

Topic Paper No 9

SUSTAINABLE TIMBER TRANSPORT

Introduction

The issues associated with the transport of timber from forests to wood-processors are well known. They need to be **managed** carefully to ensure the cost-effective transport of timber while minimising the adverse-impacts on fragile rural roads, local communities and the environment.

It is acknowledged that transportation is high on the Scottish Executive's agenda to improve the lives of the people of Scotland and develop a sustainable, competitive economy. It is also acknowledged that Scotland's growing timber production is an important component of **sustainable rural development**. However, it is also leading to a significant increase in the number of timber lorries needing to use local rural roads.

In many cases, rural roads were not designed to carry such traffic any more than they were originally designed to carry agricultural haulage operations or HGV deliveries of oil, gas or coal to householders. It is therefore vital that local authorities (as Roads Authorities), the forest industry and the Scottish Executive work together to develop innovative, cost effective local solutions to minimise and manage the adverse impacts of timber transport.

Timber Transport Groups

Since the early 1990s a number of Regional Timber Transport Groups have been formed to bring together representatives of the forest industry, Forestry Commission Scotland and local authorities to address timber transport issues. The remit of these groups varies according to local circumstances, but generally it includes the following elements:

- To collect and maintain information relating to current and future timber traffic;
- To review the existing timber transport infrastructure and identify priorities for maintenance, upgrades and new investments;
- To explore and promote the potential for increased use of rail and water modes;
- To develop and maintain a system of agreed timber transport routes;
- To work through partnerships to resolve timber transport problems and avoid new ones arising; and

- To share information and methodologies with other Regional Timber Transport Groups.

The following Timber Transport Groups currently exist (Stirling and Tayside are considering an amalgamation):

- Argyll
- Ayrshire
- Scottish Borders
- Dumfries and Galloway
- Grampian
- Highland
- Stirling
- Tayside
- Wales
- Northern England

In an attempt to minimise the impact on fragile rural roads, the eight Timber Transport Groups in Scotland, have all formulated “**Agreed Routes Maps**” indicating those roads capable of being used for timber transport and those which are not.

By using up-to-date information on harvesting programmes, processing facilities and road condition surveys, the sections of the road network needed for timber haulage have been arranged into four categories:

Agreed Routes. Those routes that can be used for timber haulage without restriction (as regulated by the Road Traffic Act 1988);

Consultation Routes. Those routes that are recognised as being key to timber extraction but which are not up to Agreed Route standard. Consultation with the Local Authority is required and it may be necessary to agree limits of timing, allowable tonnage etc. before the route can be used.

Severely Restricted Routes. Those routes that should not normally be used for timber transport in their present condition. These routes are close to being Excluded Routes. Consultation with the Local Authority is required to achieve an agreed management regime to avoid landlocking timber.

Excluded Routes. Those routes that should not be used for timber transport in their present condition under any circumstances. These routes are either formally restricted, or are very close to being formally restricted, to protect the network. Consultation with the Local Authority is essential.

This work has been continuing over the last 2-3 years and has strengthened the partnership between the local authorities and the industry by enabling all parties to recognise each other’s concerns and priorities.

The Agreed Routes Maps will be used in the management of timber transport and, other than on Agreed Routes, may restrict the movement of timber. This may,

therefore, affect the effectiveness and efficiency of the harvesting operation (timber transport can comprise anything from 30% to 50% of total, direct timber supply costs).

However, it is acknowledged by all involved that Agreed Routes Maps are a starting point, enabling local roads networks to be sustained in the short to medium term, but are only one element in a strategy for achieving sustainable, cost effective, long term solutions for timber transport.

Pragmatic solutions to the problems of timber transport must be explored and implemented and constructive dialogue must continue on potential solutions such as sea and rail transport, alternative lorry routes that avoid public roads, and for integrating local road maintenance and improvements programmes with timber harvesting schedules.

However, even if alternative intermodal or internal road solutions are developed, 95% of timber will still rely on the local rural roads network for part of its journey. Intermodal solutions will impact primarily on timber traffic using Trunk Roads but not local rural roads.

Detailed Statistics

Local roads managed and maintained by local authorities represent **94%** of Scotland's public roads network (Trunk Roads = 6%).

Within the eight Timber Transport Groups:

- 70% of local roads are rural roads, of which 52% are single track.
- 45% of rural roads are used for timber transport.
- Excluding 'A' Class non-trunk roads, 65% of roads within the "Agreed Routes" hierarchy are in the "Consultation", "Severely restricted" or "Excluded" category.
- There are 122 weak bridges (bridges that do not meet 40 tonne weight capacity) on timber transport routes identified on the Agreed Routes Maps.

Local authority funding for timber transport route improvements throughout Scotland has all but ceased since the introduction of the composite Section 94 (Government approval of Council Borrowing for Capital Expenditure Programmes) consent in 1996. Prior to this some Councils were spending up to £2.0 million per annum, including European Funding, on forestry routes improvements. This figure has diminished to less than £200,000 per annum/per Council on average throughout Scotland. It is no longer possible for some Councils to draw down European Funding for road improvements as the latter's programme measures and outputs do not support such infrastructural work.

It is also becoming evident that revenue spending on roads' maintenance is increasingly skewed towards rural forestry routes and away from the more urban/lowland routes.

The above statistics indicate the scale of the issues facing local authorities and the forestry industry. To ensure an integrated approach to timber transport a range of potential solutions needs to be developed, this including; intermodal options, the building of internal forest roads and the need to raise weak roads further up the “Agreed Routes” hierarchy. Funding will be required to achieve this.

Wider rural issues

Forestry timber transport issues should not be seen in isolation. They are **shared issues** requiring **shared solutions** and these should benefit the wider rural community and enhance rural development, quality of life and social inclusion.

The economy and environment associated with local communities are very important for the regeneration and sustainability of rural communities. Tourism and agricultural diversity, both involving links to the forestry industry, are also seen as essential to supporting the local economy and environment.

Strategic Funding

The Scottish Parliament spending review included an announcement on strategic funding in the form of a Scottish Strategic Timber Transport Fund (STTF) (see [http://www.forestry.gov.uk/pdf/SSTF_guidance.pdf/\\$FILE/SSTF_guidance.pdf](http://www.forestry.gov.uk/pdf/SSTF_guidance.pdf/$FILE/SSTF_guidance.pdf))

This fund will be available over the next 3 years:

2005/06 : £3.0 million
2006/07 : £5.0 million
2007/08 : £5.0 million

The objective of the STTF is to facilitate the sustainable transport of timber in rural areas of Scotland for the benefit of local communities and the environment, maximising the value of the fund through innovative projects and partnerships.

Eligible projects will be:

- **Forest roads benefiting the local community and environment;**
 - construction of in-forest link roads to by-pass communities or fragile public roads;
 - in-forest road links to water and rail routes;
- **Public Forest Access Roads benefiting the local community and environment;**
 - public road improvements integral to the success of a project that provides significant rural/environmental benefit;
 - short stretches of public road strengthening that link in-forest routes;
 - optimum freight route facilitation (where diversion is more cost-effective than upgrades or development);

- arterial routes where strengthening is required for the specific needs of timber transport;
- **Other Timber Freight Modes benefiting the local community and environment.**
 - rail and waterway improvements for timber transport that provide significant rural/environmental benefits where financial assistance is not available from elsewhere.

Timber Transport Groups will submit STTF bids and implementation plans for submission to and approval by the Forestry Commission's Timber Transport Fund Officer. In judging such bids it is hoped that "win/win" solutions can be found for the timber industry, local communities and local authorities.

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