

CONSULTATION RESPONSE

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to update Members on SEStran's response to consultations between March and June 2026. In particular, to summarise the response given to the consultation on Scotland's Infrastructure Strategy 2027 – 2037.

2. SCOTLAND'S INFRASTRUCTURE STRATEGY 2027 – 2037

- 2.1 SEStran officers responded to the *Scotland's Infrastructure Strategy 2027 – 2037* on 5th May 2026 with a response which focused on strengthening the link between Scotland's long term infrastructure needs and shorter term investment decisions. The full response can be found in Appendix 1.
- 2.2 The response agreed strongly with the Strategy's intention to translate the 30-year Infrastructure Needs Assessment into a prioritised, place based investment framework, providing greater coherence between strategic ambition, funding decisions and delivery. At a transport level, the focus should be shifted to accessibility, decarbonisation, inclusion and long term value for money.
- 2.3 The response did highlight the need to stronger emphasis on the functional relationships between different types of infrastructure. For example, better considering interdependencies such as improved digital connectivity, remote access to services and flexible working arrangements. These interdependencies are particularly significant in areas where many people commute to Edinburgh and there is an increasing demand for cross boundary travel.
- 2.4 There is scope to improve both governance and the early stages of the infrastructure lifecycle. Stronger regional collaboration would help identify opportunities that may not be visible at local or national level and support a more consistent 'infrastructure first' approach. Earlier consideration of demand management and service improvements, alongside better asset management, would help ensure that investment focuses on outcomes rather than outputs. More proportionate appraisal processes and a clearer role for regional partnerships would also help to improve delivery.
- 2.5 Overall, the consultation response was focused the requirements for continued public sector leadership, closer integration across transport, land use planning and economic development, and a realistic understanding of delivery capacity. Regional partnerships have an important role in coordinating cross boundary investment and aligning national priorities with local delivery. While private investment and placemaking are important, effective delivery will depend on clear governance and sufficient capacity.

Rebecca Smith
Projects Officer
June 2026

Appendix 1: Scotland's Infrastructure Strategy 2027 – 2037 Consultation SEStran Response

Policy Implications	Potentially significant policy implications, although more likely to align closely with RTS and existing policies
Financial Implications	None
Equalities Implications	None
Climate Change Implications	Potentially significant in future dependent on outcome of the consultation

Role of the Infrastructure Strategy

SEStran Response

Submitted: 05/05/2026

Publication link: [Infrastructure Strategy 2027-2037: consultation - gov.scot](https://www.gov.scot/publications/infrastructure-strategy-2027-2037-consultation/pages/7)

7. Do you agree with the scope and role of the Infrastructure Strategy?

SEStran agrees with the proposed scope and role of the Infrastructure Strategy as a 10-year, outcomes-focused framework that provides a clear bridge between Scotland's long-term infrastructure needs and medium-term delivery decisions.

We strongly support the Strategy's intention to translate the 30-year Infrastructure Needs Assessment into a prioritised, place-based investment framework, providing greater coherence between strategic ambition, funding decisions and delivery. The emphasis on making best use of existing assets, outcome-led investment, and alignment with public service reform closely mirrors the principles underpinning the SEStran 2035 Regional Transport Strategy and RTS Delivery Plan and SEStran programmes of work.

For transport, this approach supports a shift away from mode-specific or asset-led decision making, towards investment that prioritises accessibility, decarbonisation, inclusion and long-term value for money.

However, the Strategy could place stronger emphasis on the functional relationships between different types of infrastructure. For example, improved digital connectivity, remote access to services and flexible working arrangements can reduce pressure on transport networks and support more sustainable patterns of growth. These interdependencies are particularly significant in areas where many people commute to Edinburgh and there is an increasing demand for cross-boundary travel. Additionally, making improvements can decrease the necessity for travel altogether, enhance rural RTPI, and boost access to digital transport services by eliminating connectivity gaps in our region. Such changes positively influence productivity and increase individuals' confidence in the transport system.

The Strategy also needs to address how investment decisions respond not only to growth but to uneven patterns of demand. In some rural and coastal parts of the South East, the challenge is maintaining service viability and accessibility rather than accommodating expansion. A clearer articulation of how infrastructure investment can stabilise and future proof these communities would strengthen the overall approach.

8; Do you think the proposed framework linking long-term needs to the 76-year Infrastructure Strategy, Spending Reviews and annual Budgets will support improved strategic planning and delivery?

Aligning long-term needs assessment with short-term funding cycles can improve planning and reduce fragmented investment, especially in the South East of Scotland where transport, housing, and economic pressures cross local boundaries. The framework's success relies on strong regional partnerships and governance that ensures regional priorities are identified, validated through appropriate processes and delivered effectively to maximise opportunities reflected in national spending priorities. Without this, challenges like strategic transport corridors, infrastructure first, public transport resilience, and climate adaptation could be overlooked in annual budgets. Multi-year funding is crucial for infrastructure projects that span several years to maximise outcomes and benefits and minimise inflationary pressures.

Transport serves as a fundamental driver of economic and social wellbeing; therefore, it is recommended that a designated portion of the annual budget be allocated specifically to this sector. Such ring-fencing would safeguard transport funding from being redirected to other public sector priorities and help prevent delays in multi-year programmes, which can ultimately postpone expected benefits and contribute to inflationary pressures, potentially undermining the overall business case of any new project or intervention.

SEStran believes the proposed framework will enhance strategic planning and delivery through a clear line-of-sight from long-term need to short-term funding decisions. Structured links between the 30-year Needs Assessment, 10-year Infrastructure Strategy, and Spending Reviews should mitigate fragmentation caused by annual budgeting. Effectiveness depends on:

- Aligning with robust regional and local delivery frameworks,
- Greater certainty of multi-year funding for ongoing programmes,
- Transparent translation of strategic priorities into budget decisions, including managing trade-offs when demand exceeds resources.
- Consistency of short- & medium-term decision making supporting the efficient use of public funding.

Infrastructure Governance Principles

9. Do any elements of the infrastructure lifecycle need to be strengthened to promote more effective infrastructure planning and delivery?

The initial phases of infrastructure lifecycle benefit from the identification of opportunities that may be missed through a local or national lens. Strong regional partnerships and governance to enable the collective thinking and collaboration has and will continue to optimise opportunities in the southeast of Scotland. Regional transport has a role in influencing and promoting an 'infrastructure first' principle in all future regional spatial and economic planning to optimise the use of existing transport infrastructure, services along key corridors.

Establishing the investment hierarchy early on would ensure demand management, service optimisation, and behaviour change interventions are thoroughly evaluated prior to considering capital-intensive alternatives. While this approach already fits well with transport planning in the region, it has potential to be reinforced in other infrastructure sectors.

The Strategy should acknowledge the distinct nature of transport infrastructure compared to other types; notably, transport systems are rarely entirely replaced or reach full obsolescence.

SEStran believes that the early stages of the infrastructure lifecycle need further enhancement, especially concerning defining problems, developing options, and assessing place-based needs. Frequently, infrastructure projects are influenced by predetermined solutions, which reduces prospects for sector integration.

Opportunities also exist to improve:

- Whole-life asset management, prioritising maintenance, adaptation, and optimisation equally with new construction.
- Monitoring, evaluation, and learning, placing greater importance on outcomes such as accessibility, emissions reduction, and social value instead of focusing purely on outputs.

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Stronger cross-sector and cross-boundary collaboration is essential to improve the practical application of the investment hierarchy. Many infrastructure challenges in South East Scotland—such as travel-to-work patterns, access to services and development pressures—do not align with administrative boundaries and therefore require regional approaches. Further, the early phases of infrastructure lifecycle benefit from the identification of opportunities that may be missed through a local or national lens. Strong regional partnerships and governance to enable the collective thinking and collaboration has and will continue to optimise opportunities in the southeast of Scotland. Regional transport has a role in influencing and promoting an 'infrastructure first' principle in all future regional spatial and economic planning to optimise the use of existing transport infrastructure, services along key corridors.

A clearer and more formal role for regional prioritisation would help identify where investment hierarchy principles deliver the greatest benefit. This must be supported by appraisal and business case processes that are more proportionate and flexible, particularly to reflect hierarchy-based decisions and non-capital interventions. Experience from the early stages of the Bus Partnership Fund highlighted the current system as overly complex and time-consuming, with inconsistent guidance on appraisal requirements creating delays and uncertainty.

There is also a need for more effective coordination and sustainable governance at regional level. The SEStran/ South East Scotland City Region Deal approach to SEStran demonstrates how existing regional structures can be used to deliver major infrastructure projects. In this context, the First Minister's November 2025 commitment to enabling legislation for regional partnerships should be taken forward in the next Parliament. Closer cross-sector working—particularly between transport, land use planning and economic development—is not only sensible but essential.

SEStran believes the impact of the investment hierarchy would be strengthened through:

- Stronger integration of transport, land use planning, housing, health and economic development at national, regional and local levels.
- Clearer recognition of regional partnerships as delivery convenors for cross-boundary and cross-sector infrastructure; and
- Greater flexibility to invest in revenue-led and service-based interventions, particularly where these deliver preventative outcomes and reduce long-term demand on public services, such as improved access to health care and employment.

1. Do you agree that enabling net zero and environmental sustainability, driving economic growth and building resilient places remain the right outcomes?

These outcomes remain appropriate and align with both national and regional priorities. In the South East of Scotland, achieving net zero will require significant changes to travel behaviour, energy use and land-use patterns, supported by coordinated and strategic transport infrastructure and service investment.

Resilience must also be considered more broadly than climate adaptation alone. Transport service continuity, affordability and the consideration of 'unintended consequences' from public sector interventions are critical, particularly for communities that rely on a small number of transport links or assets, where disruption can have disproportionate social and economic impacts.

SEStran agrees that these outcomes provide the right framework to guide infrastructure investment over the next decade. They reflect the increasingly interconnected nature of challenges facing communities, where climate action, access to opportunity and resilience are closely linked. For transport, this reinforces the need for sustained investment in initiatives that reduce car dependency, improve access to employment, healthcare and education, and support healthier, more resilient places.

Reducing poverty should remain a central consideration for both social and physical infrastructure investment. The Regional Transport Strategy (RTS) and National Transport Strategy (NTS) provide objectives that support a balanced approach, embedding social priorities alongside economic and environmental outcomes. Alongside reducing poverty is a wider commitment to inclusivity, be that of physical access, balancing of opportunity across rural and urban communities.

2. Are the proposed enablers sufficient to deliver the Strategy's outcomes?

Public assets, placemaking and private investment are all important enablers of infrastructure delivery, but their effectiveness depends on realistic expectations about delivery capacity and the continued role of public-sector leadership. In the South East of Scotland, many strategic transport and infrastructure improvements rely on public intervention to de-risk investment and align outcomes across multiple partners.

SEStran therefore broadly supports the proposed enablers but considers that delivery capability and institutional capacity should be more explicitly recognised as a cross-cutting enabler. This includes:

- Skills and capacity within local and regional bodies.
- Data, digital and analytical capability to support evidence-led decision-making; and
- The ability to design, manage and evaluate complex, programme-based interventions.

Overall, while the proposed enablers provide a strong foundation, they will only be effective if there is clear recognition of the ongoing need for public-sector intervention and a realistic assessment of what can, and cannot, be delivered within existing capacity constraints. Further we consider RTPs like SEStran to be key enabler organisations, providing regional effective and efficient delivery and overcoming these barriers.

3. What mechanisms should ensure cross-cutting priorities are embedded in decision-making?

Greater integration between regional economic strategies, development plans and transport strategies is essential. In the South East of Scotland, regional transport planning already provides a strong platform for aligning investment with housing growth areas, employment centres and regeneration priorities.

Delivery must, however, remain sensitive to local context. National and regional frameworks should set direction and priorities, while local partners lead implementation to ensure infrastructure investment reflects place-based needs and circumstances.

SEStran recommends that the Infrastructure Strategy:

- Requires explicit alignment with regional strategies, including Regional Transport Strategies and Regional Economic Partnerships.
- Uses shared outcomes and metrics, particularly for accessibility, inequality reduction and emissions; and
- Encourages programme-based approaches that cut across sectors, such as transport to health, inclusive access to employment and nature-based infrastructure.

As noted in our response to Question 4, stronger and more joined-up regional governance will be critical to effective delivery. Transport infrastructure strategy must be seamless across land-use and transport planning. Similarly, without a coordinated regional approach to economic development and housing, there is a continued risk of fragmentation and delays to implementation.

4. Are there findings from the SFT Needs Assessment that should be more fully integrated?

The Needs Assessment rightly highlights the importance of coordinated infrastructure and transport planning in supporting wider public-sector objectives. The strategic role of Regional Transport Partnerships (RTPs) in coordinating and delivering activity across local authorities is particularly relevant and could be more clearly recognised within the Infrastructure Strategy.

Across Scotland, RTPs add value by balancing urban growth pressures with rural accessibility needs and by providing a forum for translating national policy into locally deliverable solutions. The Assessment is especially strong in its:

- Emphasis on demographic change and public-service reform.
- Recognition of the role of behavioural change alongside physical infrastructure and transport service investments; and
- Focus on system-wide thinking rather than sector-by-sector planning, with sufficient ring-fenced budget to guarantee ongoing projects.

Taken together, these findings strongly support integrated, place-based and outcome-focused approaches to infrastructure planning, particularly at a regional scale.

Place Based Approach

69. Do you support the proposal that infrastructure investment is more directly driven by the priorities of places?

A stronger place-based approach to infrastructure investment has clear merit, provided it is supported by appropriate strategic oversight. In regions such as the South East of Scotland, where infrastructure networks serve multiple places simultaneously, decisions driven solely by individual local priorities risk undermining wider system performance.

This is particularly evident in transport, where trade-offs between faster inter-urban services and local accessibility are common across rail and bus networks. Addressing these challenges requires regional and national perspectives to complement local priorities and ensure balanced, system-wide outcomes.

SEStran strongly supports a more place-driven approach to infrastructure investment, as this is essential to reflecting local needs, recognising regional variation and maximising social, economic and environmental benefit. Within this model, regional partnerships play a critical role by addressing cross-boundary issues, coordinating investment and linking national priorities with local delivery.

It is also important to recognise that placemaking is shaped by multiple national policy frameworks. While National Planning Framework 4 (NPF4) is central, land-use planning should give equal consideration to the National Transport Strategy (NTS2) and national economic strategies, all of which contribute to shaping successful places.

76. Are the proposed principles and place partnerships the right ones?

Place-based partnerships can be effective in shaping and delivering local improvements. However, in the South East of Scotland, prioritisation of strategic infrastructure must be informed by regional evidence and agreed collectively, rather than relying solely on local partnerships with differing capacity, resources and influence.

While the proposed principles and partnership landscape provide a strong foundation, greater clarity is needed on roles, accountability and resourcing. The effectiveness of partnerships depends on alignment between governance, funding and decision-making processes, alongside sufficient capacity to support delivery.

As noted in our response to Question 9, National Planning Framework 4 (NPF4) should not be viewed as the sole placemaking document. In addition to the Regional Spatial Strategy referenced in the consultation, equal weight should be given to Regional Transport Strategies and the strategies developed by Regional Economic Partnerships, all of which play a critical role in coordinating investment and delivery at regional scale.

77. Do you agree with proposals to empower communities to play a more active role?

Early and meaningful community engagement is essential to building understanding of both opportunities and constraints associated with infrastructure investment. In the South East of Scotland, the prolonged timescales for major infrastructure proposals can, however, lead to consultation fatigue and disengagement if not managed carefully.

SEStran supports greater community involvement in infrastructure decision-making, particularly where engagement takes place early in the process and focuses on defining problems and desired outcomes. Meaningful engagement should be underpinned by capacity-building, inclusive methods and clear feedback that demonstrates how community input has influenced decisions.

Greater transparency around decision-making, phasing and funding can help communities feel confident that engagement will lead to tangible outcomes, even where compromises are required. It is important that major infrastructure projects are not perceived as being imposed on communities. The City of Edinburgh Council's consultation on the proposed tram extension provides a strong example of effective engagement.

To avoid consultation fatigue, place-based proposals should be presented as coherent packages rather than developed in isolation or introduced incrementally by different public bodies.

78;Does.the.current.landscape.of.partnerships.provide.an.effective.framework?

Existing partnerships provide a strong foundation for place-based working but would benefit from clearer definition of roles and responsibilities. Community Planning Partnerships, for example, tend to focus on social outcomes and may require additional capacity and expertise to engage fully with complex infrastructure planning and delivery.

There is clear scope to strengthen the role of regional partnerships, including Regional Transport Partnerships, in coordinating place-based infrastructure investment across the South East of Scotland and ensuring alignment with national objectives. A more consistent and systematic use of regional partnerships across sectors would help address cross-boundary challenges and improve coherence in decision-making. Indeed, if the current landscape were designed anew, it is unlikely it would replicate existing arrangements.

The consultation also gives little or no attention to City and Growth Deals, despite their significant role in delivering major infrastructure projects. These programmes should be explicitly factored into discussions on regional governance, alongside Regional Spatial Strategies, Regional Transport Strategies and the work of Regional Economic

Partnerships, to ensure a more joined-up and effective approach to planning and delivery.

Enabling Private Infrastructure

79; Are there additional sectors or opportunities for strategic investment?

Private investment opportunities are strongest in growth areas, particularly around Edinburgh and along key transport corridors. Different approaches will be required in rural and peripheral areas, where commercial returns are less certain but social value is high. In all cases, public-sector leadership remains critical in setting direction, de-risking investment and unlocking wider economic and social benefits.

However, the mechanisms used to attract private investment into infrastructure require fundamental reform. Previous approaches have often failed to deliver value for the public sector. Infrastructure Levy proposals have been short-lived, while the introduction of appeal mechanisms for Section 75 agreements has significantly weakened their effectiveness. There is a clear need to explore stronger, more reliable ways of securing long-term private investment.

Greater coordination of utility diversions, improved regulation of roadworks and more robust mechanisms for locking in private investment should all be considered. In addition, many infrastructure projects require secure, long-term revenue streams for maintenance as well as upfront capital, to ensure assets remain viable and do not suffer from limited lifespan or early failure.

SEStran considers that investment opportunities linked to public transport reform, active travel, digital connectivity, access to healthcare and nature-based infrastructure should be given equal consideration alongside housing and renewables, particularly where they deliver wider economic, social and environmental benefits.

70; What will the economy need from infrastructure up to 2030?

The South East of Scotland's economy requires infrastructure that is reliable, resilient and deliverable. This means assets that perform consistently, decision-making processes that are timely, and funding frameworks that provide long-term certainty.

To support growth and prosperity, infrastructure investment must:

- Enable low-carbon, reliable and affordable mobility.
- Connect people to jobs, skills, healthcare and essential services.
- Support housing delivery in locations that reduce the need to travel; and

- Be resilient to the impacts of climate change and demographic pressures.

Integrated transport systems, high-quality public transport, strong data and digital capability, and preventative, people-focused infrastructure will be central to delivering sustainable and inclusive economic growth across the region.