

Ballyoukan Timber Haulage Options

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Introduction

The Ballyoukan plantation is reaching maturity with increasing urgency to begin forest management activities due to the scale of the site and current conditions. The forest is split into seven ownerships, with a single shared access route. The attached maps show the existing access (3a) and the work carried out on the ground to look for suitable alternatives. Below is a summary, with reference to map letters, of each of the timber haulage access options.

1

- Access option 1 is an existing track across neighbouring land that would involve upgrading 1a from the existing hill track to a forest road specification.
- The bridge at the crossing point over the *Edradour Burn* would also need to be replaced.
- There is a reasonable gradient along most of the track with some small sections that would require extensions to the bends to reduce the gradient.
- This route would be safe to use throughout the year which would allow for timber haulage operations to be spread throughout the year. This would involve 2,317m of upgrades (1a) and a 632m section of new forest road (1b) where the existing track ends, in through an existing ride in Ballyoukan Forest to meet the internal forest road.
- The landowner has given permission in principle for access across their property.
- The track is largely hidden by the topography which would reduce the visual impact of this haulage option.
- This route would also mean the timber would come straight out onto the A924 which is an agreed route suitable for timber haulage, and to go north would only need to pass through the less busy northern end of Pitlochry.
- The land is owned by Athol Estates and they have indicated that they are favourable to a route being taken across their ground.
- Out with the Ballyoukan boundary, the route is within the Forest of Clunie SPA, which is designated for *Hen Harrier, Merlin, Osprey and Short-eared Owl*. A bird survey commissioned and carried out in 2020 suggested a negligible-to-no impact on breeding birds and habitats from the works.

2

- Access option 2 involves timber haulage through a busy commercial yard to the west of Ballyoukan. There is an existing road adjoining the public road (2a) which fades to a formation (2b), and a new section would be required in through an existing ride which is particularly wet (2c).
- The access has some steep sections and the public road to the south is not suitable for haulage as it exceeds acceptable haulage gradients and does not meet current road width requirements, with blind corners and a long stretch of residential areas.
- Haulage would therefore have to go north which would involve crossing the narrow bridge at the popular tourist spot Edradour Distillery and up round a steep and narrow 'N' bend.

- There is also an increased pedestrian risk around the distillery with the visitor centre and the carpark on either side of the public road meaning visitors to the distillery need to cross the public road when moving from the car park to the visitor centre.
- Although initially interested when approached, the owner at Donavoured has not given permission and would not like to see a haulage route through his busy yard and passed his house.

3

- The current route from Ballyoukan to the public road network is unsuitable for timber transport due to several sensitivities. The current access (3a) is a 1,427m tarmacked section to the top of the hill before meeting a 430m section that would require resurfacing (3b).
- Although suitable for light vehicles, the tarmacked access traverses 765m of shared residential private way, with excessive gradients, blind corners, hidden driveways, soft verges, and minimal laybys (which are currently only usable for light vehicles, and only on the top half of the road).
- The access is structurally vulnerable to HGV usage, directly adjacent to watercourses and does not meet current timber haulage road width standards, particularly at bends.
- There is no pedestrian pavement which increases the unsafe nature of this haulage option and the road is bounded by sections of retaining wall which are structurally unsound.
- This route feeds onto the vulnerable *General Wade's Military Road* (6c), and onto unfavourable junctions in either direction for accessing the A9. The haulage route would therefore be required to cross under the low railway bridge at East Haugh and be required to move through the length of Pitlochry.
- Initial assessments suggest the tarmacked access would require significant modifications to allow timber haulage, but this would not reduce the steep sections or the risk to the public. Even with significant modifications the road would not be suitable, only passable.
- The road can be unsafe for light vehicles during the winter and sometimes even during heavy rain: restricting the appropriate timings for timber haulage and likely significantly increasing the frequency of lorries when haulage is suitable.
- The access onto *General Wade's Military Road* is also very narrow and could likely prove difficult to negotiate. The line of sight from here is not adequate for the manoeuvres required to exit the road end at Ballyoukan, and therefore poses a danger to oncoming traffic.

4

- Access option 4 would require access across neighbouring land to the southwest of Ballyoukan at Knockdarroch. There is a 754m existing length of track (4a). A further 1,104m section of new road would be required to tie into the Ballyoukan complex (4b).
- The land above the existing track is steep and the ownership is narrow so would require a lot of groundworks and bends in the road to keep to the required gradient.
- The existing track is also steep and narrow and would require significant upgrades.

- Although initially interested when approached, the owner has not given permission and does not wish to have the land used as a through road to Ballyoukan as it would pass right by the house and the land is currently used for quad biking and other outdoor activities. Lorries would again be emerging onto the vulnerable *General Wade's Military Road (6c)* as previously detailed.

5

- Access option 5 would see timber being hauled from the southeast corner of Ballyoukan, requiring access across multiple ownerships. There is an existing track (5b) but 769m of new forest road would need to be created through the wood (5d) to join in with the internal spine road accesses, followed by a 767m section (5c) to link the wood to the existing track.
- Construction within the southeast corner of the forest would require a new crossing point and SEPA approval for the watercourse running through this area.
- The new section out on the open hill (5c) would have to cross a section of the SPA which has had no previous disturbance, and over land that has large areas of peat bogs throughout: likely requiring floating sections of new road.
- The existing track exceeds acceptable gradients for timber haulage and so it would need to be re-aligned as well as requiring significant upgrades.
- There is then a tarmacked section (5a) through a farm steading before coming out onto the public road. This section of public road (6a) exceeds gradient and does not meet road width requirements or have a sufficient turning radius for significant timber haulage as expected from Ballyoukan (6b).
- Lorries would again be emerging onto the vulnerable *General Wade's Military Road (6c)* as previously detailed. Crossing multiple ownerships here would also make this difficult to negotiate access.

7

- The final access option (7) would be to take all the timber out of the northeast end of Ballyoukan, across the SPA, and into Kindrogan forest to the east. 1,203m of new roading would be required through Ballyoukan Forest including two new larger water crossings (7a) requiring SEPA approval, and a further 1,121m section of new forest road across the SPA into Kindrogan (7b). Crossing this area would require floating any new roads as it is very soft.
- Similar to strategic timber haulage routes used to avoid haulage on the public road systems, there are several risks and challenges would need to be agreed among multiple parties.
- The period available for timber haulage will be reduced if the main forest haulage route was at this higher altitude, and in an area that has much greater exposure to the weather.
- If haulage were to be agreed through Kindrogan, timber would have a 7km haulage route through the wood after having left Ballyoukan and crossing the SPA.
- Further rights of access would need to be agreed with the owner of the bridge that joins the public road as well. Once again crossing multiple ownerships here would also make this difficult to negotiate access.

8

- The existing internal roads in Ballyoukan require upgrade works to allow for timber haulage (8). The scale required here has also been considered with reference to the potential for a new formal access into the complex as it will allow for less roading works within the plantation if for example access option 1 materialised.
- The other accesses would require haulage entrances and exits to the bottom or top of the property, and thus the whole internal forest road span would be required for upgrade, plus any additional lengths created, to allow for timber haulage to commence economically.
- Environmental surveys commissioned in 2020 suggested a negligible impact from upgrading the internal forestry road network.

Conclusions

Following a preliminary review of information and initial feedback from stakeholders, haulage option 1 is the preferred route as it represents the least level of impact and is least constrained across a range of environmental receptors. Other routes pose greater environmental implications such as impacts on the peat bogs and SPA habitat, topography and landscape, and the potential for a social impact on people and public health, negative impacts on the popular tourist town of Pitlochry or using unsuitable haul routes to transfer large volumes of timber: pursuing route 1 would benefit the public road network and the protect the various local communities at risk.