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Timber Transport Forum Response to the England Tree Strategy

The Timber Transport Forum welcomes the opportunity to input to the England Tree Strategy. We have chosen to respond in writing as the policy and other measures we propose require some explanation and context which is not covered in the consultation document.

The Timber Transport Forum

The [Timber Transport Forum](#) is a voluntary partnership organisation set up in 2000 to address the issues raised by timber transport in Great Britain. The Forum includes representatives of the forestry and timber industries, the local highways authorities and various national agencies and organisations, including Forestry Commission England. Currently Forestry Commission England contributes to the part time executive support to the Forum.

The Timber Transport Forum recognises the strategic importance of transport infrastructure in connecting woodlands to the processing sector to support the sustainable management of woodlands, delivery of natural capital and rural economic growth. The Forum provides a mechanism to discuss strategic issues and develop guidance to support local delivery.

The Forum would request that transport infrastructure is actively considered in relation to the management of existing woodlands and the planning of new woodlands. It would also request that the Forestry Commission continues to actively engage and support the work of the Forum.

The Forum welcomes the bold and ambitious plan for an unprecedented increase in afforestation to increase England's forest cover from 10 -12% by 2060. The Forum recognises the role of trees and woodlands on farms and the creation of large new forests in delivering the shared strategic national challenge of planting 30,000ha per year across the UK by 2025. The Forum also welcomes and supports the specific initiatives in Northern England such as the Forestry Investment Zone (Cumbria) and the Great Northumberland Forest (Northumberland) to help facilitate woodland creation.

Timber Transport

England currently harvests around 2.2m green tonnes of softwood timber per year which is delivered to the many processors, sawmills, boardmills, and biomass processors throughout England (and southern Scotland, and Wales).

As the consultation paper notes, the UK produces a very small proportion of the timber it uses but that timber does support a modern low carbon industry providing valued materials and employment in rural areas.

Transporting this timber from forest to mill is primarily done by 44 tonne lorry with a ~27 tonne payload. Often the initial element of this journey is on minor local, sometime single-tracked, roads through rural communities, villages and towns. On parts of this route the timber lorries can be a significant proportion of the heavy goods vehicle traffic.

Timber transport is one of the most notable interfaces between the forestry sector and the public.

Large lorries on minor roads have the potential to have a negative impact on people living along the roads and to other road users, especially where roads are single tracked or narrow. Where substantial harvests are being moved, repeated lorry traffic can impact on minor roads that were not originally constructed to take heavy traffic.

Some timber is moved by rail in England e.g. from Carlisle, Ribbleshead in N Yorkshire and from Devon – all flowing to the Kronospan board mill at Chirk in North Wales. At least one English mill is served by sea transport of logs from Scotland.

Regional Timber Transport Groups

In the north of England where there is a significant volume of timber being moved, the Timber Transport Forum works with regional timber transport groups to allow liaison between the forest and timber industry and the local highways authorities. Currently there are three such [groups](#) covering Cumbria, Northumberland and Durham, and North Yorkshire. The groups comprise forestry harvesting managers, local authority highways staff and others with planning and regulatory authority such as the Forestry Commission and the National Parks. The groups meet annually or as required. Some executive support for these groups would be beneficial.

The Forum hosts an [Agreed Routes Map](#) that provides a trigger for consultation where timber haulage may have an impact on the road or the community. The Forum has produced [good practice](#) guidance relating to the consultation process with both local authorities and local communities.

Timber Transport Fund

In Scotland the Scottish Government – through Scottish Forestry and Transport Scotland, provide funding (£7m in 2020) to invest in infrastructure improvement aimed at minimising the impact of timber transport on the roads, on communities and on the environment. Much of this is spent on minor public roads serving forested areas which would not otherwise be prioritised for improvement. The Strategic Timber Transport Scheme can also support sea and rail transport that takes timber lorries off the road. The Fund also supports the working of the timber transport

groups that provide the liaison function. This support has made a significant contribution to schemes which reduce the impact of timber transport and support a more sustainable rural economy.

A Timber Transport Fund for England should be made available to support the liaison process of the timber transport groups and to address infrastructure limitations in forested areas.

Where transport infrastructure is fragile or sensitive this can be a barrier not only to harvesting and managing woodlands but also to new woodland creation (afforestation). Where otherwise suitable land for afforestation has poor road public infrastructure this will reduce the economic viability of timber producing forests.

A Timber Transport Fund or other mechanisms for investment in the public road network should be considered to provide investment where potential areas for afforestation are limited or constrained by poor road infrastructure.

Support for in-forest infrastructure

We note and would support the proposed support for in-forest roads to improve access to, and the management of, woodlands. This is vital. Good in-forest infrastructure is necessary if harvesting is to be done safely and efficiently. It can be a considerable up-front cost but will serve the longer term future of the forest providing greater management options to meet government policy objectives.

For smaller areas of forest in particular it would be most helpful if such funding could support the improvement of forest entrances/exits – i.e. where forest roads exit onto the public road. In some cases existing exits date from long ago and are unsuitable for the current vehicular use of country roads. Shifting an exit 100 yards or so to a more suitable location with improved sightlines may be most valuable in terms of safety for all.

Such support will also reduce the incidence of forest managers looking to load timber onto lorries sitting on the public highway. Occasionally this is appropriate but requires relevant permissions and risk management measures set out in our guidance on [loading timber from roadside forests](#).

Roadside bays adjacent to forests can be useful to take the loading process off the public road.

The Forum supports the policy proposal to provide support for woodland infrastructure such as roading – and forest entrances/exits

Decarbonisation

The timber supply chain is carbon positive, sequestering substantially more carbon than it emits. However the harvesting and transport of timber is currently reliant on diesel-fuelled machinery and vehicles. In the next 10-20 years the targets for decarbonisation (and specifically decarbonisation of transport) will necessitate a shift of technologies. Infrastructure improvements to increase efficiency generally will be valuable.

However, with the forest resource often on the periphery of the transport network it would be helpful if the appropriate infrastructure investment could be encouraged or supported. It is likely to become clearer in the coming years what will be appropriate e.g. electric vehicle and/or hydrogen charging points.

There may be an opportunity to use timber transport as a pilot for such developments. Timber transport is usually fairly local, timber hauliers by necessity maintain a relatively modern fleet with several hi-tech features, and several timber processors are already renewable electricity producers. As we develop new techniques and technologies for timber transport there will be a need for effective training and business support for those working in the supply chain.

The Forum suggests a policy proposal to pilot innovative HGV technologies within the timber transport sector.

Borderlands Growth Deal

The Timber Transport Forum has been supportive of the Borderlands Growth Deal and looks forward to the planned Forestry Innovation Centre in the North of England.

**Roland Stiven
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