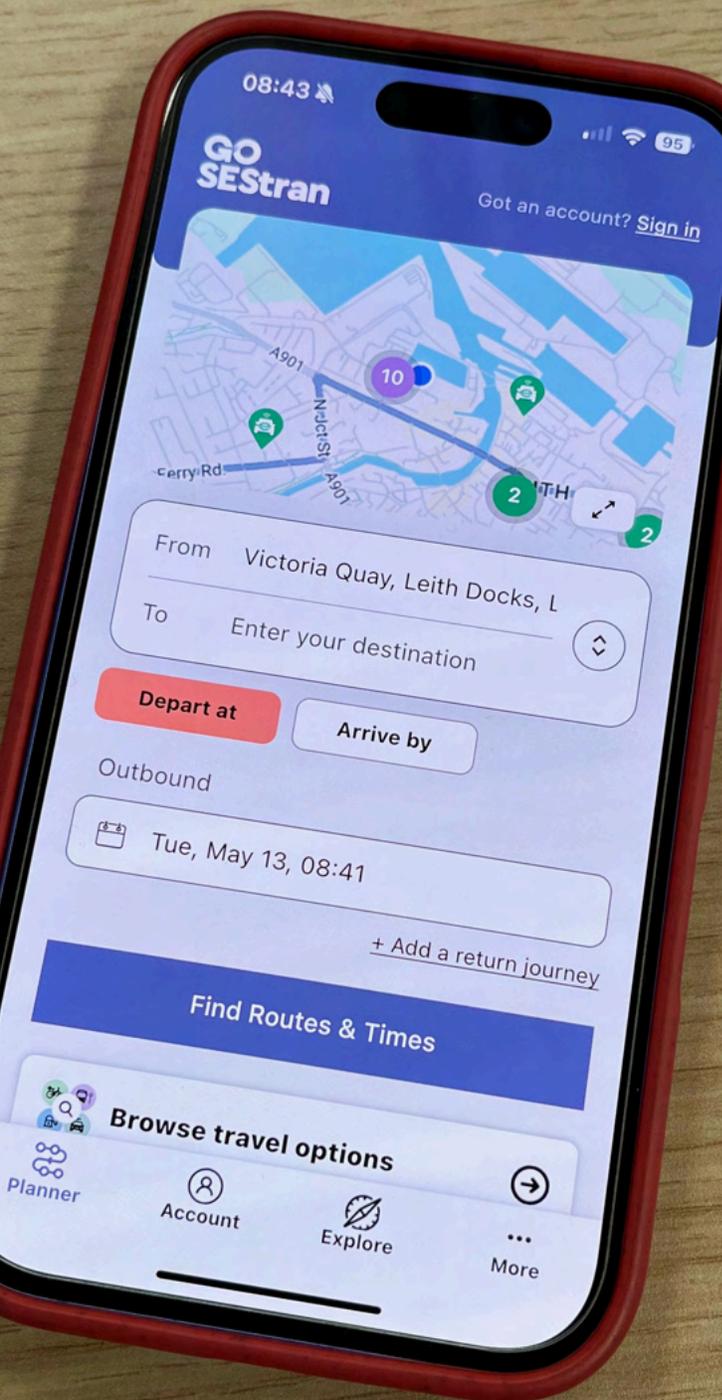
- Deliver improved public transport information in a variety of formats, supported by appropriate wayfinding infrastructure on the transport network.
- Deliver a regional MaaS pilot scheme to establish the long-term viability of MaaS in the region.

During 2024/25, we investigated opportunities to offer more to our users, including signposting to more payment methods, integrating more features and targeting specific user groups.

We continued developing VoyagAR, an app to provide digital support, including augmented reality, that gives visuals during a journey, and chat support for carers, friends and family.

Tactran led the project, which focused on developing platforms and procuring services.

1,800 unique scans of SEStran marketing QR codes.



Looking ahead

The coming year, 2025/26, is an exciting one for us as we celebrate two decades since the legislation that created statutory Regional Transport Partnerships (RTPs) was enacted in Scotland. The last 20 years have seen many changes to how we travel – digital technology has changed how we plan journeys and book tickets, the covid pandemic had a huge impact on where and how we work, and car ownership has increased. At the same time use of public transport use has decreased since the Covid pandemic and there is much to do to ensure a quality and accessible service for everyone across the region.

As we celebrate our 20th anniversary, we remain committed to addressing the evolving transportation needs of the south-east Scotland and moving us towards a post-carbon transport system.

Our priorities for the coming years include developing a bus strategy for the region, continuing our work on transport to health, developing a freight strategy and growing the take up of Thistle Assistance. Alongside this, we will continue to administer funding from the Scottish Government to enable active travel initiatives to be developed and delivered across our region.

We look forward to collaborating with our partners and communities to create a more sustainable, accessible and efficient transport network that meets the needs of everyone in south-east Scotland.



**We remain committed to
addressing the evolving
transport needs of our region.**







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