



DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORT
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Clive Whitmore Esq
Principal Private Secretary to
the Prime Minister
10 Downing Street
LONDON
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12 January 1981

Dear Clive,

EFFICIENCY IN CENTRAL GOVERNMENT: THE SCRUTINY PROGRAMME 1981

Your letter of 1 December invited Ministers to put forward their proposals for the 1981 scrutiny programme.

My Secretary of State proposes that his next Rayner Study should cover the organisation of the Traffic Area Offices, particularly the number and boundaries of the Traffic Areas or at least whether in some cases one Chairman might be in charge of two Areas. He also proposes a study of the organisation and control of work, and expenditure on winter maintenance of trunk roads, but is not yet certain that this can be arranged in a form suitable for the Rayner programme. Provisional details of the two projects are annexed. If the latter proves to require too large an operation, he has it in mind to formulate a Rayner study of the Department's involvement in road signs.

Copies of this letter go to the recipients of your letter of 1 December.

Yours,

Anthony Mayer

R A J MAYER
Private Secretary

TRAFFIC AREA ORGANISATION

A. Subject.

It is proposed to review the number and boundaries of Traffic Area Offices in relation to the Offices' existing functions and known changes in prospect; to examine whether there would be advantage in an early realignment of traffic area boundaries [redacted] and whether (in this or other ways) the statutory functions can be discharged with fewer Chairmen.

B. Costs.

The costs of carrying out the policies etc relevant to Traffic Area Offices are not directly material to this review, for the reasons at * below.

C. Reasons for selecting the subject.

This is a worthwhile and manageable study which would be a suitable vehicle for looking at the efficiency with which the organisation discharges its functions, and which follows naturally from the Rayner scrutiny of the Department's regional office organisation.

D. Terms of reference.

Draft terms on the following lines are being considered:

"To examine the number of Traffic Areas, the areas covered by Traffic Area Offices and the scope for changing them, in the light of existing functions and of known changes in prospect; to examine whether in any case changes to boundaries are required, or whether any two Areas might be covered by one Chairman".

E. Proposed starting and finishing dates.

The assignment would start not later than 1 March 1981 and be completed within 90 working days.

F. Name of examining officer.

The scrutiny would be conducted by Miss A R Head, Assistant Secretary, Directorate of Manpower and Management Services. She would have access to the Chairmen of Traffic Commissioners and senior officials as necessary and would report to the Secretary of State for Transport.

BACKGROUND

1. Following Ministerial correspondence in 1980 about the possibilities of pursuing more widely the lessons drawn from "Rayner" scrutinies, DTp have been considering the scope for rationalisation in the Traffic Area Office (TAO) network.
2. There are 11 Traffic Areas covering Great Britain but the Scottish Area also has a sub-office at Aberdeen. For each Area the Secretary of State appoints (under the Road Traffic Acts) independent Traffic Commissioners with quasi-judicial licencing functions over public transport operators, drivers and vehicles. The Chairman of the Traffic Commissioners in each area is ex officio the Licensing Authority for that area with similar quasi-judicial functions concerning the carriage of goods by road.
3. The Chairmen are supported by DTp staff and resources. These are located in the Traffic Area Office and in several other kinds of DTp establishment in the Area (eg Driving Test Centres), which employ about 4,000 staff in all, but the great majority of these work wholly or partially on normal DTp functions for which the Chairmen have no specific statutory responsibility.
4. Aspects of TAO work are constantly reviewed; but, because of the heterogeneous functions and complex management lines, useful action has been less likely to result from broad reviews of the work than from concentration on specific matters which are capable of early change. A number of such matters have been reviewed (eg the use of mini-computers for processing licencing applications), and action is proceeding on them urgently. Another specific matter is the number and boundaries of the traffic areas, substantially unchanged since the 'thirties and not co-terminous with the standard regions or any other boundaries. They are not considered in the 1979 Management Review of the Department's Transport Licencing and Enforcement activity; and, although that Management Review looked at the Chairmen's functions in relation to those of departmental staff, it did not question the basic 11 element structure. These are the proposed subjects for the current review.

A. Subject.

Winter maintenance of trunk roads and motorways.

B. Cost.

The cost of this service, provided by local authorities and charged to the Department, fluctuates between £4 million and £9 million a year depending upon the severity of the winter.

C. Reasons for selecting the subject.

The cost of keeping trunk roads and motorways clear of ice and snow has risen in real terms during the last 5 years and the volume of road salt distributed is increasing. These increased resources do not appear to be matched by any discernible reduction in accident frequency on these roads in winter. There are marked differences between county councils in the management of labour, machinery and materials in providing this service with correspondingly wide variations in its cost. The Secretary of State for Transport announced on 19 December 1980, that he would be reviewing these arrangements with a view to securing the most cost effective measures of maintaining safety.

D. Terms of reference.

To examine the methods adopted by a representative sample of local authorities for the winter maintenance of trunk roads and motorways in England with a view to securing:

- i. the maximum economy and value for money, subject to the overriding needs of safety;
- ii. effective control over such expenditure;
- iii. a better understanding between the Department and its agent authorities.

Additionally, the study should examine the scope for alternative methods of providing this service including the deployment of private sector contractors.

E. Proposed time-scale.

About 3 months from March 1981.

F. Examining Officer and reporting arrangements.

A Principal and Principal-level civil engineer. Details yet to be finalised.