

Transforming South East Scotland's transport system

SEStran's asks for the 2026
Scottish Parliament elections

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South East of Scotland
Transport Partnership

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Transforming South East Scotland's transport system

Transport is a fundamental driver of economic growth and an integral part of land use planning. It supports public service reform and plays a vital role in achieving the four objectives of Scotland's Programme for Government.

The South East of Scotland Transport Partnership (SEStran) is the statutory Regional Transport Partnership (RTP) for the South East of Scotland, encompassing eight local authorities: City of Edinburgh, Clackmannanshire, East Lothian, Falkirk, Fife, Midlothian, Scottish Borders and West Lothian.

We are one of seven RTPs covering Scotland, each uniquely placed to understand the transport needs of our individual regions. We have strong track records in delivering tailored and place-based transport solutions.

Since the approval of the SEStran 2035 Regional Transport Strategy by Scottish Ministers in 2023, our efforts have focussed on strengthening transport links in South East Scotland and we have a proven record of delivering strategic transport projects and improving transport outcomes. These include:

- **The co-ordination of strategic regional programmes (e.g. mass transit for South East Scotland, electric vehicle charging infrastructure, our Regional Transport Strategy Delivery Plan and Regional Bus Strategy) across our eight partner local authorities**
- **Delivery of region-wide active travel behaviour change initiatives**
- **Coordination of accessibility support through our Thistle Assistance initiative**
- **Accurate real time information for public transport users**



Many challenges remain.

Car usage continues to grow – increasing emissions and pollution, causing deaths and serious injuries, and increasing congestion that significantly reduces the region's productivity.

To address this, we need to encourage active travel and the use of public transport. However, over the last few decades bus patronage has fallen. And whilst active travel rates are increasing (due to a very strong focus on infrastructure and behaviour change) this is a long term, slow burning initiative.

The solution

In order to tackle these problems, our manifesto priorities are structured around three key areas from the Regional Transport Strategy:

01 Bus reform



Tackling congestion



Supporting strong regions

Challenge

Bus services remain essential for the region, yet reliability, affordability and accessibility remain inconsistent. Barriers include outdated regulations, fragmented planning and limited funding.

Bus reform



Solution

Tackling this requires:

- Local authorities and regional transport partnerships to be empowered by publishing the guidance and regulations under the Transport (Scotland) Act 2019
- Concessionary fares, network support grants and bus infrastructure funding to be reviewed to ensure that investment is targeted where it will make the biggest difference
- The inequitable split of funding between rail and bus to be addressed
- The creation of a permissive environment that encourages the roll out of smart and integrated ticketing

We call on all political parties to:

- Embed bus into all aspects of Scottish policy
- Protect and expand rural bus services
- Reduce congestion, which slows buses in our towns and cities
- Ensure bus funding is targeted, and sufficient to support priority services
- Introduce fully integrated ticketing across modes



Challenge

Congestion reduces economic productivity and leads to higher emissions. It also lengthens bus journey times and makes them less predictable. The main causes, apart from the number of cars on our roads, are the poor coordination of roadworks, unclear parking restrictions and inadequate or outdated infrastructure for buses. All of this discourages people from using passenger transport.

Tackling congestion





Solution

There needs to be a multi-pronged approach to tackle congestion, including:

- Strengthening the role of the Roadworks Commissioner and regional transport partnerships to coordinate roadworks regionally
- Bolstering parking and bus lane compliance by ensuring that enforcement legislation and penalties are designed to achieve the required outcomes
- Investing in bus priority measures
- Progressing demand management legislation that requires local authorities to take specific actions by a deadline, similar to the prohibition of pavement parking in the Transport (Scotland) Act 2019

We call on all political parties to:

- Strengthen enforcement powers
- Invest in infrastructure that prioritises buses and sustainable travel
- Following on from investment and improvements in public transport, deliver measures to reduce car dependency, including pricing mechanisms and targeted disincentives

Challenge

Sub-optimal transport governance arrangements and inconsistent funding mechanisms severely limit the ability of key stakeholders to make the type and scale of changes required to transform our transport networks to meet the challenges of tomorrow.

Strong regions



Solution

Tackling this requires:

A 'local first' approach, with regional support to drive efficiency and joined-up working. This will need devolved and appropriate, regional and local responsibility for the delivery of the regional transport strategy. This includes prioritisation and implementation of all sub-national projects and programmes.

Strategic national infrastructure should be delivered by Transport Scotland, drawing on regional and local insight, supported by national delivery of legislation, policy and guidance.

We call on all political parties to:

- Comprehensively review transport roles and responsibilities at national, regional and local levels
- Align powers and budgets to facilitate the outcomes of the governance review
- Provide multi-year funding and ensure that funding for rural areas reflects the additional challenges they face in addressing transport poverty

We welcome engagement from all political parties developing their transport policy ahead of the 2026 Scottish Parliament elections.

Bold, sustained action is needed to reform the bus network, tackle congestion and strengthen regional transport governance.

**For further information or to arrange a meeting, please contact
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