Item:
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Report to Partnership Meeting 4 September 2015

RESEARCH AND STRATEGY DELIVERY

BRANCHLINER

Purpose of Report

This report provides Members with information on the Branchliner project.

Work Packages

HITRANS has engaged a team of separate consultants to cover the following Work Packages:

- WP1 Civil engineering: terminal design, improvements
- WP2 Rail operations: procurement, wagons, haulage, pathing, possessions
- WP3 Road logistics: trip to and from terminals, roadspace allocation
- WP4 Product supply: harvesting, loading to rail, off loading
- WP5 Facilitation: promoting and establishing the alliance
- WP6 Economic case: establishing the value of timber to the Highland economy
- WP7 Environmental assessment: impact of mode shift

WP1 Civil engineering: terminal design, improvements - D Binns Ltd

This element of the report will be based on options for lineside loading and fixed sidings with reference to non-intrusive crossover system option. Options will be shown on plans which will be produced by overlaying layout on either topographic or ordnance survey plans. Requirements for road access, loading plant and stacking areas will be scoped.

Optimum land requirements with indicative earthworks will be established. Indicative methods of yard operation will be considered in conjunction with other consultants' input. A key output will be an initial estimate for construction costs. An updated topographic survey may be required.

WP2 Rail operations: procurement, wagons, haulage, pathing, possessions - Deltix

The requirement is to provide technical expertise, to liaise with freight operators, to assess wagon type etc, to optimise the current terminal, and to investigate new ways of working including alternative types of railhead.

Key outputs are required within five weeks of start of work, to help stakeholders decide the viability of the project. The key immediate demand context is over 325,000 tonnes of windblow timber, within a 10-15 year programme for movement of 4m tonnes of timber from the wider Flow Country to distant markets (Inverness and beyond).

On the supply side, consideration is to be given to three alternative types of railhead – lineside loading, semi-permanent sidings connection using the Non-Intrusive Crossover (NICS), and permanent sidings using conventional connection.

WP3 Road logistics: trip to and from terminals, roadspace allocation- Arvikaconsult

This will begin with a preliminary desk review of key issues.

An overview of The Highland Council's condition assessment of the roads in the area will be taken, and potential timber traffic limits and road sections of concern will be identified. Future methods of road condition assessment will be explored.

The current road transport situation (e.g. in light of possible weight limit imposition) and potential economic and other impacts and risks) will be assessed, alongside an overview on alternative road transportation methods.

Options for road space allocation will be identified which will require discussion with THC, suppliers and haulier following a desk review on available traffic permits systems/methods of allocating road space. Options for monitoring subsequent road haulage will considered.

WP4 Product supply: harvesting, loading to rail, off-loading - C Piper and WP5 Facilitation: promoting and establishing the alliance - C Piper

WPs 4 and 5, will involve the following:

A preliminary desk review of issues, constraints and opportunities, the historical context and the strategic/key political context.

An overview of information on current and future timber availability/supply within the Project Area, including the position with windblown timber.

An overview of key industry players and woodland ownerships, within the Project Area (eg national forest estate v private, absentee v resident, area of forest on market, wind farm proposals etc.).

Consultation with a sample of key industry players (owners, agents and representative bodies including ConFor, UKFP, to gauge issues/positions.

Identification of possible short and longer term strategies for maintaining harvesting streams, including any modal shifts in approach to harvesting, marketing and timber transport within the Project Area, together with closer partnership working.

Assessment of the feasibility of achieving financial parity between on-road and on-rail timber transport options, including a review of the relative costs. Identify barriers and constraints and opportunities for mitigating /overcoming these.

Outline recommendations for setting up a centralized and independent mechanism to co-ordinate and strengthen alliances etc., to facilitate implementation of shorter and longer terms solutions.

Recommendations as to next steps in establishing and promoting the above alliance and gaining necessary support at political and industry levels.

WP6 Economic case: establishing the value of timber to the Highland economy- tbc

Timber, standing and windblown, has a low value in the Flow Country but is a resource of great value when transported to the Inner Moray Firth for processing. This piece of work will consider the wider economic benefits to the area including the employment impacts of the supply chain.

WP7 Environmental assessment: impact of mode shift- TRI Napier

TRI Napier have been appointed to carry out an environmental assessment which will monetise the value of mode shift to rail for the product. This will be similar in format to the work carried out for Lifting the Spirit.

Progress

The team will be assembling at Lairg for an inception meeting followed by site visits to the Flow Country and debrief on 26 August. SSTS and FCS officials will be meeting HITRANS in Lairg on 7 September.

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.

Report by: Frank Roach
Designation: Partnership Manager
Date: 25th August 2015

Annexe

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. 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.