

**Report to Partnership Meeting 11 September 2020**

**RESEARCH AND STRATEGY DELIVERY**

**Branchliner II**

**Purpose of the report**

To update members on the progress of Branchliner- Timber by Rail.

**Background**

In 2019 following HITRANS' *Wood You Use Rail?* Report, Cabinet Secretary Fergus Ewing hosted a summit at Scotland House London attended by leaders of all rail freight operators and logistics providers. This was followed up by a workshop in Perth. During winter 2019-20 HITRANS and Victa Railfreight worked on the cost-model for a merry-go-round timber train, identifying wagon provision as the most important area to de-risk. Discussion took place with Transport Scotland on the potential for government to assist with the lease costs of a rake of suitable wagons.

HITRANS had located a timber harvester/supplier as a willing partner to take part in a trial run from the NDA terminal at Georgemas, with support from HITRANS, but the trial was delayed for technical reasons.

**August trial**

Meanwhile Victa submitted a successful bid to TS' Rail Freight Fund for support to run timber trains from Caithness working with the same harvester/supplier.

A short term opportunity to use Inverness Millburn Yard arose prior to the deployment of autumn leaf fall trains. The original plan was to run from Georgemas to Inverness for transshipment to Norbord, with variations to the schedule to service Kinbrace, Lairg and Kyle.

Pipe carrying wagons were identified as being available at short notice, although it was recognised that they do not provide for an optimised payload, and West Coast were contracted to provide traction.

Network Rail moved very swiftly to approve paths and make sidings available at very short notice.

Trains commenced in August for 6 weeks.

Kyle has been ruled out due to the siding requiring clearing, while Kinbrace and Lairg were impacted by overnight engineering possessions.

It is hoped however to take saw logs to Elgin for James Jones Mosstodloch and to reload with timber for the North East of England as the wagons have to return to Tees Yard.

HITRANS is contributing £5k in funding which covers an agreed sum per tonne for terminal access at Georgemas and can assist with unforeseen issues, such as ballast requiring to be moved at short notice.

### **Next Steps**

A report will be produced which will provide the industry and stakeholders with findings that may point towards a commercial model.

### **Recommendation**

1. Members are asked to note the report

## **RISK REGISTER**

### RTS Delivery

Impact –mode shift

### Policy

Impact –Efficiency of transport operations, decarbonisation

### Financial

Impact – The trial is fully funded

### Equality

Impact – Access to network

### **Recommendation**

1. Members and Advisors are recommended to note the report.

**Report by:** Frank Roach  
**Designation:** Partnership Manager  
**Date:** 31<sup>st</sup> August 2020