

North East England Timber Transport Group

**Meeting held at the Offices of Egger (UK) Limited, Hexham
At 1.30 p.m. on Wednesday, 10th December, 2014**

Present:

John Paterson, Chairman (JP)	Egger Forestry Products Limited
Athole McKillop (AMcK)	Land Factor
David Sulman (DS)	United Kingdom Forest Products Association
Ruth Bendell (RB)	Infrastructure Manager, Northumberland CC
Andrew Douglas (AD)	Timber Transport Liaison Officer, Northumberland CC
Dale Rumney (DR)	Highways Strategy Officer, Northumberland CC
Max McLaughlan (MMc)	Forest Enterprise, Kielder
Robert Mayhew (RM)	Northumberland National Parks Authority
Roland Stiven (RS)	Timber Transport Forum
Gary Leach (GL)	Durham County Council
David Robson (DR)	Egger Forestry Management
George Nicholson (GN)	A & J Scott Limited
Robert Scott (RSc)	SGS Timber Transport
Michael Hall (MH)	Scottish Woodlands Limited
James England (JE)	Dumfries & Galloway Council (South of Scotland Timber Transport Officer)
Tim Smalley (TS)	Bedmax
Tony Robinson (TR)	Bedmax
Tom Coates (TC)	Egger Forestry Harvesting
Cameron Smith (CS)	Euroforest Limited
Martin Craig (MC)	UPM Tilhill
Hazel Newman (HN), Secretary	Egger (UK) Limited

Apologies:

Cameron Scott, NCC; Keith Haywood, Taylormade Timber; Andrew Harper, CCC; Jon Bates, Forestry Commission; Doug Howieson, FE Kielder; Councillor J. Riddle, NCC; Ian Robinson, Scottish Woodlands Ltd.; Crispin Thorn, Forestry Commission; Richard Pow, Forestry Commission; Mike Yerbury, Egger Forestry; Andrew Kitching, Rural Development Initiative

No.

Action

1. Chairman, John Paterson, welcomed everyone to the meeting and noted apologies.
2. **Minutes of the Last Meeting**
The Chairman read out a letter received from Alistair Speedie, Chairman of the Timber Transport Forum, in which Mr. Speedie congratulated the Group on the successful publication of the Agreed Routes Map, and its launch on 18th September 2014.

As agreed at the last meeting, Andrew Douglas had passed on an invitation to Northumbria Police for a representative to attend future meetings. After they initially expressed interest, he had heard nothing further from the person he spoke to – AD to repeat the invitation to the next meeting.

The minutes were then approved as a true record.

AD

3. Roots to Prosperity

David Sulman provided an update on the Roots to Prosperity initiative, which had been launched in August, as a means of raising the profile of the forest sector and associated economic growth potential.

Momentum was being maintained, with a steering group meeting scheduled in the next couple of weeks when action points would be prioritised, one of which would be to look at how much land is available in the North East for forest purposes. Timber transport and rural infrastructure is key to the initiative, and this Group would play a role in taking issues forward. Local MEP Paul Brannen had expressed interest in Roots to Prosperity and was keen to learn more about the forestry sector.

4. Timber Transport Forum Update

Although unable to attend the meeting, Roland Stiven had provided an update on recent Forum activities.

FISA - The Forest Industry Safety Accord Working Group on Timber Haulage were in the process of writing a driver manual for timber hauliers on the subject of safety when working on forest sites, as well as a FISA safety guide leaflet.

Timber Transport Forum Website – the website was currently being updated, and Groups would be requested for input into the content of their own individual pages

Agreed Routes Map Website – The current contract with GAIST will continue to March 2016, at a cost of £3,500 for the year 2015/16, with each Group being requested for a contribution of £350.

Shared Access on Forest Roads – the Forum website now has the revised shared access protocol available to download. This covers access to FC roads and now includes the option of access leases.

Exit Point Data – Data collected for Scotland is being processed and developed into a GIS mapping tool. This should be completed and available to groups in March 2015. Local authorities will be able to use this data in order to assess road conditions and prioritise maintenance budgets.

National Forest Inventory by Local Authority – the Forum had requested that 25 year timber production forecasts were produced at Local Authority level in Scotland. The Forestry Commission has provided this data for council areas covered by Agreed Routes Maps in Scotland, and it should be possible to do the same for Northumberland.

Access onto the Public Road – there was ongoing discussion regarding the technical roading standards expected where forest roads exit onto the public road, and whether formal good practice should be prepared.

Good Practice – The Forum has hard copies of the Road Haulage of Round Timber Code of Practice and Managing Timber Transport Good Practice Guide. Further copies of 'Tread Softly' are being printed. All publications can be downloaded.

5. North East England Agreed Routes Map Update

Andrew Douglas stated that since the launch of the ARM in September, it had been well publicised and Councillors and members of the public were becoming increasingly aware of it. AD had been requested to attend parish council meetings to answer questions regarding the map, and inevitably there had been some complaints from people who 'didn't want timber traffic coming past their house'. AD had also received some reports of timber hauliers using excluded routes, although one such report proved to be a Christmas tree being delivered to the market place in Hexham.

Action

The meeting went onto discuss some roads where NCC had received complaints about timber traffic, and whether the status of these particular routes should be downgraded from 'agreed' to 'consultation' routes.

Belford PCC had requested that the U34 at Detchant be downgraded from an agreed route. If nearby woodlands were harvested the resulting timber traffic would add to an already busy road, since this route was an access road to the Bedmax shavings plant. However, it was agreed that access to Bedmax should not be in question, and since harvesting and extraction had already taken place in the last few years with no issues of note, this route should remain 'agreed'.

Crookham, A697 – members of the local community had requested that timber traffic should not go through the village. However, in order to avoid the village, HGV's would need to use a bad junction onto the A697.

It was agreed that these two cases were more community, rather than highway, issues and RB suggested that such cases should be vetted by NCC before being brought to the Group.

RB/AD

6. Highway Issues in Northumberland

Dipton Wood (South of Corbridge) – Athole McKillop had reported that locals had contacted him recently regarding large volumes of timber being stacked/loaded at roadside at Dipton Wood. He believed that the matter had been reported to the Police on several occasions, who had warned offenders.

This was a narrow road and timber was being stacked on the verge, in some cases access to the woodlands had also been created from the road. It was suggested that this woodland had been sold by the company 'Woodlands.co.uk' in small lots (3 acres). New owners were probably unaware of the legal obligation to apply for a felling licence, and had also created these unauthorised access points to the woodland. It was agreed this was probably more of a planning issue and down to area inspectors to enforce. NCC will also contact Woodlands.co.uk and request that they make new owners aware of their legal obligations.

RB/AD

It was pointed out that the Council have the powers to remove timber from the verge or apply a penalty.

It was agreed that the need to obtain permission to stack and load timber on Council roads should be publicised. Ruth Bendell suggested that the Council should write a policy, setting out the procedure for obtaining a permit from the Council to carry out loading/unloading on the public highway. One important requirement would be the placement of adequate signage. AD pointed out that Council permission was also required to unload off a Council road into a field, in the case of one-off firewood deliveries. RB stated that there may be an administration charge levied for the issue of such permits but these would be nominal. NCC would draft a procedure and bring back to the Group.

RB/AD

7. Northumberland Timber Transport Survey

Based on the model used in the Scottish Timber Transport Survey, NCC were considering undertaking a survey to identify woodlands/owners and future harvesting activity/production volumes. Using mapping software, it was hoped to plot access/exit points, and an estimate of potential timber transport volumes. This could then be overlaid onto the Agreed Routes Map. However, James England commented that care should be taken in what was accessible by the general public.

Action

Discussion took place as to how woodland owners could be encouraged to contribute to the survey. It was acknowledged that small blocks of woodland sometimes cause the most issues.

Information obtained from such a survey could be fed into road feasibility studies, enabling the Council to invest in infrastructure in the most cost effective way. This was already happening in the case of the B6320 and C200, where a higher percentage of maintenance funding had been allocated. In the case of the C205 (Stonehaugh loop) repairs had recently cost £100,000 to bring the road back to an acceptable standard, to enable the continued use of this key timber transport route.

8. Highways in County Durham

Gary Leach told the meeting that the Agreed Routes Map now had tacit approval from DCC. He pointed out that there had been few timber transport problems in the county. In a lot of cases roads were used to transport timber from larger forests outside of the county to sawmills within Durham. The ARM had been made available to highways inspectors in Durham, and so far there had been no issues. GL will report any issues arising back to the Timber Transport Group.

GL reported that, although it was unlikely to affect timber traffic, next year there will be major roadwork's carried out on the Milburngate Bridge in the centre of Durham.

The Chairman thanked GL for his contribution towards the adoption of the Agreed Routes Map in Durham, which enabled the map to be completed for North East England.

9. Any Other Business

- JE confirmed that the Agreed Routes Map had now been updated on the Forum website.
- It was suggested that the Group become more involved in strategic planning and create a sub-group to discuss winter working, where gritting routes and lines of communications could be identified. Although a little late to start this winter, this should be an Agenda item in the latter half of next year. It was agreed there should be a correlation between agreed routes and those gritted.

AD

GL confirmed that gritting routes were available on the DCC website.

10. Change of Group Officers

John Paterson stated that after over three years as Chairman of the Group, and now that the Agreed Routes Map had been adopted, he had indicated his wish to step down from the position at the last meeting. Although Athole McKillop had recently become Chairman of CONFOR, he had also agreed to accept the role of Chairman of the Timber Transport Group. Andrew Douglas agreed to take over the role of Secretary to the Group from Hazel Newman.

Mr. McKillop thanked JP for his hard work over the past three years and his achievement in the implementation of the Agreed Routes Map. He stated that it was important that the momentum was not lost, and that the Group continued to address issues as they arose. JP stated that the Conference Room at Egger would continue to be available as a venue for future meetings if required.

- 11. Date of the Next Meeting:** The next meeting will be held at 13:30 p.m. on Tuesday, 14th April, 2015. **Please note that the venue for this meeting will be the offices of Northumberland County Council at Morpeth. Directions will be forwarded with the Agenda.**