

Consultation and engagement for timber transport

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Last year saw the highest volume of timber harvested in Scotland ever, with over 8m m³ on the move, or about a 1000 truckloads a day. Most of this moves without issue, a regular part of rural life. Some of it though is problematic and impacts on fragile roads or causes disruption to communities and generally gets people's backs up.

Scotland has also seen the highest level of planting for some time and if the Climate Emergency develops into real action we can expect much more in the years to come. Councils and communities, however, will not differentiate between planting and harvesting; it is all forestry and if timber transport is cause for concern you can expect obstruction and objection to the best laid plans for planting as well.

The Timber Transport Forum's Agreed Routes Maps and the partnership with council roads authorities have been in place now for 20 years. We have kept pace with the rising harvest and kept the wagons rolling. But, time moves on; the councils have less money for roads now than in a long time. Road repairs and improvements require lots of cash and lots of carbon, so don't expect widespread improvements soon.

At the same time, communities are becoming more networked and vocal. In Scotland, the Community Empowerment Act requires that communities must be able to engage on issues that impact on their lives and their concerns must be addressed constructively. The Scottish Government has produced 'Guidance on Engaging Communities in Decisions Relating to Land', supported by the Scottish Land Commission's protocol on community engagement.



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In regulatory terms, timber transport falls between the stools of the Forestry and Land Management (Scotland) Act and the Roads (Scotland) Act. Our new regulatory agency Scottish Forestry has no statutory control over the use of the public road and the Council Roads Authorities have no straightforward mechanism to demand infrastructure improvements or traffic management as they might for developments that go through the planning process. The upshot is that the onus will remain on the forestry sector to engage with people and to make sure we keep rural communities on board, supportive of our industry and open to forestry expansion.

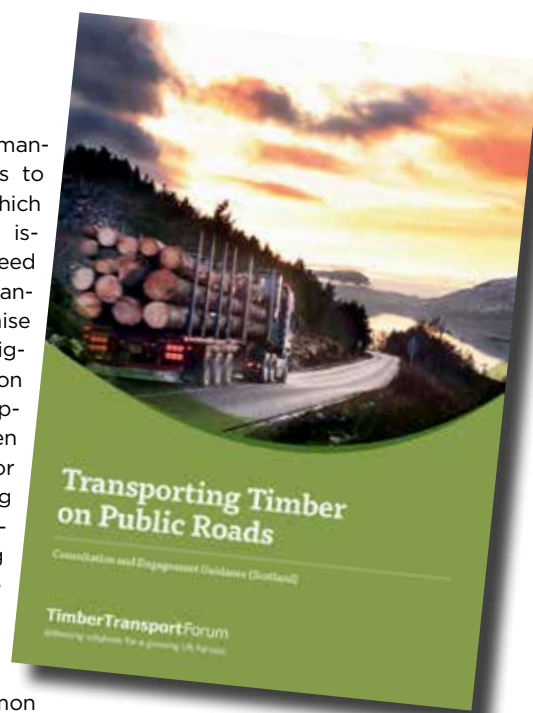
The new Guidance sets out who – landowners, agents,

regulators, forestry work managers or hauliers – needs to take the initiative at which stage, to assess possible issues, identify who they need to consult with and to manage operations to minimise any impacts. There are trigger points for consultation and engagement at scoping, at forest planning, when permissions are applied for and granted, on tendering timber sales, when purchasing stands, planning operations and during the harvesting and transport of timber.

The process set out needs to become common place. Mostly it will not be burdensome but a proportion of timber transport has the potential to result in outcomes that will be both expensive for the landowner and damaging for the 'social license' that an industry like forestry, that covers a fifth of our land area and a third of our rural roads, needs to sustain.

The Consultation and Engagement Guidance was a long time in gestation. Much of it was developed by the Stirling, Tayside and Grampian timber transport groups several years ago and drafts of this document have been widely circulated for comment and feedback. There is a legitimate view that by setting out a process we will encourage and give ammunition to the grumpy busy body who wants to obstruct any change going on around them. The Scottish Land Commission is clear however that all parties should be respectful and constructive and seek to engage where possible through representative organisations such as Community Councils. With forestry being a dynamic, expanding sector, we need to be on the front foot.

Finally, the guidance was produced in response to demand from within Scotland and is specific to Scotland. UK-wide guidance is becoming increasingly cumbersome to prepare, defining the plethora of differing regulations and agencies. However, if there is demand for similar guidance tailored to England, Wales or Northern Ireland, please let the Forum know.



FTN WEB RESOURCES



Transporting Timber on Public Roads
Consultation and Engagement Guidance
(Scotland)

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