

TimberTransportForum

delivering solutions for a growing UK harvest

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**A Response by the Timber Transport Forum
to
The Department for Transport**

Consultation on the possibility of allowing an increase in the length of articulated lorries (DFT-2011-06)

The Timber Transport Forum is a voluntary partnership “working in partnership with community representatives and the forest industry to promote a vibrant and sustainable timber transport sector and to secure social and environmental benefits.” Members comprise representatives from ten regional timber transport groups from across Scotland, N. England and Wales, the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities, the forest industries (Confederation of Forest Industries and UK Forest Products Association), Forestry Commission England, Scotland, Wales, Welsh Government, Welsh Regional Transport Consortia, Rail Freight Group, Road Haulage Association, Scottish Enterprise, Scottish Government, and the Society for Chief Officers of Transportation in Scotland.

More details can be found at www.timbertransportforum.org.uk

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Summary

In responding to the consultation on longer articulated lorries the Forum would highlight the following:

1. Longer artics could improve efficiency of road haulage of kiln dried sawn timber from sawmills in some parts of Britain.
2. Longer artics may improve efficiency of proposed intermodal haulage (by rail and road) of sawn timber and possibly roundwood (logs). However there remain a variety of policy and infrastructure obstacles to the expansion of intermodal haulage within Britain which will require attention if the benefits of longer lorries to intermodal haulage are to become widespread.
3. There may be a role for longer, higher volume lorries in efficiently transporting sawmill co-products and chipped wood biomass.
4. Longer artics would be unlikely to benefit roundwood (log) haulage as loads are generally limited by weight.

The road haulage of roundwood usually commences on the minor road network in the uplands which can already be challenging for LGVs. In most cases the industry will determine suitable lorry configurations for particular haul routes. However it is possible that longer artics will gradually become the haulage industry standard vehicle. This may further highlight the limitations of our rural road infrastructure (both public and private forest roads) and exacerbate the impact of LGV traffic on minor roads and rural communities .
5. The impact assessment that supports the consultation should be extended to include 'rural proofing'. Longer semis may:
 - Increase damage to the fabric of the minor road network that serves rural areas
 - Increase the concerns of rural residents and the traffic impacts on rural communities
6. The impact assessment should also reconsider the assumption that because gross vehicle weight remains unchanged there would be no impact on infrastructure. Many minor roads are limited by their narrowness and geometry where longer articulated vehicles are likely to increase damage to road edges, verges, drains, walls, bridges and road surfaces. To counter this, any move towards longer semis should be accompanied by resources to improve the rural road network.

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Introduction

The Timber Transport Forum promotes best practice ¹ in the transport of roundwood from British forests to the timber processors throughout UK.

The main issue for timber haulage in Britain is the limited capacity of the rural road infrastructure to carry Large Goods Vehicles. Already around 350,000 lorry loads of logs are being moved each year, from the 1.5 million hectares of planted forests distributed throughout upland Britain. The timber lorries are starting their journey on the minor rural road network managed by the local authorities. In some parts of Britain the tonnage is set to increase substantially in the coming years as forests planted in the 1980s come to maturity.

Moving roundwood

Roundwood logs are a primary product with a relatively low value to weight ratio and need to be transported efficiently if the supply chain is to be cost effective. Nearly all roundwood is transported on 44 tonne lorries, mostly on 6-axle artics but also on drawbar combinations which have a narrower swept path when cornering and can more easily manoeuvre on the narrow twisting roads in the uplands.

In most cases timber lorries are limited by mass, rather than volume, carrying a 25-27 tonne load of green logs. Timber that is drier, having been stacked for a time, is lighter and loads can sometimes be limited by trailer volume.

Timber hauliers are investing in bespoke vehicles – such as drawbar combinations with skeletal trailers, mounted loading devices, on board weighing devices, wider tyres, strengthened chassis, improved suspension and tyre pressure control systems. These high spec timber lorries are highly suited to shorter return hauls from forest to mill but they are substantially more expensive than standard artics.

In Sweden the En Trave Til² project is trialling extended drawbar combinations up to 30m long and with a payload of 66 tonnes are being trialled to increase the efficiency of timber haulage.

Bespoke timber lorries cannot carry most other goods. In order to reduce empty running on longer trips, hauliers often run flatbed artics that can combine deliveries of logs to sawmills with the dispatch of sawn timber or other goods as a return load.

Timber lorries spend a proportion of their journeys on unsealed forest roads, where aerodynamic bodywork is easily damaged and usually inappropriate.

Road infrastructure

Much of the work of the Forum and of the regional timber transport groups around the country focuses on identifying the most suitable routes for timber haulage; roads that can best cope with the weight and length of large goods vehicles. Many rural roads were adopted by the councils and are largely un-engineered by modern standards. In some cases timber haulage is working close to the limits of a road's capacity and traffic management is required to minimise the impact of the haulage on the fabric of the road. This may involve limiting the speed or frequency of vehicles, requiring the use of tyre pressure control systems to reduce tyre contact pressures and thus damage, or avoiding

¹ http://www.timbertransportforum.org.uk/Upload/Documents/22_BestPracticeGuideFinal.pdf

² <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P4JSO9TKvJO>

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times when the roads are wetter or subject to thawing frost. Local authorities are also active in maintaining and improving regular timber haul routes, creating passing places on single track roads, straightening tight corners and widening and strengthening road edges. Inevitably the resources available to local authorities for this kind of work on minor roads limit what can be achieved. In Scotland, the Scottish Government provides a Strategic Timber Transport Fund to co-finance infrastructure improvement projects to reduce the social and environmental impacts of timber haulage. To date no such funding has been made available in England and Wales.

Rural communities in the villages and small towns served by minor roads also have concerns about large goods vehicle traffic. With limited passing places on single tracked roads or overtaking opportunities on wider roads, with tight corners, roads without pedestrian pavements, houses built immediately adjacent to public roads and narrow high streets, the living environment in rural Britain is already impacted upon by large goods vehicle traffic. Timber transporters and other rural hauliers are having to 'manage' community concerns regarding lorry traffic and often this restricts efficient haulage.

In the forests themselves, forest owners and growers are building in-forest haul roads to bring the harvested logs from our planted forests to the public road. These are unsealed roads, often developed from earlier tracks used for planting or management. In recent years there has been considerable investment in building timber haul roads to a specification designed to suit existing LGV traffic. However the ground conditions and terrain do limit what can be achieved at reasonable cost. The swept path of an elongated body articulated LGV may be wider than is currently allowed for in forest road design and some stretches of road together with turning areas, passing places and loading areas may require upgrading.

Carbon budgets

Timber growing, harvesting, processing and use are part of a supply chain that contributes to formally reducing the country's carbon emissions, sequestering carbon in trees and wood and replacing more energy intensive materials in construction. To maintain this low cost and reliable emissions reduction approach, the timber industry needs transport vehicles that can efficiently use the infrastructure available and investment in improving the public road network. The transport of wood chips in high volume 'walking floor' trailers may benefit from the introduction of longer articulated lorries. Longer lorries may also make the haulage of sawn and dried timber more efficient where road infrastructure is not limiting.

Intermodal haulage

The forest industry is at the forefront of intermodal haulage promoting transport by coastal shipping loaded directly from floating piers in remote coastal areas. Haulage by rail is also being progressed for both roundwood and sawn timber. One approach being considered for roundwood is the use of flatrack intermodal containers which can be lifted from trains onto lorries for onward delivery to mills. Longer articulated lorries may contribute to improving efficiency in such systems. However intermodal transport is severely restricted by the infrastructure at rural harbours and railheads which dates from an earlier era and from the limited number of rail linked processing sites. The Timber Transport Forum submitted a response³ to a Scottish Government consultation on obstacles to the development of rail freight. These obstacles will require attention if the benefits of longer articulated lorries to intermodal haulage are to become widespread.

³ http://www.transportscotland.gov.uk/files/documents/rail/Rail_Freight_Policy_-_Consultation_Response_-_Publication_-_rfp09p_-_Timber_Transport_Forum.pdf