

TimberTransportForum

delivering solutions for a growing UK harvest

A contribution from the Timber Transport Forum
to the Scottish Government's consultation
towards Scotland's Rail Freight Strategy

Submitted within the online form.

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 eleven regional timber transport groups from across Scotland, North England and Wales, as well as the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities, the forest industry associations (Confederation of Forest Industries, UK Forest Products Association and Forestry Contracting Association), Scottish Forest & Timber Technologies, Forestry Commission England, Forestry Commission Scotland and Natural Resources Wales, Rail Freight Group, Road Haulage Association and the Society for Chief Officers of Transportation in Scotland.

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

Timber Transport Forum www.timbertransportforum.org.uk roland.stiven@confor.org.uk

Confederation of Forest Industries (UK) Ltd 59 George Street Edinburgh EH2 2JG
Tel: 0131 240 1418 Fax: 0131 240 1411 www.confor.org.uk
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Introduction

The Timber Transport Forum welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the consultation on the Rail Freight Strategy for Scotland. In particular we welcome the focus on **creating opportunities for small to medium sized enterprises and to better support the economic, social and environmental objectives of rural communities.**

The Timber Transport Forum is concerned with the infrastructure that serves our 21st Century productive forest resource which covers 14% of Scotland's land area. Scotland's forests are concentrated in rural areas where, in some local authorities such as Argyll and Dumfries & Galloway, forest cover has reached 30%. Each year we transport 7.5m tonnes of logs from Scottish forests to timber processors in Scotland. The industry is worth a conservative GVA of £1bn to the Scottish economy and employs 20,000 full time equivalent jobs mostly in rural, low carbon enterprises.

Timber is a demonstrably sustainable resource with the Scottish Government committed to increase the area of forest through new planting. Its environmental value as a carbon store is widely recognised and the value of upland tree cover in mitigating river catchment flood peaks and ensuing impact on downstream and floodplain properties is increasingly acknowledged.

The Forum concentrates on the limited capacity of our local road network which serves much of the forest resource, but there are key places where the rail network could provide an opportunity to

- take lorry traffic off fragile local roads leading to forests
- take processed timber and manufactured product from processors, south to markets taking lorry traffic off rural trunk roads.
- Move woody biomass from processors to biomass power plants.

The various challenges to the forest and timber industries making use of rail freight have been set out in response to various consultations in the past, most recently summarised in the our response to the Scottish Parliament Infrastructure & Capital Investment Committee Inquiry into Freight Transport in Scotland Forum. We recognise that the Rail Freight Strategy Consultation has picked up on some of this and highlighted that there are opportunities for timber rail freight.

Our responses to the specific questions in the consultation are below.

1. What are your views on the vision for rail freight?

The vision for rail freight is important and we welcome the vision for a 'sustainable rail freight sector playing an increasing role in Scotland's economic growth by providing a safer, greener, and more efficient way of transporting products and materials'.

However we are not convinced that this will be achieved by regulated competitive processes but will require more deliberate focused intervention by the government, and more collaboration. The collaboration is required

- at policy level

- between local authority, roads authorities and national transport planners
- between rail planners, rail operators and, critically, rural businesses. The rail freight industry talking to itself will not get anywhere!

We need to view our national rail network as the basis of services to communities (as we view our roads) not as an asset to be sold at market rates to rail operators to serve large concentrated industries. In particular we need to adapt both road and rail to suit our land uses in order to develop all aspects of our low carbon economy.

We note that the National Transport Strategy does list the Land Use Strategy as one of the related areas of policy. We **trust that this will be reciprocated in the Land Use Strategy** which is also currently under consultation. However there is much more to do to develop these policy links and to ensure practical and parallel outcomes.

Rural land uses such as forestry and farming do not normally require planning permission so tend to be overlooked by local authority planners and, in turn, by national planning reviews – which focus on major ‘development’. Rail freight infrastructure has also largely ignored rural land use generally. Indeed as the map of freight terminals shows, it has largely ignored all of Scotland outwith the central belt. This is a lost opportunity because the rail network could serve parts of rural Scotland much better, taking HGV traffic off roads (both trunk roads and local roads) many of which have limited capacity.

2. What are your views on the market opportunities identified in the document?

We agree that timber does offer a significant market opportunity for rail freight.

The major timber opportunities are quite specific:

In the Highlands there are concentrations of forest in the flow country in Sutherland (on the far north line) and at Rannoch (on the West Coast line) where rail freight could be developed to take timber traffic off long, and in places fragile, single tracked roads. At Corpach near Fort William and at Dalcross near Inverness there is scope for sidings to allow log deliveries by rail to processing facilities and to enable haulage of processed products south by rail. Multimodal handling facilities at key sites would allow easy transfer from rail to road for non-rail connected businesses.

Timber was, until recently (2009), loaded onto rail at Arrochar and/or Crianlarich on the Oban line to be taken to a timber processor at Chirk in North Wales. The constraints on the 19th century loading facilities, played a part in this service becoming uneconomic. A modern 21st Century intermodal facility to allow lorries to load trains would facilitate rail haulage from Argyll which has 30% forest cover and limited processing capacity.

In the South of Scotland opportunities for railheads have been identified at Barrhill on the Stranraer line and at Beattock and Lockerbie on the West Coast Main line. These opportunities have also been highlighted in the SWestrans response to the Rail Freight Strategy.

Innovative line access mechanisms such as non-intrusive rail crossover systems may play a part in opening up forest sites to rail, but it will take more than just innovation to overcome the challenges of serving low value bulk produce from the periphery of the network.

If we are to create markets for dispersed small to medium sized businesses there needs to be much greater rail access provision and facilitated collaboration and buy in to existing services. No single SME is likely to be able to develop sidings, crossings, track access, signalling and engage a train operator service and hire intermodal handling facilities themselves and is unlikely to spend the time and money to build the collaborative partnerships required. Even with Freight Facilities Grants available, the costs and up front obstacles have prevented any uptake whatsoever in recent years.

What we require is the development of strategic public intermodal access points at key points throughout the network in rural Scotland and a baseline level of operating, accessible adaptive freight services to which SMEs can contribute, allowing these markets to develop and to grow.

3. What are the three biggest opportunities for growth in the rail freight sector in Scotland.

Timber is one of them. Forestry is a permanent land use change. Forests that are harvested are replanted. The timber supply is forecast to continue to grow until 2030 and then plateau at around 9-10m tonnes per year. Timber rail freight haulage could help to establish baseline flows on peripheral routes that would allow growth in more general rail freight by attracting other rural industries (including food and drink) to contribute to the services.

4. What are the 3 biggest challenges to growth in the sector.

With regard to timber,

- The lack of integration of the National Transport Strategy and the Land Use Strategy.
- The fragmented nature of the rail industry and the resulting very high cost of developing projects involving rail.
- The reliance on private sector competitive process and limited regulation to effect change rather than public intervention and infrastructure investment. We are faced with a classic “chicken and egg” situation with a cycle of irresolution urgently needing a positive Government stimulus to break.

5. What are your views on the role of the Scottish Government, as outlined in the document?

We believe that the Scottish Government needs to be more deliberate and engaged in growing the rail freight market.

While providing grants, and encouraging collaboration from within the rail industry are no doubt necessary, the impact will be limited. The rail freight industry, existing customers and interests would appear to be insular, and opaque to other sectors. New markets will not be achieved on any scale without a deliberate outreach programme and the development of easily accessible freight

services suited to SMEs. This is particularly so in rural Scotland on the peripheral routes where the industry will not naturally take itself. This is evident from the minimal turnout at the Inverness consultation workshop on this strategy.

Promotion will have little impact without other interventions. The section on promotion suggests that 'there is a perception that accessing rail freight service is complex' and there is a need to 'demystify the perceptions of complexity'. This is not a perception. Compared to road, accessing much of Scotland's rail network (outwith the main terminals) is very complex indeed, and very expensive! A telephone call will have a truck pick up your timber tomorrow; any rail alternative is likely to take months or years to set up and high levels of upfront cost.

As mentioned previously the government role of strategic planning to grow rail freight is constrained by the lack of recognition of rural issues and rural land uses in the national planning framework. In most cases national planning in Scotland is about connecting cities, ports or large concentrations of industry or energy. It has little understanding or interest in wider rural land use despite these being of increasing national importance.

6. What are your views on the steps necessary to create a stable environment for growth.

The Forum has no view on this except that change is required if the sector is to grow!

7. Should targets be set in the final strategy and if so what areas should these cover?

Yes we need targets. The Timber Transport Forum has been responding to consultations on rail, land use and national planning for several years now with no effective response. The Land Use Strategy remains unwilling to integrate with transport or development planning, Freight Facilities Grants remain unspent and none of the opportunities to develop roundwood (log) haulage have been achieved. Unless we have targets and milestones, then ten years down the line we will be responding to another consultation asking about the barriers to overcome.

8. What are your views on the actions identified in the document and who should take the lead role in delivering these.

No doubt all of the actions are necessary and useful. We particularly welcome the first two regarding creating opportunities for SMEs and supporting rural communities. Maybe the Rural Parliament could be asked to lead on the latter? Confor (The Confederation of Forest and Timber Industries) and the Timber Transport Forum will contribute from the forestry sector.

Regarding the action point *to work with partners including Forestry Commission Scotland to explore potential opportunities around timber transport and rail....*

HITRANS and the Highland Timber Transport Group are currently completing an investigative study on the potential for taking timber by rail from the Flow Country. This study is being supported by the Scottish Government's Strategic Timber Transport Scheme and should be completed by March 2016. The forest and timber industries have already gone some way down the road of 'exploring the potential opportunities around timber transport and rail'. We would welcome a more deliberate,

time-bound action point to take forward some pilot projects to trial and evaluate timber transport by rail.

We would welcome an additional action point for the Land Use Strategy to address rail freight transport and other rural development infrastructure issues.

9. Any other views?

The Timber Transport Forum would welcome more proactive engagement by the nation's rail services (public and private) in expanding the role of rail freight to maximise its utility to the forest and timber industry. There are some obvious opportunities where rail freight could improve timber supply chain efficiency and at the same time remove lorries from rural roads, with concomitant benefits to society and to national and local roads authorities. The barriers to timber by rail are well known but not insurmountable if there is a will from government and from those contracted to supply and develop rail services to do so.

Roland Stiven

On behalf of the Timber Transport Forum

22nd January 2016