Written submission from Timber Transport Forum

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, Scotland, & Wales, Wales Forest Business Partnership, Rail Freight Group, Road Haulage Association and the Society for Chief Officers of Transportation in Scotland.

Introduction

1. The Timber Transport Forum welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the development of the Land Reform (Scotland) Bill. The Forum’s contribution focuses on the functions of the proposed Scottish Land Commission and the relevance of transport infrastructure in marketing the harvest from Scottish forests.

2. Commercial forestry now covers almost 14% of Scotland’s land area. The bulk of timber production comes from heavily forested regions such as The Highlands, Argyll, Dumfries and Galloway, Grampian, Ayrshire, South Lanarkshire, Scottish Borders, Perth and Kinross, Stirlingshire, Loch Lomond & the Trossachs, Moray and Angus. In these regions, commercial forestry cover can approach 30%. 3. The Government’s response to the recent report from the Woodland Expansion Advisory Group sets a target for continued woodland expansion, much of it likely to be in the uplands of Scotland. The Woodland Expansion Advisory Group noted that the condition of transport infrastructure was a constraint on future woodland expansion in some areas.

4. Most of the existing plantation forestry resource is in the uplands and served by weak, sometimes single track, public roads, ill-suited to timber haulage vehicles. As a result the home grown timber supply chain is less efficient than it could be and impacts on the minor road network, and on the communities that rely on them.

5. Harbour and rail access infrastructure in rural areas is also dated, which restricts opportunities for intermodal transport of timber.

6. The Timber Transport Forum and the regional timber transport groups in Scotland are all about engaging with the local communities and local roads authorities. We do not believe any other industry does this as well as forestry does. At the same time, there can be no better form of sustainable development on appropriate land in Scotland as productive forestry. However one of forestry’s greatest problems comes with its harvest – worth over £1bn per annum to the Scottish economy and underpinning over 40,000 jobs. That problem is the poor state of Scotland’s rural roads infrastructure to meet the demands of the 21st century. Local authorities are under constant pressure to find sufficient funds to maintain their outlying rural roads and associated infrastructure. Yet virtually every load of timber on its way to sawmill or wood processing plant needs to use those outlying roads.
7. The Forum believes there needs to be a new approach to solving how to keep this important harvest going, since however successful may be the many local initiatives, led through the regional timber transport groups, we are constantly frustrated by restrictions imposed on the shortest routes to market, which can in turn avoid or bypass local communities. Indeed some forests are in danger of being land-locked, a good example of this being the current crisis in Sutherland of extracting several million tonnes of timber from the A897 catchment.

8. We trust that Ministers will instruct the new Scottish Land Commission to give this subject its early attention.”

9. The Timber Transport Forum would be happy to discuss these proposals further and to provide more information as required.