

# TimberTransportForum

delivering solutions for a growing UK harvest

**A Submission by the Timber Transport Forum  
to**

The Woodland Expansion Advisory Group

6<sup>th</sup> January 2012

The Timber Transport Forum is a voluntary partnership “working 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 twelve 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](http://www.timbertransportforum.org.uk)

**1. The Timber Transport Forum** welcomes the opportunity to highlight timber transport issues and to propose how they might be taken into account in identifying opportunities for woodland expansion.

**2. Background to the Timber Transport Forum**

- 2.1. The Forum is concerned with the process of moving softwood logs from Scottish forests to the processors. Currently around 300,000 lorry loads of logs are transported each year and the harvest is set to increase over the coming decade.
- 2.2. Those involved in timber transport are aware that most of the minor public roads that serve our forests were not designed for modern haulage vehicles. Road haulage from the forest can impact on the fabric of more fragile rural roads and on the quality of life of the neighbouring communities.
- 2.3. The Timber Transport Forum works through a network of Regional Timber Transport Groups made up of forest owners and managers, local authority road engineers, local councillors, timber processors and timber hauliers. The groups develop and share best practice and provide a voluntary framework to manage timber movement on the public road network with a view to minimising the costs and impacts of timber transport.
- 2.4. Over the last ten years the timber transport groups have developed agreed routes maps for roundwood haulage, directing timber traffic onto the most suitable roads. Diversions, restrictions or traffic management solutions are put in place where roads are weaker, and where timber traffic will affect local communities. The maps<sup>1</sup> are regularly reviewed and updated to take account of new areas of harvesting and changes in markets. The agreed routes maps are voluntary but self-enforced by the timber industry and hauliers.
- 2.5. The Forum is also aware of the wider environmental impacts of timber haulage in terms of the carbon emissions arising from haulage and from improving and maintaining road infrastructure. The Forum's [report](#) on the carbon footprint of timber transport demonstrates that the emissions from timber haulage are relatively small in the context of the timber supply chain and do not substantially detract from the overall carbon benefits of forest growth and timber production and use.
- 2.6. The Forum's submission concerns the implications of infrastructure constraints on the expansion of productive forestry plantations where it is expected that

---

<sup>1</sup> The Agreed Routes Maps cover the main forest areas of Scotland and are available online at [www.timbermap.org](http://www.timbermap.org)

roundwood will be transported to market. We recognise that these constraints will not necessarily apply to woodland established for environmental reasons where there is no expectation of significant timber harvest.

### **3. Lessons learned**

- 3.1. The previous period of substantial productive woodland expansion in the 1970s and 1980s resulted in many new areas of forest being planted, some in areas with relatively poor road access. The assumption was that technological advances in haulage and 30-40 years of public infrastructure investment would address any constraints on how to move the logs to market.
- 3.2. While trunk roads and some roads leading to larger concentrations of commercial woodland have been improved, and lorry technology (such as tyre pressure control systems) has advanced significantly allowing many areas to be harvested, substantial areas of productive forest remain constrained by transport infrastructure where timber haulage may impact on roads and communities.
- 3.3. The fundamentals of timber transport have not changed in the past 30-40 years.
  - Harvested softwood logs are a bulky and relatively low value primary product and haulage costs can affect the marketability of the standing timber.
  - Over 95% of timber haulage is by road and nearly all transport relies on the minor road network on immediately leaving the forest.
  - Large lorries (now 44 tonne HGVs) remain the most practical and cost effective means of initial transport.

### **4. Future haulage**

Looking forward 30 -40 years with all the uncertainty that entails....

#### **4.1. Will road haulage remain the dominant mode of timber transport ?**

As things stand there are no realistic alternatives to access most of our upland areas. However road haulage may be more costly in the future. Scottish Government [policy](#) is to aim for almost complete 'decarbonisation' of road transport by 2050, with significant progress by 2030. Heavy rural road freight is likely to be one of the most challenging transport elements to decarbonise. While we should give credit to the next generation that they will come up with innovative solutions to moving timber we cannot assume there will be a substantial change in what is possible.

#### **4.2. Will we have better roads?**

The recent [National Roads Maintenance Review](#) is fairly stark about the state of the roads and the outlook for investment in the coming decade. It says '*Given the present*

*financial climate, and with pressures on all public sector budgets, it is unlikely that significant additional funding will be made available for road maintenance to help address the backlog issue, and further deterioration is therefore inevitable.'*

The Scottish Government's Strategic Timber Transport Fund currently supports targeted infrastructure improvements to strategic concentrations of productive forest to reduce the impacts of timber transport. This may involve in-forest haul routes or upgrading to public roads and has yielded significant gains in accessing timber reserves previously regarded as "landlocked". The Forum and the Regional Timber Transport Groups will continue to press for investment in targeted infrastructure improvements to better serve strategic concentrations of productive forest.

However much of the forest resource is in more fragmented plantation areas, where working with and sustaining the public road infrastructure that exists will be the way forward.

#### **4.3. Can we make more use of other modes of haulage?**

Coastal shipping of timber from harbours and floating piers is already well established. At present, running costs are generally higher than for road haulage and the savings in road miles can be countered by increased impact on the local roads that experience the high frequency of movements required to load boats. However coastal shipping may prove a sustainable option from some coastal forests. Land for new planting that can be accessed directly from a relatively sheltered coastline may be regarded as less constrained than sites at the end of fragile minor roads.

Similarly for rail: A current project is working to demonstrate the viability of lineside loading – loading logs directly from forests onto trains - using inter-modal containers that can be transferred from the train to a lorry for final delivery. If this proves effective it will open up land for railside plantations where lineside loading is feasible.

Both rail and boat are most viable on longer hauls and in most cases intermodal solutions will still require road haulage at either end.

#### **4.4. Can we process more locally?**

Some Forest and Woodland Strategies suggest that more local timber processing will reduce the haulage distance and therefore the impact of timber transport. Expected markets for biomass fuel, for example, may encourage more local processing and use. This may have some impact on transport emissions but it is usually the initial haulage to the trunk road that is the least fuel efficient and the most constrained by transport

infrastructure. This first stage is likely to be required even where more local processing is possible.

Scottish grown timber is also more 'local' than imported timber which may carry a significant carbon footprint related to transport and will not necessarily be more 'sustainable' than homegrown timber.

## **5. Existing advice and practice**

- 5.1. The [UKFS](#) and climate change guidelines see the timber transport groups as appropriate sources of advice on timber transport. The Scottish Government guidance [The Right Tree in the Right Place](#) describes the Agreed Routes Maps as a useful tool in identifying suitable routes for timber haulage, allowing councils to plan spending on road upgrading and maintenance and the forestry sector to look for in-forest road solutions that reduce the need to use fragile roads.
- 5.2. Some Forest and Woodland Strategies have been more indicative regarding constraints on new planting. The [Scottish Borders Woodland Strategy](#) suggests that new planting should be sited 'within economic distance' (suggested as 2km) of the Preferred Routes Network (by which they mean 'agreed' routes). Similarly the [Highland Forest and Woodland Strategy](#) shows a map with catchment areas associated with 'agreed routes', another zone linked primarily to 'consultation routes' and areas served only by 'excluded routes'. However experience has shown that applying the principles of best practice referred to above has enabled some forests beyond these restrictions to come to market.
- 5.3. In some regions, timber transport constraints are already being taken into account in assessing applications for planting grant using the information from Agreed Routes Maps and existing experience of timber transport. Applications are currently being dealt with on a case by case basis aiming to weigh up the public benefits of productive planting against the likely costs to public infrastructure.

## **6. The way forward**

- 6.1. The Forum proposes that:
  - Decisions on the implications of transport infrastructure on productive woodland expansion should continue to be based on the infrastructure and haulage technology currently available.
  - Regional Timber Transport Groups should input to Forest and Woodland Strategies to provide an indication of how transport infrastructure constraints might influence land suitability for productive forest planting.

- The Regional Timber Transport Groups should be prepared to respond to requests to extend Agreed Routes Map categorisation of roads leading to potential new planting sites. Any responses to applications made by local authorities should be reviewed and ratified as soon as possible by the group.

6.2. Regarding applications for new planting:

- There should be no concern regarding applications that demonstrate haulage access onto an A road or 'agreed route'.
- Where access is onto a 'consultation route' the presumption should be that any potential roading constraints would be overcome through best practice negotiations. If access is to a B, C or unclassified road that has not been categorised, then the local authority should be consulted and any restrictions identified.
- If the only access is via a 'severely restricted route' or 'excluded route' then the applicant should demonstrate whether haulage could be achieved without substantial impact or cost to the roads authority. This may, for example, involve a formal commitment by the applicant to upgrade the road or to construct or gain rights to alternative access prior to harvest.

6.3. Finally, the Forum notes that the Scottish Government's '*overriding purpose is to focus government and public services on creating a more successful country, with opportunities for all of Scotland to flourish, through **increasing sustainable economic growth***'. Investment in forestry brings significant economic benefits as well as reduced dependency on subsidy by comparison with other land uses attracting substantial public support, such as upland sheep farming.

6.4. With that in mind the Forum believes that it is generally in the nation's interests to maintain, and as appropriate to improve, Scotland rural transport infrastructure, to ensure that economic activities such as productive forestry remain a viable opportunity throughout Scotland. Investment in transport infrastructure will also benefit local communities and other rural industries such as tourism.

6.5. Where there are substantial concentrations of land suitable for productive woodland expansion, but constrained by transport infrastructure, the Scottish Government should consider mechanisms that could support applicants and/ or local authorities in overcoming these constraints.

The Timber Transport Forum would be happy to discuss these proposals further and to provide more information as required.

Roland Stiven (on behalf of the Timber Transport Forum)