

PROJECTS UPDATE

1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This report provides an update to the Board on the key programmes within the Business Plan for 2026/27.

2 REGIONAL TRANSPORT STRATEGY DELIVERY PLAN

- 2.1 In May 2026, the Edinburgh and South East Scotland City Region Deal (CRD) Joint Committee submitted a proposal to the Local Growth Fund (LGF). The proposal included £500k for the Regional Transport Strategy Delivery Plan (RTSDP), with the following profile:

- 2026/27 – £150k (£100k RTSDP & up to £50k to SEStran)
- 2027/28 – £175k
- 2028/29 – £175k

- 2.2 At its meeting in June 2026, the SEStran Board was informed that the following actions would be undertaken after the funding was confirmed:

1. Commission a consultant to complete the baselining of existing projects from regional partners and the list of 'Sifted Projects' from the Strategic Transport Projects Review 2 into the existing strategic assessment matrix
2. Undertake an Equalities Impact assessment to supplement the project level assessments undertaken by partner Local Authorities (LAs) for individual projects. The outcomes will be built into the future process, programme and scope
3. Complete the 'mapping and gapping' exercise with regional partners to identify opportunities for new projects, cross boundary collaborations and economies of scale
4. Assess and draft a scope of services for the remaining two financial years of funding (2027-2029) to undertake a Strategic Business Case (SBC) Assessment in accordance with Scottish Transport Appraisal Guidance, or other appropriate alternatives
5. Provide an updated programme cost estimate to deliver the scope of service
6. Provide a draft delivery programme with external dependencies quantified
7. Provide programme governance structure, with processes and templates
8. Draft Transport Planning Objectives for consideration at the next stage.

- 2.3 The UK Government published the City Deal Local Growth Fund Investment Plan at the end of August 2026, and the above proposal has been approved and included

in the plan. The grant offer award letter is expected in September 2026, after the CRD has undertaken appropriate internal checks.

2.4 In addition to the LGF, £50k has been allocated from Transport to Employment funding in 2026/27, so the overall budget profile for the RTSDP is as follows:

- 2026/27 – £150k
- 2027/28 – £175k
- 2028/29 – £175k

2.5 The procurement process for the consultant team to deliver items 1 to 8 commenced on 27 August 2026, with tender returns due on 28 September 2026. Following evaluation of submissions and completion of the necessary approvals, it is anticipated that the consultancy contract will be awarded by the end of September 2026. Progress on the commission and associated workstreams will be reported to the Board in December 2026.

3 PEOPLE & PLACE

3.1 Delivery is underway across the programme's four themes of Schools and Young People, Workplaces, Accessibility and Inclusion, and Capacity and Capability Building. LAs and third-sector partners have commenced a wide range of interventions including:

- Cycle access schemes
- School-based active travel initiatives
- Walking and wheeling projects
- Community-led engagement programmes
- Workplace travel planning
- Accessibility improvements
- Sustainable transport promotion

3.2 Early delivery has included:

- The installation of cycling infrastructure and storage
- Accessibility improvement projects
- Programme planning; and engagement activity
- Cycle maintenance and refurbishment initiatives
- The preparation of school and community-based projects for implementation during the autumn and winter delivery period

3.3 Since the drafting of the Finance Officer's Report elsewhere on this agenda, Transport Scotland has confirmed an additional grant award of £600,000 (revenue)

to Regional Transport Partnerships, of which SEStran's allocation is £159,225. This funding will mainly be used to increase the resilience of the People and Place budget, with small amounts being allocated to internal and external projects to support delivery as needed.

- 3.4 Work has begun on reviewing the People and Place delivery plan for 2027/28, with an early draft being discussed with LAs and key wider stakeholders at workshops on 8 and 9 September. A revised draft will then be shared with stakeholders for a final consultation in October, with the final version being presented to the next Board meeting.

4 REGIONAL BUS ACTION PLAN

- 4.1 Since the paper presented to the Board on 19 June 2026, work on the Regional Bus Action Plan (RBAP) has focused on establishing the governance, evidence base and partnership structures required to support delivery of the Regional Bus Strategy (RBS).
- 4.2 The RBAP provides the framework for delivering RBS objectives around level of service, affordability and ticketing, and service quality through coordinated action across LAs, operators, national agencies and regional partners. Board members have identified priority areas for early delivery, helping to shape the initial programme of work and ensuring that the RBAP reflects operational challenges and opportunities across the region. The updated RBAP is now focused on Year 1 priorities only, which are impactful, achievable and in line with regional partners' priorities.
- 4.3 Further work has been undertaken to develop an outcomes and performance framework for the RBS. A Measuring Success paper has been circulated to establish clear outcomes, monitoring arrangements and reporting mechanisms, ensuring that delivery activity remains focused on achieving long-term improvements in regional bus services rather than simply completing individual actions.
- 4.4 The team has met with SPT's bus data working group to understand their approach and how their materials could be utilised in developing a monitoring and evaluation framework for the regional bus work. This will ensure we can learn from the west's data governance and reduce duplication of public spending.
- 4.5 To ensure Real Time Passenger Information (RTPI) is successfully installed and maintained across the region, a consultant, AtkinsRealis, has been procured by SEStran to support LAs with equipment installation and testing. The consultant has excellent knowledge of the RTPI system and the supplier, so is well placed to support the region's RTPI network improvements. This will help to ensure funding from the Bus Infrastructure Fund (BIF) will be successfully spent within the financial year.
- 4.6 The Thistle Assistance project continues to support more accessible and inclusive public transport across the SEStran region. Evaluation activity is progressing well, with

strong user engagement informing the assessment of the Thistle Assistance Card and App. The project timeline has been updated to reflect delivery requirements, with completion now expected by end of October 2026. Engagement with transport operators and accessibility stakeholders is also underway to ensure the evaluation captures both user experience and broader transport sector perspectives.

4.7 Looking ahead, the focus over the coming months will be on progressing the Year 1 priority actions identified within the RBAP, including:

- Development of the regional evidence base
- Refinement of service standards and performance measures
- Establishing a regional congestion working group

5 TRANSPORT TO EMPLOYMENT

5.1 The Transport to Employment Programme (TtE) has successfully moved from programme design into delivery, with funding fully allocated across a regional portfolio of projects focused on reducing child poverty by improving access to employment, training and healthcare. During the year to date, SEStran has established programme governance arrangements, issued funding awards, recruited additional staff and put in place the systems required to manage and monitor delivery across the region.

5.2 A number of projects are already delivering practical improvements for communities. New public transport links have been introduced to connect people to major employment and healthcare destinations, including:

- The launch of a new East Lothian service providing direct connections to the Royal Infirmary of Edinburgh
- A new bus route linking Hawick with Borders General Hospital

5.3 Additional services connecting communities in Midlothian, East Lothian, West Lothian and the Scottish Borders to key employment, healthcare and education destinations are scheduled to commence during the autumn. A number of additional bus services were launched from 13 September and updates will be provided to future Partnership Board meetings.

5.4 The programme is also supporting pathways into employment through targeted employability interventions, such as:

- Summer work placements have commenced through The Bike Station's Kids Bike Life project; and
- Powering Futures has developed a programme that will work with schools, employers and families to raise awareness of career opportunities and support progression into employment.

- 5.5 Recruitment has been completed for a number of dedicated delivery roles, including employer engagement posts in West Lothian and Clackmannanshire and a Behaviour Change Officer in the Scottish Borders, increasing local capacity to support residents into work.
- 5.6 Alongside project delivery, work has progressed to develop longer-term solutions to employment accessibility challenges. Employee travel demand analysis work has been commissioned and SEStran has led the appointment of a consultant to develop a common evaluation framework across participating RTPs. These activities will help build the evidence base for future investment and identify the interventions that deliver the greatest benefit for households experiencing transport-related barriers to employment.

6 TRANSPORT TO HEALTH

- 6.1 Following the publication of the Transport to Health (TtH) Case for Change (CfC), progress has been made to move from an evidence base to a structured strategic approach for the region.
- 6.2 A procurement exercise was carried out over the summer to secure capacity support from an external consultancy agency. This attracted 30 notes of interest; however, this translated into 6 final submissions, reflecting the capacity constraints experienced by many consultancy agencies over the summer months. Urban Foresight obtained the highest score and were appointed in August 2026 to support the second phase of our TtH programme of work.
- 6.3 For this financial year, the TtH work will involve:
- Refining the seven draft Transport Planning Objectives (TPOs) with the TtH Learning Network
 - Co-creating a regional strategic vision with the Learning Network and wider key stakeholders
 - Generating a long list of potential interventions to meet the goals set out in the TPOs
 - Carrying out a sifting exercise and identifying a short list of potential interventions based on specific agreed criteria
 - Developing Outline Business Cases (OBCs) for specific interventions which will aim to address the issues identified in the CfC and contribute to at least one TPO
- 6.4 An inception meeting with Urban Foresight was undertaken at the end of August to confirm the scope of work, roles and responsibilities, timelines and key milestones for the commission. Work has commenced and is on programme, with the successful delivery of an online session on 3 September 2026 with the Learning Network to review and refine the TPOs. The next programme milestone will be the delivery of

an in-person workshop with wider stakeholders to co-create the programme's 'Vision'. This will take place on 24 September 2026 in Edinburgh.

- 6.5 While the recently announced reforms to the NHS in Scotland may result in changes to the strategic healthcare landscape in Scotland, the need to address transport barriers to accessing health services remains. Work on the TtH programme will therefore continue as planned, with the team monitoring structural changes and policy developments, to assess any implications for the programme as further details of the reform emerge.

7 SEStransit

- 7.1 Following on from the update to Board in June 2026, the Programme Strategic Business Case (SBC) has progressed over the summer, notably:

- The first stage Case for Investment (CFI) has progressed to its second draft and will be submitted to the Steering Group for review ahead of a regional stakeholder meeting scheduled for 30 September 2026
- The second iteration of the TPOs and associated appraisal framework was presented to the SEStransit Board on 26 August 2026. Following consideration by the Board, the detailed documents were submitted to the Steering Group on 1 September 2026 for review in advance of it meeting on 30 September 2026
- City of Edinburgh Council agreed that their SBC demonstrates the positive impact that the North-South tram route could have on the wider City Region and recognised the importance of aligning this work with SEStransit. The project will now be considered as part of the wider SEStransit programme SBC.

- 7.2 As part of the development of the CFI, which is a review of the available evidence, significant limitations have been identified in the existing regional transport model. The model was developed in 2012 and has not been updated in the last 5-10 years, so it is no longer capable of providing the credible level of analysis required to assess current network performance, reflecting changing post-pandemic travel demand, or future growth and development scenarios. Establishing a credible evidence base is essential to demonstrate the programme's strategic value, support future investment decisions, and ensure that proposed interventions can be assessed alongside other nationally significant infrastructure projects in health, social care and education through the new National Investment Plan process.

- 7.3 On 26 August 2026, the SEStransit Board endorsed the need for a robust transport model to underpin the development and delivery of SEStransit through the Scottish Transport Appraisal Guidance process.

- 7.4 The SEStransit Board agreed that the most efficient and cost-effective way of delivering a credible model was to extend the current City of Edinburgh Council model that is currently being updated, using up to date demand data from detailed

mobile phone data. This will be undertaken in a proportionate way to represent the level of detail required at the SBC stage.

7.5 The 2026/27 funding of the programme was confirmed on 26 August 2026 with the announcement by Transport Scotland of the BIF funding for 2026/27. SEStran was awarded:

- £500k for Consultancy support to complete the technical completion of the SBC process
- £200k to establish a Programme Management Office to deliver regional governance, stakeholder engagement exercise to support the programme delivery, the development of the Financial Case within the SBC

7.6 As the funding award was delayed by five months, the programme has been adjusted to reflect the activities that can now be feasibly completed within the remaining period of financial year 2026/27, meaning the development of the SBC will continue well into 2027/28.

7.7 As the original BIF application assumed a start date of 1 April 2026, it is not now possible to expend the full £500k budget on the technical delivery elements, so this enables the remaining budget to be re-purposed for the development of the proportionate transport model referenced in 7.4 in 2026/27.

7.8 The overall programme has been re-assessed based on the second iteration of the CFI, TPOs and the delayed funding award with the following milestones identified (also being cognisant of the Local government elections in 2027):

- Completion of CFI by October 2026
- Completion of TPOs by December 2026
- SEStran Model Development by May 2027
- Development of 'Priority Corridors' from October 2026 to September 2027
- Stakeholder Planning & Engagement from June 2026 to August 2027
- Draft SBC for SEStran Board sign-off by October 2027
- Draft SBC for individual LA consideration/approval through winter by 2027/28

7.9 The CFI will be presented the SEStran Board at the December 2026 meeting.

8 Workforce Mobility Project

8.1 The Workforce Mobility Project (WMP) team has now been operating a national pilot for five months. To date, work has focused on data analysis and upskilling of 6 RTPs and 8 LAs, with work now underway to create data dashboards for the remaining 24 Scottish LAs.

- 8.2 Beyond the supply of data and analysis the team is currently helping LAs across our region with the following workstreams:
- Continue supporting West Lothian Council to deliver a Journey Hub Study, full Bus Network Review and School Transport performance monitoring
 - Supporting Clackmannanshire Council with new local data and analysis to inform its Active Travel Investment Plan
 - Supporting Scottish Borders Council with a performance dashboard to monitor and influence of operating new services supported by TtE funding
- 8.3 There is strong regional and national support to extend WMP beyond March 2027, when the current funding allocation expires, 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.
- 8.4 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 business case has been developed as part of the CRD Integrated Regional Employability & Skills Programme (IRES) 2027+, which WMP is currently part of, and was submitted to Scottish Government in August 2026 for consideration in the 2027/28 Scottish Government budget. Agenda item A7 provides further detail on the IRES 2027+ business case and requests that the SEStran Partnership Board 'Pledge' support for the future IRES programme as a key regional partner.

9 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 9.1 The Board is asked to note the content of this report

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31 August 2026

Policy Implications	The programme contained in this report will support the delivery of the Regional Transport Strategy and will form the basis for future influence on a Regional Spatial Strategy and Regional Economic Partners developments.
Financial Implications	Costs incurred by Scottish Borders Council are funded directly through Edinburgh & South East Scotland City Region Deal.

	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. 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.
Equalities Implications	Each Programme has or is in the process of creating and updating the EQIA at every delivery stage of the programme.
Climate Change Implications	All programmes will support access to sustainable transport, this will support the transition to net zero.