

PROGRAMME FOR GOVERNMENT

1 PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1** The purpose of this report is to provide members with an initial overview of the Scottish Government's Programme for Government (PfG) 2026–27, which was published on 1 September 2026 and to outline the immediate implications, opportunities and alignment points for the Partnership's current work programme. The report highlights areas of direct relevance to our strategic objectives, delivery commitments and statutory responsibilities, and identifies where further analysis or engagement will be required as detailed policy measures are released. The PfG document is available at this [link](#).

2 SUMMARY

- 2.1** The PfG is a five-year plan focused on eradicating child poverty, growing the economy, tackling the climate emergency, and strengthening the NHS and public services.
- 2.2** It sets out the Scottish Government's legislative intentions, priority reforms and investment commitments for the year ahead. As an annual statement of governmental direction, it provides the policy context within which regional transport partnerships, local authorities, public bodies and delivery agencies are expected to plan, coordinate and report their activity.
- 2.3** This year's PfG emphasises a continued focus on public service reform, inclusive economic growth, net-zero transition, and community wellbeing, alongside targeted measures intended to support households and strengthen local delivery capacity. While the detailed implications for regional transport, digital inclusion, economic development and place-based programmes will emerge over the coming weeks, the publication provides an important framing for our forward planning, risk management and stakeholder engagement.
- 2.4** The PfG contains a number of commitments that align closely with SEStran's strategic priorities, particularly around public transport affordability, regional connectivity, active travel, transport decarbonisation and mass transit development. Notable measures include the national rollout of a £2 bus fare cap, Better Buses legislation, substantial active travel investment, continued strategic transport infrastructure programmes and support for regional connectivity.
- 2.5** Of particular significance is the Government's commitment to explore regional governance models, resource pooling and transport governance reform, which may have important implications for the future role of Regional Transport Partnerships in the planning, coordination and delivery of transport investment across Scotland.

3 STRATEGIC ALIGNMENT

3.1 General

- 3.1.1 Initial analysis indicates that several PfG commitments intersect with the Partnership's current priorities, including transport decarbonisation, behaviour-change and modal shift initiatives, accessibility, economic participation and community resilience. These areas present opportunities to strengthen our contribution to national outcomes and ensure our programmes remain aligned with emerging policy direction.

3.2 Public Governance & Regional Reform

- 3.2.1 The PfG marks a significant acceleration of the public service reform agenda. The Scottish Government will convene a three-month dialogue, from September to November 2026, with Parliament, local government and other partners on the future of local governance. This will consider new forms of collaboration, potential structural change, more strategic regional models of local government and the scope to pool resources and functions at regional level, while strengthening community-level decision-making. The Government intends to establish a shared direction for reform by the end of 2026, enabling early decisions and initial progress to be reflected in the first Budget of the new Parliament.
- 3.2.2 The Programme does not prescribe council mergers, regional boundaries or a single model for reform. It instead opens a period in which the functions, geography and governance of regional arrangements will be shaped. The initial three-month process is described as a dialogue with partners rather than a formal public consultation. More detailed consultation is likely to follow as specific structural or legislative proposals are developed, but no separate timetable for this has yet been published.
- 3.2.3 There is specific reference to the reform of transport governance:
- Transport Scotland will be brought back into the Scottish Government
 - The role of the National Smart Ticketing Advisory Board will be reviewed
 - Some transport functions will be transferred directly into government
 - Remaining transport bodies will be reviewed to identify potential mergers and streamlining opportunities
- 3.2.4 Wider public sector reform commitments include:
- Public service reform legislation
 - Simplification of health governance structures
 - More preventative, place-based and regional approaches to service delivery

- 3.2.5 For RTPs, this signals a period of significant institutional change and reinforces the recent direction of travel towards a more regional approach to planning and delivery of services. The reference to resource pooling is particularly noteworthy.

3.3 Public Transport

- 3.3.1 A number of initiatives designed to support and promote bus use have been confirmed. These include:

- The roll out of a national £2 bus fare cap across Scotland during this Parliament, building on existing pilots
- Continued funding of free bus travel for over 2.4 million eligible people
- Introduction of Introduce Better Buses legislation to improve regional bus service delivery, give communities improved bus services and strengthen local connectivity
- Support of more affordable access to public transport as part of wider anti-poverty and cost-of-living measures

- 3.3.2 A number of initiatives designed to support and promote rail use have been confirmed. These include:

- The permanent removal of peak rail fares
- Continued investment to ensure rail supports economic growth and climate objectives
- Keeping the railway affordable and accessible to encourage modal shift

3.4 Strategic Connectivity and Major Infrastructure

- 3.4.1 The Government has reaffirmed support for:

- Clyde Metro development
- Improved physical and digital connectivity between communities
- Investment in transport infrastructure that enables economic growth and supports regional development

- 3.4.2 Although SEStran is not specifically referenced, there is a clear policy direction towards regionally significant public transport programmes and integrated transport planning, creating a favourable environment for future regional mass transit investment. This aligns strongly with SEStran's current work on the SEStran Strategic Business Case. Further, the cabinet secretary did reference mass transit

schemes for Edinburgh, Aberdeen and Glasgow at his first appearance for Transport Committee.

3.5 Roads

Government commitments include:

- Continuing the dualling of the A9 and A96
- Progressing the A83 Rest and Be Thankful improvements
- Addressing pothole maintenance and wider road network resilience
- Improving strategic rural road links

3.6 Transport Resilience

3.6.1 The Programme commits to:

- Investing in a more resilient transport network
- Working with infrastructure owners to focus investment on areas most vulnerable to disruption and climate impacts

3.7 Industrial Strategy & Public Procurement

3.7.1 Ferguson Marine & Clyde Shipbuilding: Seeks to protect commercial shipbuilding and skilled jobs in Scotland by proposing direct awards of government vessel contracts including small replacement ferries and marine research vessels subject to legal, commercial, and subsidy control checks.

3.7.2 Procurement Bill Consultation: Launches a consultation on new procurement legislation aimed at driving innovation in health and social care, embedding community wealth building, and maximising local economic impact.

3.7.3 Green Freeports & Investment Zones: Focuses on joint delivery with regional partners to leverage tax incentives, attract private investment, and execute investment plans.

3.8 Rural & Island Communities

3.8.1 Rural Renewal Bill: Begins work on primary legislation intended to stimulate targeted economic growth across rural economies.

3.9 Access to Employment

- 3.9.1 Continued multiyear funding for *No One Left Behind* and a commitment to the key barriers to work identified through Employability Support review being addressed within the next Scottish Budget.
- 3.9.2 Support for Regional Economic Partnerships to deliver regional interventions that respond to employers' skills needs and support people in training and job opportunities.

3.10 Active & Sustainable Travel Investment

- 3.10.1 Funding Escalation: PfG scales total investment in Sustainable and Active Travel from £115 million in 2021–22 to over £226 million in 2026–27.
- Continued investment in walking and cycling infrastructure to improve health, wellbeing and sustainable travel choices

3.11 Decarbonisation and Net Zero Transport

- 3.11.1 Key measures include:
- Expanded support for electric vehicle infrastructure
 - Planning reforms to simplify installation of public EV charging
 - Encouraging private sector investment in heavy vehicle decarbonisation
 - Continued active travel investment
 - Focus on resilient, low-carbon infrastructure

These commitments align closely with SEStran priorities on decarbonisation, future mobility and sustainable transport delivery

3.12 Health boards in Scotland

- 3.12.1 The Scottish Government's Programme for Government proposes major NHS reform, replacing the current 14 territorial Health Boards with two larger regional boards and placing greater emphasis on preventative, place-based service delivery. This could create opportunities for more consistent regional planning of patient transport and healthcare access, aligning closely with SEStran's Transport to Health programme. However, there is also a risk that local transport needs could receive less focus during the transition, making it important that transport accessibility is embedded within the reform process.

4 POLICY AND LEGISLATION PROPOSALS

4.1 Scottish Prevention Investment Framework

Building on Scotland's preventative budgeting work, the development of a Scottish Prevention Investment Framework will drive a decisive shift toward early intervention across public services. This framework will establish a consistent approach to identifying, assessing, and prioritizing investment in prevention and early intervention. By directing resources toward proactive measures, it aims to improve long-term outcomes for individuals while reducing future demand on public services. This offers direct strategic alignment with wider regional transport goals and targeted access-to-employment initiatives, such as Transport to Employment.

4.2 Public Service Renewal (Scotland) Bill

The Scottish Government intends to introduce the Public Service Renewal (Scotland) Bill to provide statutory backing, where required, for reforming the public service delivery landscape in alignment with the Public Service Reform Strategy. The Bill aims to improve the long-term fiscal sustainability of public service delivery through structural reform, including the potential merging or abolition of public bodies and the transfer of functions between core government and public agencies.

5 CONCLUSION

5.1 The Programme for Government appears highly supportive of several current SEStran priorities:

- Regional Bus Strategy and Bus Action Plan
- SEStran and mass transit development
- RTSDP delivery and regional infrastructure planning
- Transport to Employment and transport poverty initiatives
- Active travel and decarbonisation programmes
- Data-led regional planning and regional collaboration

5.2 However, the most strategically important commitment may be the intention to explore regional governance reform and resource pooling, which could create opportunities for RTPs to take on a stronger delivery and coordination role in future transport investment and service planning.

8 RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that the Partnership Board:

- 8.1 Notes the publication of the Programme for Government and the initial assessment set out in this report.
- 8.2 Agrees that officials monitor the introduction of the Public Service Renewal (Scotland) Bill and present a dedicated paper to a future Partnership meeting

outlining any specific governance, operational, or statutory implications for Regional Transport Partnerships once the draft legislation is formally published.

- 8.3 Agrees that the Partnership continues proactive engagement with Scottish Government officials and regional partners as PfG measures are developed.

Brian Butler
Partnership Director
18 September 2026

Policy Implications	This work will entail significant policy developments over coming months, although these are not yet clear. Officers will monitor progress of the PfG and report to the Board on any required changes.
Financial Implications	The PfG is likely to have significant financial implications, but these are currently unclear. Officers will monitor progress of the PfG and report to the Board on any required changes.
Equalities Implications	The PfG is almost certain to have positive implications for equalities. Officers will monitor progress of the PfG and report to the Board on changes as part of all other relevant reports.
Climate Change Implications	The PfG is almost certain to have positive implications for climate change. Officers will monitor progress of the PfG and report to the Board on changes as part of all other relevant reports.