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## **Response from the Timber Transport Forum to the Consultation on the Long Term Role of the Public Forest Estate in England.**

The Timber Transport Forum was established in February 2000 to provide a mechanism for sharing ideas and best practice on timber haulage issues. A network of nine Regional Timber Transport Groups - seven in Scotland and one each in England and Wales, enable regionally-specific operational solutions to be found through collaboration between Local Authorities and the forest industry.

The consultation document describes the role of the public forest estate in providing timber for the sawmilling and wood using industries, and the contribution of these industries to rural employment and investment. The Timber Transport Forum supports the important role the Public Forest Estate has in supporting these industries through timber production. The consultation paper also specifically recognises the need for investment and innovation in wood supply chains. Timber haulage is a vital component in the wood supply chain, delivering the roundwood from the forest to the processing industries and should therefore been seen as a key component of delivering sustainable woodland management.

In some areas, however, the level of heavy goods vehicle traffic that arises from timber transport can damage weak rural roads that were not designed to the standards of modern trunk roads. Damage to roads impacts on local communities and results in costly ongoing road repairs for Local Authorities. Poor road infrastructure also reduces the efficiency of timber haulage in terms of costs to industry and energy use.

Regional Timber Transport Groups have demonstrated the potential of collaboration between councils, communities and the industry to address local road issues, whilst at the same time solving timber transport problems and thereby maintaining sustainable forest management in rural areas.

By agreeing appropriate timber haulage routes the Regional Timber Transport Groups have reduced the social and environmental impact of lorry traffic and enabled prioritised investment in the routes which give the greatest local, social and environmental benefits. Other measures to improve the efficiency of timber transport are also promoted, including a shift to other modes of transport.

Collaboration in Scotland has been supported by the Strategic Timber Transport Fund which has helped to bring forward infrastructure investment and establish good working relations between the various public and private sector partners. It has been particularly effective in building better understanding and relationships between local roads authorities and the forest industry.

The consultation describes the potential of forests to contribute to the climate change agenda, in particular the role of productive forests to sequester CO<sub>2</sub> in harvested wood products. Timber haulage is part of the overall carbon equation and strategic investment in transport infrastructure is vital if operational efficiency is to be maintained and improved.

It should be noted of course that investment in transport infrastructure in rural areas will benefit all aspects of the rural economy, including forest management.

**The Timber Transport Forum therefore recommends that the approaches that have been developed through the work of the Forum are promoted in the plan document and used to support the continuing role of the Public Forest Estate in encouraging productive forest management.**

More detail of the work of the forum can be found on the website [www.timbertransportforum.org.uk](http://www.timbertransportforum.org.uk). The Forum would be happy to provide further information on the subject as the role of the public forest estate is developed.

Yours sincerely

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