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# Consultation: SEStran Regional Transport Strategy

## QUESTIONS

### 1. What is the name of your organisation?

RNIB Scotland

### 2. Please summarise your role within the organisation

This response has been prepared by Dr Catriona Burness (Parliamentary and Policy Manager) and Rachael McMurchy (Policy and Campaigns Officer) of RNIB Scotland’s policy and public affairs team.

### 3. What is your organisational remit and geographical coverage?

The Royal National Institute of Blind People (RNIB) Scotland is the country’s leading charity working with blind and partially sighted people. We support children and adults with sight loss and help them to live full and independent lives, campaigning for their rights.

### 4. How does transport play a role in the day to day activities of the organisation you represent?

As a national organisation supporting blind and partially sighted people, RNIB Scotland recognises that people with a visual impairment rely on public transport more than most groups to access employment, education, and leisure activities. Unless a family member is a driver, private car use is not usually an option for those with sight loss making it necessary to either use public transport or costly taxis to get around independently. It is therefore vital that public transport is reliable and efficient, safe, and secure, and easy to use in order to access work, education, and leisure activities if you have a visual impairment.

### 5. Please describe the key transport & travel issues for your organisation (up to 4 or 5 issues). Please focus these issues on the Sestran region.

* Blind and partially sighted people cite a number of barriers to accessing public transport including accessing information about transport that is in a format that they can read such as Braille or large print. This includes timetables and travel updates.
* There is an ongoing need for staff training to increase understanding the needs of passengers with sight loss.
* The infrastructure around public transport being inaccessible.

### 6. Please describe any key travel and transport improvements across the Sestran region which would be of benefit to your organisation

#### 6.1. Infrastructure

In terms of infrastructure the following features are essential to blind and partially sighted people:

* Embedding accessibility as a central principle.
* Providing more detail on how people with disabilities will be involved to a greater degree in all aspects of the transport network from consultation to being employed in the transport sector.
* Disaggregating data gathered on the rates of usage of different modes of transport by disability.
* Kerbs of at least a 60mm upstand between changes in street use, for example between the pedestrian zone and cycling zone, and between the cycling zone and the car zone, with dropped kerbs at regular intervals.
* Controlled crossings across roads with either an audible or tactile signal.
* Easy access to bus stops guaranteed with a safe pedestrian path to bus stops.

#### 6.2. Bus travel

RNIB Scotland members have given us the feedback below on bus travel:

* It would be helpful to improve the way sound can be heard through the perspex screen, between the bus driver and passenger.
* The pass scanners should be as obvious as possible on entry to a bus and drivers should receive instruction to ensure that they are consistent in their approach to scanning passes for blind passengers.
* Nine out of ten people with sight loss told RNIB they could not see the number of an approaching bus in time to flag it down. And, once on board, it can be difficult to identify the desired stop without an audio prompt.
* Awareness campaigns and materials on buses should actively promote the priority seating and areas for disabled people, including promoting this priority space for use for guide dog users travelling with their dog.
* It is necessary to explore all options for providing audio announcements on buses, including making use of new technologies when they become available. When introducing buses with audio announcements, new routes should be chosen in consultation with passengers with sight loss, prioritising the busiest routes and those which enable people to travel to key locations and facilities, such as hospitals or leisure centres.
* Drivers should receive mandatory disability awareness training to assist passengers with disabilities including those with sight loss.

#### 6.3. Rail and passenger assistance

Feedback from RNIB Scotland members on rail and passenger assistance includes:

* RNIB Scotland members are broadly positive about passenger assistance on trains. Blind and partially sighted passengers generally say that they feel confident using and relying on the passenger assistance service in Scotland and compared it positively to their experiences of cross-border rail travel.
* There have been instances, however, where, although passenger assistance was booked the member of staff failed to at their destination or the request had not been recorded properly. This resulted in missed connections and distress, but in these instances, staff were apologetic and ensured that the cost of a taxi was covered, for example, to the intended destination. Overall, improved communication between the booking service and staff, and between stations would ensure the best assistance.
* A suggested improvement would be ensuring that on arrival at railway stations, you could request assistance directly rather than relying on a member of staff seeing you.

### 7. What do you think are the main transport challenges in the region that the Regional Transport Strategy needs to address?

The two areas below are of particular interest to RNIB Scotland:

#### 7.1. Accessibility

As the SEStran Equalities Duty highlights, barriers to accessible travel can leave disabled people unable or unwilling to travel. While most disabled travellers in Scotland rely on public transport, many experience difficulties when travelling. Problems include poor service frequency, inadequate infrastructure between home and stop or station, and the most reported, difficulties physically accessing the transport.

(Disability Equality Scotland 2017).

#### 7.2. Hate Crime

RNIB Scotland members have reported an increase in instances of hate crime following COVID-19 guidance. Many blind and partially sighted people report challenges social distancing and following new layouts one-way systems when travelling. Further, some individuals require the support of a sighted guide when travelling and have experienced negative reactions to these from members of the public. We would like to see this issue highlighted within staff training.

### 8. Once Covid 19 restrictions are removed; do you expect challenges and issues faced for transport to be similar or will issues change? If so, in what way do you expect changes and how will they affect travel and transport patterns and needs?

RNIB Scotland recently facilitated some discussion with visually impaired members on transport priorities. Blind and partially sighted people raised several concerns regarding the changes introduced throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, including:

* Transport providers and commissioners should recognise that any reductions in service will significantly affect blind and partially sighted people. RNIB Scotland members highlighted to us that individuals who are not blind or partially sighted often have alternatives open to them - for instance, instead of travelling by public transport, they can drive. This has been particularly relevant with the messaging around not using public transport to take part in recreational activities during the period of less strict Coronavirus restrictions. This has disproportionately affected blind and partially sighted people, who often do not have an alternative method of transport available to them, and who might avoid making a legitimate use of public transport for fear of being questioned about their journey. Participants highlighted this issue as especially pertinent given the expectation restrictions may be eased over the coming weeks and months.
* Blind and partially sighted people have also raised concerns about allocation of space should social distancing guidelines remain in place long term. There have been reports of the disabled passenger bay at the front of buses being taped off as part of social distancing measures. This has cut off an accessible and familiar seating area for blind and partially sighted people and made reaching a seat unexpectedly much more complicated.
* Further concerns have been raised about rural bus services, which are often a lifeline for communities and especially for those who cannot access other forms of transport. Maintaining these services is essential in the medium to long term.
* The importance of communication cannot be underestimated. A blind or partially sighted person relies on verbal communication for vital information and to help orientate themselves getting on the bus. It is important that all staff have adequate training to support blind and partially sighted travellers. For instance, bus drivers should not pull away from a bus stop until passengers are seated. Audio announcements can enable all passengers to get off at the right stop.
* Some participants access bus timetable information through apps, and spoke positively about the Traveline and Scottalk apps, although the latter is not available on Android and so not available to all. During COVID, some travel apps have featured more information and imagery, and this has made them inaccessible for blind and partially sighted people. Consideration should be given to app accessibility as they can be very useful for getting public transport information. Participants highlighted the desirability of having one app (available on both Android and ios) which would contain all the information needed to travel with ease, and to avoid the need to use different apps for different purposes, and which could have differing levels of accessibility. The cumbersome nature of trying to access timetable and bus stop information for a connecting journey, which could mean missing connections, was also raised as an issue.
* More audio and visual information at bus stops and on-board buses would be warmly welcomed and improve accessibility for blind and partially sighted people. This was raised by all participants as being particularly beneficial, avoiding the need to rely on drivers to inform them they had reached their stop or apps which can be cumbersome and rely on access to, and confidence in using, technology.
* In terms of rail travel, station accessibility remains an ongoing concern for many. Individuals report traveling to or from a nearby station in the knowledge it was more accessible and easier to navigate to other locations, even more so than a station closer to home.
* Given the financial impact of COVID-19 on transport services there are growing concerns around the long-term future of concessionary travel schemes in Scotland and calls for a national, statutory scheme.
* Regarding the Blue Badge scheme, complications have arisen through disabled parking bays being converted for other uses (i.e. commercial loading bays) without this information being shared with Blue Badge holders and taxi drivers. There have also been suggestions that signage of parking restrictions should be improved and made clearer, particularly where there is a change in restriction. Overall, participants who have a Blue Badge were overwhelmingly positive about it and would wish to see more action on tackling their misuse.
* The full impact of changes made under the Spaces for People Scheme is unlikely to be established until travel restrictions ease further. Feedback to date indicates that due to current government guidelines many people are not currently frequenting the areas where significant changes have been made.

### 9. Do you have any other comments around transport or travel in the Sestran region, on behalf of your organisation?

We do not have any other comments.

**Please complete the survey before 19th April. Thank you for your time and assistance. On behalf of SEStran, we will keep you informed of the subsequent consultative stages of the developing RTS.**

**If you have any further questions or comments, please contact our engagement team on** [**SEStranRTSEnquiries@stantec.com**](mailto:SEStranRTSEnquiries@stantec.com)**.**

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