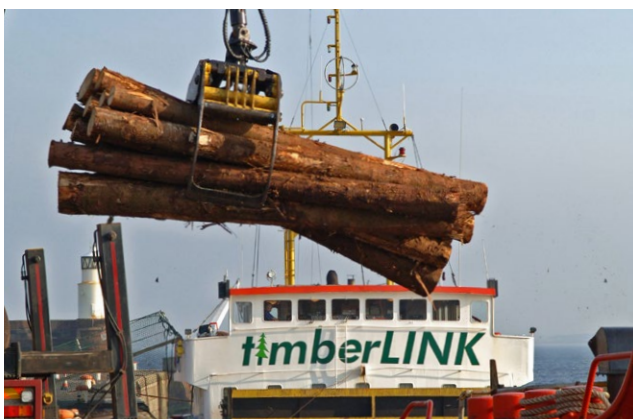




Improving timber transport case study

Timberlink

What?	A public service contract to support short-sea coastal shipping of roundwood from Argyll to Ayrshire
When?	2000 onwards
Where?	Argyll and Ayrshire
Who?	Associated British Ports, Ayrshire timber processors, Argyll forest owners
How much?	A maximum STTF contribution of £1 000 000 per year
Timber tonnage	85 000–110 000 tonnes per year



Timberlink is a public service contract funded by the Scottish Government through Forestry Commission Scotland to transport roundwood from forests in Argyll to processors in Ayrshire, across the Clyde.

Argyll has around 30% forest cover and produces 15% of Scotland's timber. However, it has limited timber processing capacity and so most leaves the region to be processed in central Scotland and Ayrshire. It is a long road haul from Argyll to central Scotland, on roads that are less than ideal for heavy lorries. From Kintyre to the processors in Ayrshire is a distance of up to 168 miles. By sea, across the Firth of Clyde, it is only 50 miles. Although the distance is longer, road haulage remains significantly cheaper than inter-modal transport due to the multiple handling involved, short sea crossings and port charges.

There are environmental benefits from taking lorry traffic off rural trunk roads - reducing traffic congestion on the trunk roads and the associated impacts on air quality, noise and visual amenity along the route. The sea route also uses less fuel and produces fewer greenhouse gases.

The Timberlink service was started in 2000 by Associated British Ports (ABP) with a Freight Facilities Grant from Scottish Government, but longer-term revenue support was required for it to remain viable. In 2005 Forestry Commission Scotland received agreement from the European Commission for a public service contract, such as those used to support island

transport, to support a freight link across the Firth of Clyde. Timberlink was awarded up to £1m/year from the newly established Strategic Timber Transport Fund and the contract was won by Associated British Ports in October 2006. APB retained the contract in 2012 for a second period of up to five years.

The public service contract ensures that there is no additional cost from shipping the timber compared with the cheaper direct road haulage. To calculate the subsidy the Argyll forests are mapped and zoned by distance to their nearest port. Costs are determined for lorry haulage to the port, harbour dues, loading the boat, shipping to Troon, unloading and forwarding the logs by lorry to three or four specified processors. Comparable road haulage costs are collated from Forest Enterprise Scotland and private sector haulage contracts and the resulting payment rates are reviewed on a regular basis.

The boat makes eight or nine trips across the Clyde each month collecting roundwood from Campbeltown, Ardrishaig, Sandbank or Portavadie piers. The timber is delivered to Adam Wilson & Son in Troon, Egger Barony at Auchinleck and to UPM Caledonian and Alexander Mair & Sons in Irvine. The service is open to other processors in the vicinity.



Map showing route of timber transport across the Clyde.

The service requires good communication between those harvesting the forests, the hauliers, the boat operator, the harbour managers and the timber buyers. ABP charter the boat and contract loading services at the ports. Haulage from the forest is left to the timber buyers but ABP arrange the final leg of the journey from Troon to the processors. Good administration is vital to ensure each buyer's timber is identified, with a clear chain of custody and audit trail to show the calculation of the payments.

A 2010 review of the service found the environmental benefits of Timberlink to be very positive and that it continued to provide value for money. The service also attracts strong support from local people and visitors. However, while the service takes lorries off the trunk roads, it can put extra pressure on the local roads in Argyll. The current boat 'The Ayress' takes a cargo of around 1400 tonnes (56 lorry loads) but there is limited stacking space at some Argyll harbours. When the boat arrives there can be a rush of haulage to complete the load, which does have an impact on both the forest and the public roads leading to the ports.

The Argyll Timber Transport Group has been successful in attracting funding to upgrade some of the roads from forests to ports; meanwhile local hauliers are investing in lower impact timber lorries to use on particularly sensitive roads.

To date, the Timberlink service has mitigated the impact of over 1.3m tonnes of timber transport from the haulage roads between Argyll and Ayrshire. It has also underpinned significant investment in the Argyll ports which are now capable of servicing the shipping of timber to other destinations and promoting coastal shipping of other freight.

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