

Report to Partnership Meeting 2 June 2015

RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT

BRANCLINER PLUS

Purpose of Report

This report provides Members with information on the Branchliner project which needs to be reappraised in the light of new developments.

Summary

- Windblow has created new problems for timber transport in the Flow Country.
- Voluntary limit of 10 trucks per day (6 south, 4 north), while demand rises to 50.
- Highland Council may move to protect the road.
- Timber needs to be extracted while it has value, and the economic benefits to the area are captured.
- New freight grant valuation for single track A roads can provide £8/t support.
- Landowners/Harvesters could form an alliance to manage operations co-operatively.
- Rail operations may well be lineside loading in the first instance, but other options will be explored.
- An alliance could provide a partnership for filling train space in conjunction with road space allocation.
- Branchliner 1 £30k funding can kickstart the process.

Branchliner 1 Outline

Branchliner 1 received an STTS award of £20k matched with £5k from each of HITRANS and FCS in order to investigate rail from the Flow Country.

Over the next 10-15 years the timber industry needs to transport 4 million tonnes of timber from the wider Flow Country catchment to distant markets. This will have consequences for the fragile public road network, the environment and the neighbouring communities. The carrying capacity of the road network is a major constraint. The Highland Timber Transport Group's Flow Country Strategy 2014-16 highlights the still unrealised potential for rail to play a part.

This investigative study is a first phase which, if it proves positive, will lead towards a demonstrator project that will trial timber deliveries by rail.

HITRANS will bring together a high level strategic group to establish the importance of the issues at stake – the environmental peatland interest, the economic timber interest and the critical infrastructure constraints – and to ensure there is commitment to finding a viable solution. This group will set the context for and agree a brief for consultants to develop the options and make recommendations. The consultants will gather existing knowledge and experience of timber transport by rail in the UK to see how it can be best applied to the Far

North Line. They will establish gaps in knowledge and understanding of physical, cost, logistical, environmental and community issues and, where necessary, commission consultancy services to fill these gaps. Suitably experienced consultants will investigate the optimum location and size of loading facilities, the cost of their upgrade or creation. It will take account of train lengths, terminal operation and train path metrics and consider the role of demountable ISO flatracks, conventional dedicated timber wagons and freight multiple units. All options will be reviewed, to determine the costs and to identify any logistical barriers to delivery of Flow Country timber by rail to Inverness and beyond. The environmental benefits of mode shift to rail from the Flow Country will be calculated.

Project update

The storm on 8 January 2015 has created a new urgency for the supply of Flow Country timber with over 325k tonnes of windblow in addition to the regular movements.

To harvest this while it still has value creates demand for up to 50 loaded trucks per day on the public road, up from the voluntary agreement of 6 per day south of Kinbrace, 4 north. The £1m SSTS award to Highland Council for improvements to the A897 will be insufficient to permit even a modest increase in traffic, but rather is designed to cope with the status quo. Rail is now not optional but has to be part of the solution.

A significant development occurred recently with the DfT decision to value the Mode Shift Benefit value of single-track A roads (with passing places), at £2.35 per lorry mile rather than the standard A road's £0.82 per lorry mile which are found in some parts of peripheral north and west Scotland. Timber moving by rail to Inverness from the Flow Country could attract £8 per tonne in support.

Within a short space of time HITRANS believes that there is a need to create a viable rail project based on Kinbrace loading bank with lineside loading in the first instance, but HITRANS will explore the costs and feasibility of :

- developing the loading bank to permit more efficient stacking of material and therefore potentially longer trains.
- establishing a more permanent solution with sidings connected to the mainline with a Non-Intrusive Crossover System (NICS) or a permanent connection to mainline.

In order to avoid a free for all for capacity on road and rail, an **alliance** could be formed of forest owners working with FCS, UKFPA and Confor. Its role would be to act a single point of contact to:

- lease the Kinbrace terminal from Highland Council
- manage and operate the facility including loading
- contract with a rail haulier to provide wagons and a locomotive
- deliver timber to Inverness by rail for collection by mills

Without co-operation there is a risk that no timber will get to market, and that there environmental degradation and the loss of an asset of value to the Highland economy.

Robust financial arrangements will need to be put in place to ensure that there is equality of access for each forestry owner.

Recommendation

1. Members are asked to note the report.

Risk	Impact	Comment
RTS delivery	√	This project fits well with a number of RTS Horizontal themes.
Policy	√	This project has integration and environmental benefits.
Financial	√	This project is fully funded
Equality	-	No impact on equalities issues.

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