SCOTTISH BORDERS COUNCIL
THURSDAY, 25TH AUGUST, 2022

Please find attached the correct report in respect of Item 15. on the agenda for the above meeting

15.	**Scottish Borders Response to the Regional Transport Strategy** (Pages 3 - 8) Consider report by Director Infrastructure and Environment. (Copy attached.)	20 mins

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Scottish Borders Council Response to the Regional Transport Strategy - Update

Report by Director Infrastructure and Environment

SCOTTISH BORDERS COUNCIL

25 August 2022

1 PURPOSE AND SUMMARY

1.1 **The report provides an update on the Council's response to South-East of Scotland Regional Transport Partnership (SEStrans) Draft Regional Transport Strategy on 11 February and the subsequent work undertaken by officers to secure changes to the Draft Strategy which is to be considered for approval at the SEStran Board meeting in September 2022.**

1.2 The Council approved the submission of a comprehensive set of comments on the Draft Regional Transport Strategy to SEStran on 11 February 2022 that highlighted the need for the strategy to better reflect priorities in the Scottish Borders and other rural challenges and opportunities.

1.3 The consideration of the Draft Regional Transport Strategy by SEStrans Board on the 18 March 2022 was deferred to allow discussion and agreement of revised text to be agreed with Scottish Borders Council.

1.4 Revised text at key sections of the Draft Regional Transport Strategy has been agreed and it is now proposed to take the final version of the Strategy to the SEStran Board in September 2022 for approval.

2 RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1 **I recommend that Scottish Borders Council agrees that the Scottish Borders Council representatives on the SEStran Board approve the revised version of the Regional Transport Strategy that incorporates the alternative text agreed with officers.**

3   BACKGROUND

3.1   The Council prepared a comprehensive set of comments on the Draft Regional Transport Strategy (RTS) which was submitted to South-East of Scotland Regional Transport Partnership (SEStran) on 11 February 2022.

3.2   The overall themes of the Council's response were that the document did not reflect strongly enough the transport challenges and opportunities of the Scottish Borders. The key components of this were:

- There needed to be greater differentiation between urban and rural areas. The document was heavily skewed to urban challenges and solutions. There was limited recognition of the role that rural regions make to the overall transport network, other than travelling into Edinburgh;
- The draft strategy needed to acknowledge the important linkages of the region to the south into northern England; west to Dumfries & Galloway, South Lanarkshire and Glasgow; and north into Perth & Kinross and beyond. These corridors and linkages provide important opportunities for the SEStrans region and the Scottish Borders;
- There needed to be clear support for the development/delivery of the Borders Railway extension, improvements on the existing line and action to maximise the integration of Reston Station into the east coast mainline, to support the community and a modal shift. There was a need to use the clear opportunity to support these strategically important infrastructure projects in sections 9.1 & 9.3 of the Draft RTS;
- There should be more emphasis on the correlation between good transport and good digital connectivity. Digital equality across the region will support an integrated and connected transport network especially in rural areas.
- The final strategy should have significantly more emphasis on increasing public confidence in public transport following the national messaging to avoid public transport during COVID 19. Also there is a lead role to play in behavioural change and public education to support sustainable transport choices to help deliver the strategy vision;
- The 'Vision' and 'Objectives' needed to display clear alignment with National Transport Strategy 2, the Just Transition recommendations and support the ambition of Regional Economic Strategies and Growth Deals;
- The links to the strategy 'Vision' and 'Objectives' needed to be clearly articulated throughout the document. The core linkages needed to be accurately defined to show how the actions will deliver the strategy objectives. There also needed to be clear and measurable outputs for each action so that they are quantifiable and link to the Monitoring and Evaluation section of the strategy;
- There were a significant number of actions within the draft strategy without clarity on ownership, how they will be funded, delivered or programmed; and
- The document would benefit from being more focused and shorter in length, especially when compared with other regional strategy documents.

4   PROGRESS UPDATE

4.1   After reviewing the Council's consultation response to the consultation, SEStran wrote to the Director of Infrastructure & Environment on 4 March 2022 confirming that they would be taking the updated Draft Regional Transport Strategy and the comments received from the overall consultation process to their Board on 18 March 2022 for final approval. However, no clarity was provided on how the Council's comments would be incorporated into the final Strategy document.

4.2   SEStran wrote again on 14 March 2022, following the publication of their report providing recommendations to the SEStran Board to approve the Final Regional Transport Strategy, with a high level overview of how the Council's comments would be addressed in the final strategy. Officers requested further detail from SEStran and a full tracked change version of the revised Regional Transport Strategy was provided for review.

4.3   On a detailed review of the revised strategy it was clear that some of the comments from the Council had been addressed, but there were still important challenges and opportunities that were not reflected in this revised strategy. SEStran were advised that Scottish Borders Council could not support the approval of the Regional Transport Strategy and it was agreed that the consideration by the SEStran Board would be deferred to enable further discussion to take place.

4.4   A meeting was subsequently held with SEStran on 19 April 2022 to discuss the areas of the revised strategy that Officers still highlighted the need for amendment, where it was agreed that Scottish Borders Council officers would provide appropriate text to be incorporated into the strategy for SEStran review.

5   REVISED TEXT

5.1   Officers provided revised text to SEStran on 10 May 2022 for their review. The revisions put forward focused on the following themes:
   • Borders Railway/Reston Station;
   • Rural challenges;
   • Data & digital improvements;
   • Behavioural change & education, and
   • Rural solutions.

5.2   SEStran provided amendments to the proposed text on 31 May 2022, with the principles of the majority of the proposals agreed, with minor changes to language so that it was consistent within the context of the overall document.

5.3   Officers were content with the response from SEStran except in relation to Section 12 where it was suggested that Demand Responsive Transport is a low cost transport solution in rural areas. It was felt that although Demand Responsive Transport will have a role to play in future transport networks, it is still a developing concept and this statement did not reflect current evidence that it can be significantly more expensive to operate compared to fixed route services. Alternative wording was agreed in relation to this on 15 June 2022.

6   REGIONAL TRANSPORT STRATEGY APPROVAL PROCESS

6.1   SEStran have programmed the Regional Transport Strategy to be approved by their Board in September 2022, following the incorporation of the new members to the board after the Local Government elections in May 2022.

6.2   If the recommendations in this report are approved it will enable Scottish Borders Council representatives on the SEStran Board to approve the Regional Transport Strategy.

7   IMPLICATIONS

7.1   Financial
There are no costs attached to any of the recommendations contained in this report.

7.2   Risk and Mitigations
The Regional Transport Strategy will be in place until 2035 and will set the direction for regional investment over this period of significant change to a Net Zero society. The revisions to the document now better reflect rural challenges and opportunities to support strategic investment and external funding that addresses the needs of the Scottish Borders.

7.3   Integrated Impact Assessment
No Integrated Impact Assessment required for this report. This report details the proposed Scottish Borders Council's consultation response to the SEStran Regional Transport Strategy. The proposed response does highlight that there needs to be a greater emphasis on rural areas, the challenges, ambitions and solutions for the benefit of our communities. SEStran have completed an IIA as part of their Strategy development process, it highlights positive and negative implications for the groups identified in this assessment. The SEStran IIA can be found at the link below:
https://sestran.gov.uk/publications/sestran-2035-equalities-impact-assessments/

7.4   Sustainable Development Goals
The finalised Regional Transport Strategy will positively impact the Sustainable Development Goals in the following ways:
- There will be a step change to the prioritisation of transport projects to reduce inequalities, improve wellbeing and inclusive growth. Local equity and accessibility will be regional priorities.
- Active travel sits at the top of the new transport hierarchy, so further investment and behavioural change will benefit the health & wellbeing of our communities.
- Building resilient infrastructure and transport solutions are at the core of the proposed strategy.
- The safety of users on the transport system is a fundamental principle of the draft strategy, which is specifically important for a transition to active travel solutions.
- All of the actions within the draft strategy are focused on delivering the national net zero targets.

7.5 Climate Change

The final SEStran Regional Transport Strategy will identify methodologies for reducing impacts, include direct and indirect greenhouse gas emissions, resulting from regional transport projects. This report provides a proposed consultation response to the draft SEStran Regional Transport Strategy to highlight the need for linking the actions back to the vision of carbon reduction. As this is just a consultation response to a new strategy being delivered by and external organisation, SEStran have already completed an Integrated Impact Assessment (IIA) and Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) as part of their Strategy development process. This will highlight positive/negative implications and mitigation for the actions identified in the Climate Change checklist. The SEStran IIA and SEA can be found at
https://sestran.gov.uk/publications/

7.6 Rural Proofing

The final SEStran Regional Transport Strategy will identify methodologies for reducing impacts and providing benefits for rural areas resulting from regional transport projects. This report provides a proposed consultation response to the draft SEStran Regional Transport Strategy to highlight the need for equitable benefits across the whole region. As this is just a consultation response to a new strategy being delivered by and external organisation, SEStran have already completed an Integrated Impact Assessment (IIA) and Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) as part of their Strategy development process. This will highlight positive/negative implications and mitigation for the actions identified in the Climate Change checklist. The SEStran IIA and SEA can be found at
https://sestran.gov.uk/publications/

7.7 Data Protection Impact Statement

There are no personal data implications arising from the proposals contained in this report.

7.8 Changes to Scheme of Administration or Scheme of Delegation

NA

8 CONSULTATION

8.1 The Director (Finance & Corporate Governance), the Monitoring Officer/Chief Legal Officer, the Chief Officer Audit and Risk, the Director (People Performance & Change), the Clerk to the Council and Corporate Communications have been consulted on this report and comments received have been incorporated into the final report.

Approved by

John Curry   Director Infrastructure and Environment

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Background Papers: Council 27 January 2022
Previous Minute Reference: NA

Note – You can get this document on tape, in Braille, large print and various computer formats by contacting the address below. Brian Young can also give information on other language translations as well as providing additional copies.

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