

Our Timber; Our Roads; Our Communities

A Guide to Transporting Timber

Forestry and timber play an important role in our economy and daily lives, providing materials for everything from building homes to crafting furniture. At the same time, the movement of timber on our roads can impact others.

This guide is designed to offer an overview of how and why timber is transported, the impact it can have on our roads, and the steps the industry is taking to act responsibly and reduce disruption as much as possible. It aims to provide useful information and show the sector's commitment to doing its best for our roads and communities now and in the future.

The UK forestry and timber industry and its impact on roads

The UK forestry and timber industry produces around 10 million tonnes¹ of timber each year from forests across the country. This timber is processed in modern sawmills and factories, contributing over £3.1 billion² to the UK economy and supporting more than 34,000³ jobs in forest-based activities.

Much of this timber is transported on rural roads.

Given that timber lorries can carry around 25 tonnes of timber when full, this adds up to around 400,000 loads – or 800,000 lorry trips – every year across the UK.

Many roads, particularly in remote areas, were never designed for the modern timber lorries that now carry these loads. As a result, timber lorries can cause disruption for local residents, other road users, and tourists. However, these routes are often the only viable way to move timber from forest to market.

How Timber is Transported

Timber is used in many everyday products – from construction materials, fencing and furniture to pallets, biofuels, board, and paper. The vast majority is moved by lorry on public roads.

In some areas, particularly in Scotland, timber is also moved by sea through ports like Inverness, Aberdeen, and Montrose, or, on the West Coast, from floating piers. A small portion also travels by rail.

Even when sea or rail transport is used, most timber begins and ends its journey on a public road.

Timber is just one commodity that uses the road network. In the UK, 98% of all food and agricultural products travel by lorry at some stage of their journey, and overall, 89% of all freight is moved by road⁴.

¹ 2024 – 2: UK-Grown Timber – Forest Research

² 2024 – 8: Finance & Prices – Forest Research

³ Economic Impact of Forest Based Activities in Scotland 2024

⁴ Road Haulage Association – Industry Facts and Stats

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The Challenge of Road Conditions

Public roads are used by everyone: pedestrians, cyclists, horse riders, cars, buses, and freight etc. Many roads are already under pressure due to increasing traffic and limited funding for maintenance.

This means that while timber lorries are needed for transporting timber, the roads they use are often not ideal.

Efforts to Reduce Impact

Despite these challenges, the timber industry is taking active steps to reduce its impact on the road network and surrounding communities.

Operators are investing in modern vehicle technologies, including tyre pressure control systems and different lorry configurations, which help reduce road wear and environmental impact.

To help reduce impacts on local communities and other road users, timber haulage businesses apply voluntary measures – such as selecting suitable vehicles or routes, limiting daily lorry movements, and avoiding peak travel times.

These measures are voluntary, agreed collaboratively with local authorities to balance essential timber movements with the needs of other road users.

They help reduce disruption, but also present operational challenges for the sector, such as lower efficiency and restricted working hours.

To support these efforts, a network of **Regional Timber Transport Groups**⁵ and a UK-wide **Timber Transport Forum**⁶ bring together local authorities and industry representatives. Together, they develop and promote industry good practice and look for ways to support infrastructure improvements where they're most needed.

The industry has produced this **short video**⁷ showcasing the steps being taken to reduce its impact on the environment, public roads, local communities, and other road users.

A Shared Responsibility

Public roads are shared by all, and the challenges they face cannot be solved by one sector alone. The timber industry recognises its responsibilities and remains committed to using roads as carefully and responsibly as possible.

While the forestry and timber industry will continue to rely on the public road network for transporting timber, it is working hard to minimise its impact on others.

⁵ Regional Groups - The Timber Transport Forum

⁶ The Timber Transport Forum Homepage - The Timber Transport Forum

⁷ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rEFWiG5tVBQ>