

DELIVERING THE OPPORTUNITY

Timber transport conference 2007

Report by Jamie Farquhar, ConFor's director Scotland.

Over 100 delegates came to the annual timber transport conference and field trip last month, organised for the Timber Transport Forum (TTF) by **ConFor**.

Some of the latest innovative tools were on view during the field trip to Eskdalemuir. These included central tyre inflation demonstrated on a rig belonging to **Gordon Mackenzie** from Sutherland; a low ground pressure 25 tonne trailer belonging to **JST Services** and in use by Tilhill at Eskdalemuir; and a demonstration of the quick installation and retrieval of temporary trackway by **Eve Trakway**. We were shown the road monitoring station which is part of the Roads under Timber Transport project (RUTT) headed up by **Wave Tyrell** of Forestry Civil Engineering, consisting of a percostation, and a road deformation measuring system. **Tim Liddon** of UPM-Tilhill gave an overview of the proposed project, presently the subject of an application to the Scottish Strategic Timber Transport Fund, whereby the community of Eskdalemuir will be by-passed with a dedicated timber haul route.

At Steven's Croft, Lockerbie, we saw EoN's new wood-fired 44MW power station, still in construction and due for firing up this autumn. Here **Richard Palmer** of A W Jenkinson Forest Products (contracted to supply the 400,000 tonnes per annum of biomass for the plant) described the chipping and woodfuel handling system in the adjacent "big shed" to deliver woodchip at about 50% moisture content by overhead conveyor to the power station building.

Simon Oldham of Scottish Woodlands, gave a short presentation on the specialist harvesting, chipping and haulage equipment being used by Forest Energy UK, a partnership between Scottish Woodlands, Euroforest and Aitchesse to harvest more biomass in the form of poles, tops and brash, and which has the potential to increase tonnage output from stands by 20%.

Day 2 saw us at St Martin's College, Carlisle, where delegates were welcomed by **Alastair Speedie**, chair of the TTF and group manager of strategic planning and transportation for Dumfries & Galloway Council.

David Crichton, chief executive of ConFor, gave the keynote address *Timber Transport: at the heart of a successful industry*. He encouraged innovation in the supply chain, and timber transport in particular, to meet the challenges of increasing output from our forests in a coming era of better overall returns, offset by problems of increasing haulage costs through high fuel costs, driver shortages and intensifying regulations for work time and continuous professional development.

Neil Harrison of Northwoods gave an upbeat paper on the *transport options to deal with an expanding woodfuel market*, citing examples of work being done in northeast England, and how local supply chains are developing to

cope with the increased demand from existing woodlands to service new woodfuel installations in the cities.

Claire Glaister of Rural Development Initiatives then explained her company's project work for the Grampian Regional Timber Transport Group on *timber flow mapping*. This takes forward the initial harvesting forecast data-gathering work done in the 1990s by Timber Growers Association, to produce updated forecasts of timber flows from our forests. This will be used by regional TT groups to update Agreed Routes Maps, and inform local roads authorities of potential demands on the infrastructure.

Derek Nelson of Forestry Commission Scotland then gave an update on the *Scottish Strategic Timber Transport Scheme*, funded (£13m) by Scottish Executive for projects approved by March 2008. Successful industry lobbying led by ConFor has seen the original time limit for actual spending on approved projects extended by one year.

Neil Syme of Victa Railfreight explained the current status of rail operators, able and willing to engage with rail transport of timber, and outlined some of the challenges his industry faces with having to move large volumes of relatively low value cargo, often at less than 'full train volumes'.

Peter van Velzen of Forestry Commission Wales described the work being done to extend normal *SatNav for forest road use*.

Frank MacCulloch, Forestry Commission area civil engineer, Scotland, gave a presentation to complement the previous day's demonstration of central tyre inflation, and showed how successful this is proving on the poor roads of central Sutherland, enough in fact to allow continuing extraction during the winter.

Geoff Clarke, from the Department of Transport's Best Freight Practice programme, complimented the industry on its efforts to secure *Operational Efficiency*, and encouraged continuing efforts to reduce fuel consumption, maximise vehicle utilisation and reduce the environmental impact of CO₂ emissions.

Tim Liddon of UPM-Tilhill gave a thought-provoking talk on *joined-up timber haulage*. He advocated analysis of haulage issues on a whole forest basis, suggesting civil engineering cannot always provide a panacea, but rather that the best solutions will come through co-operation by neighbouring managers throughout the supply chain, using every and different tools at their disposal.

James Graham of SAOS complemented Tim's talk by encouraging the industry to adopt *collaborative chains*, and how, by better understanding of each organisation's operational costs and income expectations in the chain, will come bigger overall efficiency, and better profits for all.

Barry Gardiner of Forest Research explained the work of *EFORWOOD*. This EU project is developing a quantitative decision-making support tool for

assessing the sustainability of the wood chain, and how it is presently being tested in Craik Forest. Geographic information systems (GIS) enables better financial and carbon budgeting for forest management using different transport options.

Finally, **Finlay McAllister**, Forestry Commission Technical Development, explained how *Timber miles* may be used by Defra as an indicator in sustainable development to improve supply logistics.

Conclusion

With so much happening in timber transport, it was impossible for Alastair Speedie to summarise the two days. We left realising there are many opportunities for everyone in the supply chain to improve efficiency, and therefore cut costs. Timber transport may be referred to as the *Achilles Heel* of the supply chain, but by better understanding of the issues, we can continue to deliver the opportunities that lie ahead.

Jamie Farquhar
Director Scotland, ConFor
March 2007.