

Ballyoukan Timber Haulage Brief

Summary

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. There are an estimated 120,000 tonnes of timber to be harvested in the next 10 years, resulting in an estimated 4,800 loads of timber entering the public road network: equating to approximately 10,000 lorry movements.

The current route to the public road network is unsuitable for timber transport due to several sensitivities, thus alternative accesses are being considered by all parties involved. 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.

Following a preliminary review of information and initial feedback from stakeholders, the preferred alternative appears to represent the least level of impact and is least constrained across a range of receptors. This is the alternative haulage option currently being pursued. Support through the Strategic Timber Transport Scheme is also being sought as the preferred alternative would benefit the public road network and the community of Pitlochry.

Options Considered

Existing Access (Route Option 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 (*Figure 1*), soft verges, and minimal laybys (which are currently only usable for light vehicles, and only on the top half of the road).
- The route exceeds recommended gradients (*Figure 2*), and visibility is poor due to numerous blind corners (*Figure 3*).
- The access is structurally vulnerable for HGV usage, as it is directly adjacent to watercourses (*Figure 4*) and does not meet recommended timber haulage road width (*Figure 5*), particularly at bends.
- There are no footpaths for the daily pedestrian usage. This increases the unsafe nature of this haulage option, and the road is bounded by sections of retaining wall which are structurally unsound (*Figure 4*).
- This route feeds onto the sensitive *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 more suitable.
- To achieve the expected timber extraction, an average of 20 lorry movements per week, per year would be expected. However, this would be considerably increased during a significantly shorter acceptable hauling period.
- The access onto *General Wade's Military Road* is also very narrow and could likely prove difficult to negotiate. Visibility is not adequate for exiting the road end at Ballyoukan, and therefore poses a danger to oncoming traffic (*Figure 6*).
- This haulage route joins the A9 at a poorly designed, unfavourable junction, without the option to turn left.
- An initial assessment suggested that the road could be made passable for some configurations of HGVs, for example, wagon and drag. This however would require significant modifications to the existing road. These modifications are detailed on the appended map *Ballyoukan Current Road Upgrades 20-21*; and *Ballyoukan Current Road Upgrades Bill of Quantities 20-21*. A primary Scottish Woodlands Ltd haulier has since visited the existing access road and shared their concerns. These can be found in the associated document *Ballyoukan Forest – Haulier Visit*.



Figure 1. Hidden driveways: one on the left and one on the right pictured



Figure 2. Lengths of road with excessive gradients



Figure 3. Blind corners



Figure 4. Adjacency to the watercourse and structurally unsound retaining walls



Figure 5. Road width does not meet recommended width for timber haulage



Figure 6. Narrow site entrance and inadequate visibility

Preferred Alternative (Route Option 1)

Access across the neighbouring land on Atholl Estates, pending agreement with all parties, is the preferred haulage route for Ballyoukan (map letter 1).

- This is an existing track across neighbouring land that would involve upgrading 1a from the existing hill track to a forest road specification.
- The low weight bridge at the *Edradour Burn* crossing point would also need to be replaced.
- There is a reasonable gradient along most of the track with some small sections that would require widening and lengthening 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 (*Figure 7*). The existing entrance point has good visibility, and to go north would only need to pass through the less busy northern end of Pitlochry.
- The land is owned by Atholl 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.



Figure 7. Bellmouth of preferred alternative

Second Alternative (Route Option 4)

Access across the neighbouring land at Knockdarroch.

- 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 and requires extensive groundworks to the route to adhere to the recommended 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.

Third Alternative (Route Option 2)

Access across the neighbouring land to the west at Donavourd.

- 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 several steep sections and the public road to the south is not suitable for haulage as it exceeds recommended gradients and does not meet current road width requirements, with poor visibility on bends and adjacent to a long stretch of residential properties.
- 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 (*Figure 8*).
- 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 (*Figure 9*). Haulage would also be the most frequent during the peak tourist season.
- Although initially interested when approached, the owner at Donavourd has not given permission and would not like to see a haulage route through his busy yard and passed his house.



Figure 8. Mid 'N' bend approaching a sharp and steep left turn



Figure 9. Public road through Edradour Distillery and carpark

Fourth Alternative (Route Option 5)

- Access across neighbouring land to southeast through Tomnauld Farm.
- Access option 5 involves 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 construction on several sections of new road.
- The existing track exceeds recommended gradients for timber haulage, requiring re-alignment and significant upgrade.
- 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 the recommended gradient and does not meet the recommended 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.

Fifth Alternative (Route Option 7)

Access through Kindrogan, the neighbouring plantation.

- 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 road construction 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.

Key Issues

- Designated sites/Protected species/sensitive habitats
- Material assets (land ownership), including public roads
- Road safety for hauliers and local traffic
- Variation in the time of year available for haulage
- Nuisance & tourist impacts
- Public safety
- Rural economy (Ballyoukan Plantation will contribute an estimated 175,000 tonnes of timber to the forestry sector during its first rotation)

Early Stage Consultation

Ballyoukan plantation landowners have been involved in continuing discussion since January 2018, however concerns had been raised by Scottish Woodlands and the owners prior to this to determine a feasible way to manage their forest at a landscape scale cooperatively. In 2010 windblow was cleared and extracted by tractor and trailer. This was seen as the only suitable option at the time given the condition of the existing road; and it is not a suitable option for the volume of timber estimated to be extracted over the next 10 years. To date all landowners have agreed an alternative haulage route would be preferred to the existing route and have come together with the same solicitor to negotiate a wayleave in principle across the land to the west of Ballyoukan, owned by Atholl Estates.

Local residents and the Community Council were invited to consider and respond to the proposal to haul timber along the existing route which prompted Scottish Woodlands to investigate alternative access routes. Feedback from this exercise carried out in February 2020 is summarised below, along with early-stage feedback from other statutory stakeholders. No formal consultation exercise has yet taken place due to the ongoing agreements being sought to access neighbouring property.

NatureScot were consulted in March 2021 to express the challenges with the current access and that Scottish Woodlands were looking to upgrade a hill track and an additional section of new forest road to operate as the main timber haulage route for the Ballyoukan complex. It was expressed that this would involve crossing the SPA to which NatureScot's main concern was the new section of road as this would permanently remove forage habitat for the bird species for which the site is designated, and that this would be an environmental constraint on the proposed works. The other concern given from NatureScot was the increased disturbance that would result from the timber haulage process. The concerns raised are to be investigated further but we have carried out a preliminary bird survey between March and July 2020: this is detailed under the heading *Assessment of Issues* heading.

An early-stage informal discussion with the local Timber Transport Officer in May 2021, following discussions previously had with Scottish Woodlands, suggested that there was support for our preferred alternative. It was suggested that being able to take timber traffic of this magnitude away from Pitlochry, and any other residential and tourist areas, indicated a positive alternative. Comments of reservation were made with regards to timber traffic moving across the narrow bridge through Edradour Distillery. Follow up contact has since been made with regards to the considered options and we have received the following feedback:

- The public roads along the southern end of the forest complex serve a number of residential properties and businesses (including tourist accommodation and attractions), are, in places, of limited width and restricted geometry, of steep gradient and on tight bends. *General Wade's Military Road* includes a bridge under the railway with a height restriction of 4.7m. These roads are currently classified as Consultation Routes under the Agreed Routes Map system and so would require discussion with Perth & Kinross Council prior to the commencement of timber haulage to agree any suitable measures required for the management of the haulage operations (reduced frequency of loads, lorry and trailer configuration, seasonal restrictions, and community engagement). These Consultation Routes would need to be used to reach the A9 or A924, both of which are Agreed Routes under the Agreed Route Map system.
- Any proposal which would reduce or remove significant levels of timber traffic from Consultation Route(s) or roads serving local communities and businesses and can provide a more direct way of reaching an Agreed Route, would be favourable as this would help to reduce disruption and congestion to other road users, improve safety, and lessen damage to the public road network.
- The link road proposed at Ballyoukan (route 1) would result in the removal of timber traffic from the Consultation Routes to the south of the complex and by doing so, around residential properties and tourist sites. It would also take timber lorries directly onto the A924 from where they would travel along this Agreed Route to reach the A9 trunk road or the A93, another Agreed Route.

Consultation with the local roads officer and chair of the Stirling & Tayside Timber Transport Group has been carried out. The haulage alternatives were presented, and the following feedback was received:

- Route option 1 would be the preferred haulage route as the timber lorries will be joining the public road network on an A class road which is an Agreed Route on the TTF Agreed Route Map. Although the public road is built on peaty subsoil, the road geometry and sightlines are good at this point. There may be a requirement for localised strengthening of the public road at the forest access to provide additional durability at this localised point where timber lorries are putting the highest stresses on the road structure.
- Any new access point would have to be constructed in accordance with the Perth and Kinross Council specification for new forest access points. There may also be a requirement for some road construction work to take place on the north side verge of the public road to consider the swept path of timber lorries using the new access.
- Perth and Kinross Council Road Maintenance Partnership do not have any plans for significant capital works to be carried out on this section of the A924 public road over the next two financial years – only some patching and surface dressing works.
- Route option 2 - The U165 Edradour public road is a single-track road with passing places along its northern section. The road is fragile and vulnerable to damage from HGV's and is a Consultation route on the TTF Agreed Route Map site. Road geometry and gradients are not good and there is a road bridge at Edradour Distillery which is challenging for HGVs to negotiate without hitting the bridge parapets. Pedestrian and vehicular traffic at distillery site car park is an additional risk to be factored in. Signage is already in place saying the road

unsuitable for HGVs. This route is not recommended for timber extraction from Ballyoukan forest.

- Route option 3 – This route is too steep and has poor access onto the C503 public road with limited visibility. Timber could not head Northwest on the C503 public road due to the height constraint at the railway bridge on the approach to the A9 slip roads. This route is not recommended for timber extraction from Ballyoukan forest.
- Route option 4 - This private route would need improved. It is narrow road with steep gradients means it is not recommended route for timber extraction from Ballyoukan forest.
- Route option 5 – This private road eventually joins the U164 Dalcaon public road which has poor geometry, poor sightlines and is of fragile construction and vulnerable to damage by HGVs. It is not recommended for timber extraction.
- Route option 7 – Predominantly in-forest roads tying into the C503 public road. Access onto the public road would need improved. The road is narrow road with steep gradients and is not a recommended route for timber extraction from Ballyoukan.
- In regards to route options 3,4,5 and 7, the C503 public road is of good construction as it was formerly the A9 trunk road, but timber could not travel northeast due to the height restriction constraint (4.7m) at the railway bridge on the approach to the A9 slip onto the southbound carriageway.

Four of the residents at Ballyoukan responded to the early due diligence consultation request raising a variety of sensitivities including the current delicate condition of the shared private way. They were concerned with the how narrow and steep it is; the insufficient sub-base material; the insufficient passing places; and unsuitable culvert structures for supporting HGV access. There were concerns raised as to the disruption caused by timber traffic on the nine households who use this route daily, and the significant safety implications that would be imposed to them of timber lorries accessing the site through this residential area. They also raised the point that an alternative route had been discussed many years ago due to the unsuitability of the shared road, as well as the junction with the public highway being too narrow for large vehicles to safely navigate. While visiting the site to measure the road for potential upgrades, one resident approached Scottish Woodland staff and made his concerns about the road being used for lorries very plain saying that if we attempted this we would 'have a fight on our hands' with the local people.

Assessment of Issues

Key Issues were assessed against each alternative to determine the level of significance associated with the proposals. This assessment involved an evaluation of sensitivity and an evaluation on the magnitude of the impact to result in an overall estimate of significance as indicated in the table below. This is a preliminary assessment as additional evaluation is ongoing. It does however represent why we have chosen to pursue further investigation into the preferred alternative.

Sensitivity represents the relative quantity of key issues present and the scale at which these will be affected by the proposal while magnitude of change represents the existing infrastructure and land use and the degree to which the proposal will change this.

ESTIMATING SIGNIFICANCE	HIGHLY SENSITIVE	MEDIUM SENSITIVITY	LOW SENSITIVITY	NEGLECTIBLE SENSITIVITY
HIGH MAGNITUDE OF CHANGE	Major	Major	Moderate	Minor
MEDIUM MAGNITUDE OF CHANGE	Major	Moderate	Minor	None
LOW MAGNITUDE OF CHANGE	Moderate	Minor	None	None
IMPERCEIVABLE MAGNITUDE OF CHANGE	Minor	None	None	None

Small areas of windblow were cleared in Ballyoukan in 2010 and the timber was extracted with a tractor and trailer via the existing road. Although this was a suitable solution at the time, and the only realistic option due to the configuration of the current access, it is not a suitable option for the volume of timber estimated to be extracted over the next 10 years.

A thorough walkover survey of the existing access road was carried out. A map and bill of quantities was generated to highlight the works required to make the road passable. The documents are appended: *Ballyoukan Current Road Upgrades 20-21*; and *Ballyoukan Current Road Upgrades Bill of Quantities 20-21*. An additional site visit carried out by a primary Scottish Woodlands Ltd haulier has since produced further feedback which is also appended: *Ballyoukan Forest – Haulier Visit*.

The preferred alternative provides the opportunity to enable timber haulage for a longer period during the year than the other alternatives could provide. This route would also reduce the impact on residential areas and allow the avoidance of popular tourist spots, while overall providing a better solution for the road network.

A breeding bird survey was commissioned by Scottish Woodlands in spring 2020 to assess the potential development impacts on breeding birds related to the preferred alternative. This comprised five visits between 17th March 2020 and 9th July 2020. The potential impacts identified were:

- Black Grouse
- Hen Harrier and short eared owl breeding.
- Other species such as mistle thrush, song thrush, raven, kestrel, and long eared owl.
- Habitat loss from the construction of the track.
- Disturbance to other breeding birds

From this, the significance of the impacts was assessed in the report as follows:

- Black Grouse – no impact, short term disturbance only
- Hen Harrier/Short-eared owl – no impact as a result of the track upgrade works
- Other species (mistle thrush, song thrush, raven, kestrel) – no impact from the development.
- Habitat loss – no significant habitat loss, impact on ground nesting birds negligible, if works carried out in October to February reduced likelihood of disturbance.
- Disturbance to other breeding birds – some disturbance, birds may begin to nest further away from the road as it is used.

Overall, the impact to the local bird populations is considered to be negligible. The following mitigation has been proposed:

- Checks to be carried out for nesting birds if trees are to be felled as part of the upgrade works.
- If works to the farm track are in the breeding season, a nesting bird check is to be done before work commences. These would only be valid for three days during peak times.
- The site should be re-surveyed if works have not commenced prior to the 9th of January 2022.

Findings

The following table demonstrates the overall sensitivities, magnitudes of impact and the estimated level of significance of each of the alternatives discussed above.

Option	Sensitivity	Magnitude of Impact	Estimated Level of Significance
Existing Access – Route Option 3	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate
Preferred Alternative – Route Option 1	Moderate	Low	Minor
Second Alternative – Route Option 4	Moderate	High	Major
Third Alternative – Route Option 2	High	High	Major
Fourth Alternative – Route Option 5	High	High	Major
Fifth Alternative – Route Option 7	Moderate	High	Major

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 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. Following initial discussions and given the points made above from the local timber transport officer, and the roads officer and chair of the Stirling & Tayside Timber Transport Group, we have further stakeholder support for the preferred across the land Atholl Estates.