

North East England Timber Transport Group

Meeting held at the Offices of Egger (UK) Limited, Hexham
at 9.00 a.m. on Friday, 13th December, 2013

Present:

John Paterson, Chairman (JP)	Director, Egger Forestry Products Limited
Crispin Thorn (CT)	Area Director, Forestry Commission
David Sulman (DS)	Executive Director, United Kingdom Forest Products Association
Roland Stiven (RS)	Timber Transport Forum Project Officer
Ruth Bendell (RB)	Acting Head of Sustainable Transport, Northumberland County Council
Dick Phillips (DP)	Network Manager, Northumberland County Council
Andrew Douglas (AD)	TTRO Officer, Northumberland County Council
David Woodhouse (DW)	Harvesting and Marketing Manager, Forest Enterprise
Andrew Harper (AH)	Transport Planning Officer, Cumbria County Council and Secretary of the Cumbria Timber Transport Group
Hazel Newman, Secretary (HN)	Wood Purchasing Manager, Egger (UK) Limited

No.

Action

1. Chairman, John Paterson, welcomed everyone to the meeting, and briefly outlined the Agenda.

2. Experiences of Other Timber Transport Groups

Cumbria: Andrew Harper outlined the formation of the Cumbria Timber Transport Group three years ago, following an approach to the Council from Neil Dyson, previous Timber Transport Project Officer for Dumfries and Galloway. From the beginning it had been felt important that the Group's Chairman should come from the forest industry, and Richard Scott, of BSW Timber (Carlisle) had subsequently been appointed, with the Council providing administrative support, in the form of Andrew as Secretary to the Group.

The first objective of the Group had been to establish an Agreed Routes Map along the lines of those adopted in Scotland. This had been a comprehensive process, involving consultation with elected members, the Highways team and members of the public. Subsequent experiences had been positive, with the main benefit being clear cooperation between the Council and the industry, resulting in information sharing which in turn has had a positive effect on highways maintenance arising from better planning. Lines of communication were established with the industry enabling negotiation of operating conditions with operators and hauliers, from which Members took comfort. Operators felling timber in 6 months time routinely discuss with the Council which will be best extraction route to use. Where necessary traffic management plans can be put in place regarding vehicle movement, i.e. number of vehicles, time of movement etc., and complaints from members of the public can be addressed more easily, with quicker resolution of issues

However, AH made the point that the Timber Transport Group does not become directly involved in specific issues of carriageway damage. The Group will provide contact details, act as 'go between' and mediate if necessary, but is not involved in the resulting decision making process. In order to maintain a good working relationship between the parties involved, the TTG will assist where possible, but will leave it to the Highways Department and forest contractors/timber hauliers to agree a resolution between them.

No.**Action**

North Yorkshire: Crispin Thorn related how, after number of false starts, the North Yorkshire Timber Freight Quality Partnership had developed. In the beginning there had been a lack of trust between the sector and Local Authority, the situation being exacerbated by staff changes in the LA which had hindered progress. However, following assistance from the Forestry Commission Regional Advisory Committee and contributions from the GB Timber Transport Forum, together with the appointment of an independent Chair, the Group had reformed and successfully achieved partnership working. Agreed routes had been put out to public consultation which had included presentation to parish councils, and there was a general acceptance of the initiative. The Agreed Routes Map is now 'owned' and respected by the forestry sector and the Local Authority, who work in genuine partnership with the common aims of protecting the road network and supporting the rural economy. The NYTFQP is currently engaging with the Local Enterprise Partnership in an attempt to secure funds.

Roland Stiven commented that there were now 10 regional groups in Scotland and England, all of which had gone through similar stages, the most important of which had been the process of defining agreed routes. This process was valuable in bringing people together and establishing dialogue and routes of communication. There are differences between how individual groups view restrictions and limitations, and where this has happened it is important that boundary issues are agreed.

Dick Phillips reported that internal issues within the Council had now been resolved and the importance of moving the work of the Group forward was recognised at the highest level with the involvement of Barry Rowland. The Council had consulted with Members and Parish Councils regarding the principle of agreed routes and were ready to progress collaboration with the group.

DP asked AH how much administration the Group required. AH stated that the mapping and consultation exercise required the most input. There were six highway teams in Cumbria, and members of the Group met with each team and amended the map as required. However, the Group now met only quarterly, and if there was not too much to discuss this was extended to six months. As secretary to the Group he dealt with Member enquiries, but the Chairman, Richard Scott, would play a large part in bringing parties together and resolving issues. Traffic management plans played a large part on sensitive routes, as well as conditions imposed regarding the type of vehicle used. The Council GIS department undertook any changes to the map required. AH emphasised that just because a route is categorised as 'agreed', this does not mean the Council relinquishes any right to redress in the event of irresponsible use leading to damage.

3. Strategies to Progress the North East England Group

Ruth Bendell stated that the immediate objective was re-engagement with the wider Group, and the Agreed Routes Working Group should be reconvened to complete categorisation of routes. There had been changes in personnel at NCC, and there would be future involvement in the Group by Louise Hayward, Rural Highways Manager, and Dale Rumney, Highways Asset and Pavement Manager. She pointed out that all Council managers were under pressure to meet reduced budgets.

Crispin Thorn referred to the meeting held in August at the Forestry Commission offices at Kielder, in which Barry Rowland and RB had expressed commitment to taking the Group forward. It was important that the maps were reviewed constructively and the potential impact of heavy traffic on vulnerable roads managed.

No.**Action****4. Timber Transport within the Context of the Wider Economy**

CT circulated a paper to the meeting which described the Northern England Forestry Sector Growth Plan – 'A Partnership for Economic Growth'. In recognition of the potential for the forestry and forest products sector to be a driver for economic growth and employment, this initiative was a partnership between a range of organisations from both the private and public sector. One of the key objectives of the initiative was to secure funding and target investment to further the growth of the sector. The Growth Plan was a means of engaging with Local Enterprise Partnerships and identifying opportunities for development of the industry to the economic, social and environmental benefit of the region. Investment in road infrastructure, both public and in-forest was high on the agenda, and adoption of 'agreed routes' would provide a mechanism to assist the Local Authority to manage the roads network to mutual benefit.

A draft of the Forestry Sector Growth Plan would be produced in January, followed by the more detailed report expected to be published in March 2014. The Growth Plan will be presented to LEP's in Cumbria, Northumberland, County Durham and North Yorkshire, with a view to raising the profile of the sector and being instrumental in accessing funds to enable the continued development of the sector. Ruth Bendell confirmed that capital funding was now allocated through LEP's, and acknowledged the importance of the forest industry to the region. Cameron Scott, Local Growth Team Manager (NCC) was a key contact.

David Sulman described the support given to timber transport by the Scottish government via the Strategic Timber Transport Fund, which enables timber transport groups to apply for project funding with particular emphasis on community benefits and moves towards modal shift. However, in England the Secretary of State, while acknowledging the success of the Scottish initiative, was in favour of the forest industry working in partnership with LEP's.

5. Transport Issues

The Chairman pointed out the need for discussion on what the Group is and is not. He agreed with the Cumbrian model, where members of the Group can supply contact details or help identify the parties involved, but would not get involved in individual issues. Crispin Thorn suggested that a memorandum of understanding be signed by Group members, agreeing the course of action in specific instances. He pointed out that there was a role for Forest Enterprise in promotion of the Agreed routes whereby applicants for felling licenses would be referred to the map, who would then be able to plan/consult on extraction routes

JP

6. Future Funding

Ruth Bendell outlined the current position where the local transport fund was agreed on an annual basis, the bulk of which was spent on highway maintenance, and which had been cut by 30% in recent years. A rough split was £2-3m on improvements, £4-5m on bridges and structures and approximately £10m on carriageways and footpaths. The fund did not take into account the condition of the network, and a substantial increase was required to maintain the status quo. Once 'agreed routes' are adopted, they will feed into prioritisation of maintenance.

Roland Stiven confirmed that the Timber Transport Forum had written to Dan Rogerson, Government Minister for Forestry in England, proposing that a timber transport fund be established in England. The Forum had received a reply encouraging timber transport groups to work with the Local Enterprise Partnerships and local authorities. Forum Chairman, Alistair Speedie, was still of the opinion that a separate fund was required and would continue to press for this. The Minister had also confirmed that £6 billion had been made available to local highways authorities in England over the next six years. Ruth Bendell commented that she would respond to this, and RS offered to contact RB prior to the Forum again writing to the Minister.

RS

<u>No.</u>	<u>Action</u>
Discussion took place regarding the identification of timber flows, and future timber movements in the county. JP pointed out that once the map was established it would then be possible to gather such information, but while information was currently available on the Government owned forest, the private sector was fragmented and information was not always available. Both Crispin Thorn and Andrew Harper agreed that one of the biggest benefits of the Groups and maps established was engagement, and subsequently information, from the private sector. The establishment of agreed routes had not impacted directly on funding, since timber transport accounted for a relatively small percentage of road use.	
7. Framework for Future Meetings	
It was agreed that meetings of the Timber Transport Group should continue to be held on a quarterly basis, once progress had been made with the Agreed Routes Map for the county.	
Northumberland County Council to look into providing facilities for the meetings, as well as secretarial assistance for the Group. Ruth Bendell agreed that the NCC GIS team could also take over maintenance of the map in future.	RB/DP
Consideration would be given to inviting Members to future meetings. (Previous meetings had been attended by local Councillor, John Riddle, and Councillor Anthony Murray, from the Wooler constituency). It was the experience of other Groups that rural Councillors were keen to work with them and be involved in constituency timber transport issues.	RB/DP
In order to progress the Agreed Routes Map, a meeting of the Agreed Routes Working Group would be held immediately after this meeting, to make amendments to the original map presented to NCC. Another meeting of the sub-group would then be held in the first week of February to complete the map, followed by a meeting around the third week in February with Dick Phillips and members of the Highways Department to discuss the amended map. HN to arrange.	HN
8. Date of Next Meeting: The date of the next meeting of the full Timber Transport Group to be arranged once the Agreed Routes Map is finalised.	