

WORKFORCE MOBILITY PROJECT

1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This report provides an update to the Board on the opportunity for SEStran to deliver the Workforce Mobility Project (WMP) in partnership with the Edinburgh and South East Scotland City Region Deal (City Deal) through the existing Concordat between the two organisations. WMP already supports existing regional activities, and a newly funded pilot will provide data intelligence to Regional Transport Partnerships and Local Authorities across Scotland.

2 BACKGROUND

- 2.1 WMP has delivered recognised benefits since 2020, linking transport evidence, spatial planning and economic development into practical, data led decisions and investment across the region. WMP has one year of City Deal funding remaining – for 2026/27. This funding is in addition to the £200k for a national pilot project, accessed through Transport Scotland’s Transport to Employment programme, which will be administered via SEStran and has been endorsed by all seven Regional Transport Partnerships. This is a pivotal year to continue the momentum and recognition of the project with the aim of gaining regional and national support required to mainstream and gain funding beyond March 2027.
- 2.2 There has been a personnel change within the WMP at the start of April 2026, with the embedded Manager leaving the seconded post at Scottish Borders Council (SBC) to join SEStran as the Senior Partnership Manager. Prior to leaving, the Manager drafted an options paper on the best way forward in order for WMP to maintain stability and momentum. This paper identified two main options:
1. SBC continues to deliver WMP and, over the first 3-6 months of 2026/27, undertakes the recruitment and upskilling of a new Workforce Mobility Manager, supported by the embedded resources and any embedded consultants; or
 2. SBC and SEStran utilise the current Concordat agreement to jointly deliver the WMP, retaining the embedded knowledge of the former Workforce Mobility Manager in a leadership capacity through his new role at SEStran. The staff budget released by not replacing the Workforce Mobility Manager will be redirected to increase day to day delivery capacity within the wider team and maintain the quality and quantity of outcomes delivered.
- 2.3 The report was considered by SBC Directors and the City Deal Integrated Regional Employability & Skills (IRES) Board and both agreed on 8th May 2026 that the preferred way forward is Option 2.
- 2.4 These decisions were primarily based on the following benefits offered by Option 2:
- Continued relationships to optimise existing team performance;

- Continuity of project and data knowledge;
- Continuity of Local Authority knowledge and relationships;
- Continuity of regional and national knowledge and relationships;
- Knowledge of IRES 2027+ and the inter-relationships with the rest of the programme; and
- Knowledge and experience of local and regional governance.

As a result, it was concluded that the continuity of knowledge, experience and regional/national relationships will maximise the outcomes for 2026/27 and provide the best opportunity for the project to be mainstreamed in 2027

2.5 Under this model, SBC (on behalf of City Deal) will continue to deliver the project and the national pilot in partnership with SEStran to optimise the benefits of personnel continuity, rapid mobilisations, team capacity, experience, maintaining regional/national relationships, national leverage and value for money.

2.6 This approach also simplifies the administration of the two funding streams and performance reporting to both City Deal and Transport Scotland.

3 WORKFORCE MOBILITY PROJECT OUTCOMES

3.1 At a regional level the WMP has provided transport, spatial planning and economic development teams with support to develop their data maturity and access to new data and analysis that has and will inform decision making to deliver transport solutions that match the needs of communities and regional opportunities.

3.2 Examples of outcomes and benefits delivered to date:

- SBC Bus Network Review and implementation: This has delivered significant growth in patronage; reduced operational inefficiencies; delivered financial headroom to enable further investment in the bus network;
- East Lothian Council Journey Hub Study: A data led assessment of where the authority needs to invest in journey hub and supporting active travel infrastructure to deliver improved transport integration and facilities that improve the customer experience and promote behavioural change; and
- Local Authority PowerBi Dashboards: Utilising the Microsoft software package that all Local Authorities have access to, the team has developed an automated data analysis dashboard that enables partners to scrutinise subsidised bus data thoroughly, while presenting the data in a form that can be used as a communication tool for Elected Members and the public.

3.3 Workstreams for 2026/27

- Continue supporting West Lothian Council to deliver a Journey Hub Study and full Bus Network Review:

- Supporting Clackmannanshire Council with new data and analysis to inform its Active Travel Investment Plan and delivery;
- Supporting all Local Authorities within the region with data and analysis to inform multiple transport studies via the support of consultants; and
- Provide all Regional Transport Partnerships and associated Councils in Scotland with a suite of mobile phone and census data and dashboards to create a data informed public sector, and to support the intelligent Client function. This support will include the upskilling of the public sector to utilise existing software and understand how to utilise the data available to inform investment decision making.

4 THE FUTURE OF THE WORKFORCE MOBILITY PROJECT

- 4.1 There is strong regional support to extend WMP beyond March 2027, recognising the value of retaining the specialist insight, experience and data intelligence developed by the regional team. Continuing the project will enable partners to further embed data-led decision making and reinforce transport's role as a core enabler of spatial and economic planning across the region.
- 4.2 A business case has been developed to support the continuation of the project, positioning it as a key coordination mechanism for regional partners and aligned initiatives, and as a foundation for a future regional intelligence hub with transport data at its core. This draft business case, developed as part of the wider IRES Programme 2027+, was tabled with the Scottish Government in late 2025 and will be formally submitted following the establishment of the new administration.
- 4.3 The 2026/27 national pilot is pivotal in securing future investment, providing the evidence required to demonstrate the value of a centralised data resource that delivers economies of scale, consistent national insight, and improved outcomes. SEStran's leadership role in delivering the pilot is therefore critical. By working closely with national partners to drive adoption, build capability within transport teams, and strengthen confidence in data-led decision making, SEStran will play a defining role in establishing the credibility, sustainability, and long-term success of WMP.
- 4.4 This development will also raise SEStran's profile and influence in ongoing discussions around national transport governance and the empowerment of regional partnerships.
- 4.5 It is therefore proposed that SEStran will continue to partner the City Deal in the delivery of the Workforce Mobility Project beyond March 2027 and that it will be named as a delivery partner in the business case to be submitted to Scottish Government.

5 GOVERNANCE STRUCTURES

- 5.1 The governance structure of the WMP will continue through the City Deal IRES Board, with validation of any decision by SEStran Board. The lead for all reporting will be the SEStran Senior Partnership Manager and this will include the governance and reporting requirements associated with the Transport Scotland funding.

6 SEStran BOARD APPROVALS

6.1 Due to the urgency involved in ensuring continuation of the WMP plus putting the new arrangements in place, the Partnership Director and Chair of the SEStran Partnership Board utilised Standing Order 40 to authorise:

- SEStran working in partnership with the City Deal
- Expenditure of the £200k additional funding, which has already been received from Transport Scotland (see 6.2), to deliver WMP commitments

(Standing Order 40: Items of Urgency. If a decision which would normally be made by the Partnership requires to be made urgently between meetings of the Board, the Partnership Director, in consultation with the Chairperson (whom failing, the Deputy Chairperson(s)), can take action subject to the matter being reported to the next meeting of the Partnership.

6.2 Transport Scotland has supported the concept of the national pilot with the separate allocation of £200k funding through the Transport to Employment fund. This will provide the following resources:

- Increase SBC project Support for 12 months
- Additional data analyst 4 days per week (external consultant)
- Additional Management, maintenance & Storage capacity for WFM data tools
- Commercial Expert resource 2 days per month for 12 months
- Additional PM support 3 days per week for 12 months (external consultant)
- Purchase Mobile Phone Data
- Contingency (circa 4%)

The approval of the Transport to Employment funding is contained within Agenda item A2(b) Revenue Budget 2026-27.

7 RECOMMENDATIONS

7.1 The Board is asked to note the content of this report and the associated funding position that is further detailed within Agenda item A2(b) Revenue Budget 2026-27.

7.2 The Board is asked to note action taken by the Partnership Director and Chair of the SEStran Partnership Board under Standing Order 40, approving the participation of SEStran in the delivery of the Workforce Mobility Project in 2026/27

7.3 The Board is asked to approve the continuation of the Senior Partnership Manager's leadership of the Workforce Mobility Project to deliver the benefits identified in Section 2.4 of this report.

7.4 The Board is asked to endorse the continuation of SEStran partnership delivery of the Workforce Mobility Project beyond March 2027, subject to approval of the Business Case to be submitted to Scottish Government later in 2026.

<p>Policy Implications</p>	<p>Utilising data to inform transport decision making is a commitment within the RTS and many Local Transport Strategies. SEStran’s leadership role in the Workforce Mobility will support the delivery of the RTS priorities and influence the longer term adoption of these principles to support partners with continued access to data intelligence.</p>
<p>Financial Implications</p>	<p>Costs incurred by Scottish Borders Council are funded directly through Edinburgh & South East Scotland City Region Deal.</p> <p>The Transport Scotland – Transport to Employability funding will be administered by SEStran to procure additional resources to scale-up delivery for the national pilot. This will be a combination of services procured directly by SEStran and granting money to Scottish Borders Council to expand existing commissions. The financial implications and approval request are contained within Agenda item A2(b) Revenue Budget 2026-27.</p> <p>The Senior Partnership Manager’s time to lead the project will be an ‘in-kind’ contribution to support the project success and future delivery business case.</p>
<p>Equalities Implications</p>	<p>An EQIA has been undertaken by Scottish Borders Council at the start of the Workforce Mobility Project and the outcomes still influence the project direction to fundamentally reduce the transport related barrier to employment, training and education across the region.</p>
<p>Climate Change Implications</p>	<p>As projects will generally support access to sustainable transport, this will support the transition to net zero.</p>