

21 November 2014

Local Highways Maintenance Branch

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**Response to Consultation on Local Authority Highways Maintenance Funding:
2015/16 - 2020/21**

This response is from the Timber Transport Forum¹ and proposes the **creation of a challenge fund for roads used for timber transport in the north of England.**

Background

The Timber Transport Forum is a voluntary partnership organisation set up in 2000 to address the issues arising from the transport of logs from British forests to timber processors over minor rural roads. As the volume of timber from Britain's forests has increased, there has been recognition that haulage can impact on the rural road network and that these impacts need to be managed. In addition the increase in heavy haulage in rural areas highlights the limitations of narrow country roads and can cause potential disruption to communities and other road users. Alongside the pressures of managing the impacts there is also recognition that timber provides a valuable, sustainable raw material which supports the rural economy. Timber is a globally traded commodity product and the sector needs to retain its competitiveness in a challenging world market.

Through the Forum, the forest industry has worked in partnership with local authorities to manage timber haulage to minimise damage and to mitigate, where possible, the impact on rural communities. The aim is to ensure harvested timber can reach markets through an efficient supply chain, maintaining the diverse benefits of the timber industry for the economy, society and the environment.

The Forum works through timber transport groups at local authority level. These groups establish working relations between the private forest sector, Local Authorities and the Forestry Commission.

Voluntary agreed routes maps are prepared to direct timber traffic to the more suitable roads and protocols have been established for liaison over the use of weaker roads that

are necessary for timber haulage. The timber haulage sector is investing in lorries with various features that can help reduce the impact of lorry traffic on fragile roads.

The North Yorkshire Timber Freight Quality Partnership is one example of how the sector is working in partnership to help manage timber traffic on the rural road network. Details of their agreed routes map can be found [here](#)ⁱⁱ.

Our Response to the Consultation

The Forum has developed this response in collaboration with the forest industry and local authorities in the north of England. The specific local authorities are North Yorkshire County Council, Cumbria County Council, Durham and Northumberland County Council each of which contributes to a regional timber transport group.

The Forum proposes that a small element of the available funding (£3m/year) is allocated to the creation of a challenge fund specifically to support targeted upgrades and improvements to minor local roads that are strategically important to the forest industry. A [comparable scheme](#)ⁱⁱⁱ has been running in Scotland for ten years and has proved to be a highly efficient mechanism to help target resources at a part of the network which, experience suggests, would not otherwise receive the investment in needs.

There is a strong economic rationale for this. The north of England holds the highest concentration of plantation forest in England, feeding large timber processing and manufacturing plants in Hexham, Carlisle and Workington and several smaller sawmills and biomass energy facilities throughout the rural area, supplying an industry that employs over 30,000 people. The industry and local authorities have come together to produce [Roots to Prosperity](#)^{iv} a strategy and action plan to bring more woods into management which sets out an investment opportunity of around £23 million to unlock jobs and deliver low carbon growth and sustainable economic development across rural and urban communities in the north of England. Roots to Prosperity was launched in August^v by Guy Opperman MP delivering a message on behalf of Liz Truss, Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. There is ongoing engagement with the Local Enterprise Partnerships to construct a package of private and public finance to deliver.

The challenge fund would support the infrastructure improvements required to enable the wider development plan which delivers jobs as well as other economic and environmental benefits to the region.

The Timber Transport Forum has been discussing the creation of such a challenge fund for several years recently involving both Dan Rogerson MP (Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Water, Forestry, Rural Affairs and Resource Management) and Robert Goodwill MP (Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Transport). Indeed it is at Robert Goodwill's suggestion that we propose funding this through the budget allocations to local authority highways maintenance. I will attach a copy of recent letters.

The Timber Transport Forum has experience of developing and managing such a challenge fund, setting criteria that allow proactive, prioritised and targeted

improvements. In many cases the type of work needed includes minor upgrading of pinch points, widening of corners, the creation of passing places and improvements to short stretches of roads.

A Timber Transport Challenge Fund would be a highly effective use of a very small proportion of the roads maintenance allocation delivering economic, environmental and community benefits. The Forum is ready to provide advice and support to develop and manage a suitable mechanism for delivery of the challenge fund.

Yours sincerely



Alistair M Speedie

Director Planning and Environment Services, Dumfries and Galloway Council

And Chair of the Timber Transport Forum

cc

- Robert Goodwill MP, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Transport
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- Dan Rogerson MP, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Water, Forestry, Rural Affairs and Resource Management
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Encs

- Previous correspondence with DfT and DEFRA

ⁱ www.timbertransportforum.org.uk

ⁱⁱ <http://www.northyorks.gov.uk/timbermap>

ⁱⁱⁱ Improving Timber Transport, Forestry Commission Scotland 2014

<http://scotland.forestry.gov.uk/images/corporate/pdf/improving-timber-transport.pdf>

^{iv} Roots to Prosperity

http://issuu.com/roots-to-prosperity/docs/roots_to_prosperity?e=10702123/6586525

^v <http://www.northumberland.gov.uk/default.aspx?page=6270&article=3363>