

The Highland Council
Community Services Committee
6 November 2014

Agenda Item	16
Report No	COM 42/14

Strategic Timber Transport Scheme Bids

Report by Director of Community Services

Summary

This report invites the Committee to note the submission of recent applications for funding to the Strategic Timber Transport Fund (STTF), and details the range of projects supported through the fund.

The report invites the Committee to approve that representations are made through the Forestry Commission, the Timber Transport Forum or COSLA, as appropriate, for the Scottish Government to continue the funding of the Strategic Timber Transport Fund beyond March 2016.

1. Introduction

- 1.1 Forestry is an expanding rural industry that brings significant economic benefits to the Highlands. However the increasing rate of extraction of timber requires to be managed carefully to minimise damage to the public road network.
- 1.2 In a number of cases forests were planted without any real thought being given to the extraction route, the expectation being that the road network would be improved in the years to come. In addition, haulage vehicles are much larger, longer and heavier than they were at time of planting, with 44 tonne vehicles now being the norm. This has and will continue to present problems with the harvesting of timber and getting it from remote glens to market.

2. Classification of Routes for Timber Extraction

- 2.1 In order to minimise any damage to the road network from timber extraction, Councils across Scotland and the industry through the Local Timber Transport Groups have agreed a classification system of routes for timber extraction. These are currently shown on the Agreed Route Maps which can be found on the Forestry Commission website:

<http://maps.forestry.gov.uk/imf/imf.jsp?site=TTAR>
- 2.2 The following definitions are used to classify roads on the Agreed Route Maps for the Highland area, as detailed on the Timber Transport Forum website (note, a fourth classification – Severely Restricted – is not used in the Highland area):

<http://www.timbertransportforum.org.uk/AgreedRouteMaps/?pid=4>

- **Agreed Routes (Red).** Those which can be used for timber haulage without restriction as regulated by the Road Traffic Act 1988. “A” Class roads are classified as Agreed Routes unless covered by one of the other Timber Transport Group Classifications (e.g. Consultation Route)
- **Consultation Routes (Yellow).** 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 and allowable tonnage before the route can be used. B Roads and minor roads are classified as Consultation routes unless covered by one of the other Timber Transport Group Classifications.
- **Excluded Routes (Blue).** Those routes that should not be used for timber transport in their present condition. These routes are either formally restricted, or are close to being formally restricted, to protect the network from incurring damage from loads. Consultation with the Local Authority is required to explore alternatives.

2.3 Given the importance of timber production in the local and national context it is difficult for the Council, as Roads Authority, to insist on the timber industry carrying out improvements to roads. However, by negotiation and use of the opportunity provided by the Strategic Timber Transport Fund, we have been successful in obtaining contributions for a number of road improvements as well as persuading operators to use other methods to minimise damage to the road network.

3. Strategic Timber Transport Fund

3.1 The Strategic Timber Transport Fund (STTF) was set up by the Scottish Government in 2005 in recognition of the challenge faced in getting timber to market. It is administered by the Forestry Commission Scotland in order “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 monies available through innovative projects and partnerships”.

3.2 The scheme is open to Local Authorities and private forestry companies to submit bids for timber transport. Projects can involve enhancement of public roads carrying timber or support sea transport, rail transport and in-forest routes as alternatives to using the public road network. Study projects are also supported as are project officers who assist in coordinating bids and undertake development work.

3.3 The Fund has in previous years provided a total of some £3.8M in the Highlands, allowing delivery of projects with total value of £8.3M including in-forest links, new and upgraded public road bridges, road widening and strengthening as well as assisting with exceptional winter road damage. The intervention rate has generally been about 50%, but has been as high as 80% for exceptional projects, with the balance being met by the private sector, FCS

or the Council in the case of public roads. **Appendix A** provides a list of all STTS funded schemes in the Highlands.

3.4 Projects are assessed on a competitive pan-Scotland basis and the Council, through its membership of the Highland Timber Transport Group, has worked closely with the private sector and forest industry to deliver these major benefits to the Highlands.

4. Projects Funded in Highland in the 2012/13 to 2014/15 STTS funding rounds.

4.1 Projects in the Highlands totalling £6 million have been awarded a total of £2.8M of funding since April 2012. This is made up of contributions of £1.3M from the Council via the strategic use of previously allocated funding, £4.7M from the STTF, Forestry Commission Scotland and the private sector:

- South Loch Ness: £2.4M series of improvements to the B862 and B851 roads running south of Loch Ness between Fort Augustus on the A82 and Daviot on the A9. This will improve access for timber extraction as well as providing a welcome alternative to the A82 for tourism and at times when the Trunk Road is closed. A combination of Council, renewable contribution and STTS funding provides a unique opportunity to deliver this key project.
- Applecross upgrade: £202k road improvement scheme to facilitate timber extraction.
- B871 Bridges: £52K bridge replacement of two bridges over watercourses.
- Braerhour Link Road: £350K scheme providing in-forest bypass to public road.
- Cannich to Fasnakyle: £180k of widening and improvements to this key timber extraction and tourist route to Glen Affric.
- Loch Arkaig: £2.2M major partnership project to enable currently landlocked timber to come out of maturing forests along, and to the west of, Loch Arkaig in Lochaber. Using Council capital funding already programmed for the B8005 it was possible to lever funding from the private sector and STTS to deliver a series of culvert and bridge replacements and improvements, road strengthening and minor widening. It also included a car park at the road end in an area popular with hill walkers. Use of an existing in-forest link on the north side of the loch, combined with low ground pressure trucks minimised the extent of work needed.
- A897 Drainage: £50K road drainage improvement scheme.
- Strath Carron: £70k road improvement scheme to facilitate timber extraction.

- Killiechonate, Lochaber: £0.53M private sector project involves construction of a new bridge over the River Cour and link roads to enable substantial volumes of timber to be taken in-forest through Leanachan Forest to join the A82 via the Aonach Mor access road.
- A897 Melvich Forsinain: £19k survey and strategy development work to help decide how best to manage timber traffic from the Flow Country.
- Highland Timber Transport Group: Running cost shared between the Council, FCS and the private sector ensured the HTTG and its part-time Project Officer can continue to develop projects until 2014/15.

5. Highland Projects submitted for 2015/16 STTS funding.

- 5.1 A further round of bids for funding is currently underway. For the Highlands, five bids were submitted to the Forestry Commission Scotland by 24 September 2014. It is expected funding allocations will be announced by 13 November 2014.
- 5.2 In the Highlands, two bids for 2015/16 funding have been submitted by Highland Council, a third by the Highland Timber Transport Group, the fourth by HITRANS and the fifth by a forestry company.
- 5.3 The pool of Government funding available for 2015/16 is about £2M. There is also some funding available in 2014/15 for schemes that could commence early.
- 5.4 The Council scheme for the replacement of Ruthven Bridge, which currently has a 3 tonne weight restriction, is applying for £250K grant funding (25%). This scheme could commence in 2014/15 if the application is successful.
- 5.5 The Council has also submitted a scheme for improvement of the Flow Country Timber Links – A897, Helmsdale to Melvick and the B871 Kinbrace to Syre. The scheme is £1.095M scheme with 75% grant funding with delivery in 2015/16. Officers were invited to interview by the Forestry Commission Panel on 28th Oct 2014.
- 5.6 There are 2M tonnes of timber to be extracted from the Flow County over the next 10 to 15 years. To enable this alternatives to road haulage will also need to be developed.
- 5.7 On behalf of the HTTG and the Council, HITRANS have submitted a complementary bid for trialling the transfer of timber to rail in 2015/16.

6. Future actions

- 6.1 The Fund has been of great benefit to the Highlands in dealing with timber transport problems but many issues remain to be solved. Projects take time to develop and deliver and it would be helpful to be assured that a funding stream was available beyond 2015/16.

6.2 Within the Highlands there are several timber extraction sites where successful bids to future STTS funding would avoid damage to the public road whilst facilitating commercial extraction of timber.

6.3 To support timber transport beyond March 2016, Members are invited to approve representations being made, through the Forestry Commission, Timber Transport Forum, or CoSLA as appropriate, for a continuation of funding.

7. Implications

7.1 As yet no resource; legal; equalities; climate change/carbon clever; risk, Gaelic or rural implications have been identified arising directly from this report.

7.2 Risk implications: If in-forest and on road improvements cannot be supported through future STTS funding and timber extraction continues via the public road, the cost of repairs will greatly exceed the value of the contribution requested.

Recommendations

The Committee is invited to:

- i) note the submission of recent applications for funding to the Strategic Timber Transport Fund; and
- ii) agree that representation is made, through the Forestry Commission, the Timber Transport Forum, or COLSA as appropriate for the Scottish Government to continue the funding of the Strategic Timber Transport Scheme Fund beyond March 2016.

Designation: Director of Community Services

Date: 23 Oct 2014

Author: Robin Pope

Appendix A

Strategic Timber Transport Fund Supported Projects						
Project Title	Lead Partner	Application Date	Overall Value(£)	Amount Awarded(£)	Scheme Type	Current Position
Flow County Timber Links	Highland Council	Bid Sept 2014	1,095,694	Bid for 805,694	Public Road	Bid stage
Ruthven Bridge	Highland Council	Bid Sept 2014	1,000,000	Bid for 250,000	Public Road	Bid stage
Branchliner - Flow County Rail Project	HiTRANS	Bid Sept 2014	1,253,830	Bid for 508,830	Timber to rail	Bid stage
Highland TTG Officer	Highland Timber Transport Group	Bid Sept 2014	40,000	Bid for 20,000	Support	Bid stage
Inventory Management	Scottish Woodlands	Bid Sept 2014	19,900	Bid for 12,540	Support	Bid stage
Applecross Upgrade	Highland Council	29.08.2014	202,000	100,000	Public Road	Active
B871 Bridges	Highland Council	30.08.2013	52,000	26,000	Public Road	Active
Braehour Link Road	Summerleaze/FCS	16.11.2012	349,900	174,950	InForest Route	Active
Strath Carron	Scottish Woodlands	16.11.2012	70,000	33,011	Public Road	Complete
A897 Drainage	Highland Council	12.11.2012	50,000	25,000	Public Road	Complete
C1110 Fasnakyle - Cannich Ph 2	Highland Council	13.04.2012	180,000	90,000	Public Road	Active
Loch Arkaig TTIP	Scottish Woodlands	13.04.2012	2,216,500	900,000	Public Road	Active
South Loch Ness	Highland Council	13.04.2012	2,355,600	1,177,800	Public Road	Active
Highland TTG Officer	Highland Council	13.04.2012	120,000	60,000	Support	Active
Leanachan/Killichonate In Forest Route	Killiechonate Estate	13.04.2012	346,919	173,459	InForest Route	Complete
A897 Melvich - Forsinain Farm Route Assessment	Highland Council	13.04.2012	19,320	9,660	Support	Complete
B871 Passing Places	Highland Council	28.02.2011	29,400	14,700	Public Road	Complete
Logie Bridge	Highland Council	28.02.2011	437,133	97,140	Public Road	Complete
Altnabreac Flow Country Strategy	Highland Council	28.02.2011	13,162	7,897	Support	Complete
Highland TTG Officer	Highland Council	28.02.2011	33,600	16,800	Support	Complete
Roundwood by Rail	J G Russell	28.02.2011	45,673	29,687	Rail	Complete
West Inverness	Highland Council	14.02.2011	79,638	39,488	Public Road Extreme Winter	Complete
Flow Country	Highland Council	14.02.2011	50,000	25,000		Complete
A837 Oykel Bridge	Highland Council	14.02.2011	50,000	25,000		Complete
Highland Winter Road Damage Project	Highland Council	01.02.2010	100,000	45,000		Complete
Highland TTG Officer	Highland Council	28.10.2008	78,304	39,152	Support	Complete
Tomdoun Link Road	J Robin Dixon	14.01.2008	293,020	117,208	InForest Route	Complete
A897 Partnership	Highland Council	31.08.2007	409,707	327,771	Public Road	Complete
Rathad-Mara	Scottish Woodlands	26.11.2006	285,871	189,499	Sea	Complete
Timber Transport Strategy & Solutions	FE/HTTG	09.06.2006	64,800	43,333	Support	Complete
Fersit Road, Lochaber	Highland Council	09.06.2006	430,581	64,946	Public Road	Complete