

Prime Minister

NOTE

Asked Tpt to
announce like the
3.30 if they did it on 22/5.

Agree that Mr Fowler
should announce ^{that the}
inquiry will go ahead?
Mr Heseltine (Flas A) is
content.

12
18/5

C O N F I D E N T I A L

PRIME MINISTER

There is great public and press interest in the issue of heavy lorries. The road haulage industry is strongly in favour of heavier lorries. Our predecessors announced an inquiry which would cover this issue within wide terms of reference. I would be very unwilling to go back on the idea of such an inquiry. The public (and party) criticism which we will encounter would be a serious embarrassment to us. We need to have the advantage of announcing the inquiry will proceed to prevent speculation growing in the next few days.

The one essential condition of the inquiry is that it should be manifestly impartial. There is genuine public concern about the environmental impact of heavy lorries. They seem to many people to be dangerous, too noisy, to pollute the air, and to be disruptive of the communities through which they travel. No one has taken an overall look at the impact of the lorry, which would provide the basis for decisions. There are no easy solutions where there are conflicts between economic costs and environmental improvements but we have to be sure that we do not sacrifice the efficiency of the road freight transport industry.

h

Spencer out

C O N F I D E N T I A L

C O N F I D E N T I A L

The focus of attention - and, indeed, the principal point on which to take a decision - is the maximum weight of lorries allowed on our roads, at present restricted to 32.5 tonnes. Other EEC countries have maximum weights of 38 tonnes or more, and the Commission is endeavouring to get agreement to a common scheme. The previous Government's policy was that no increase could be agreed unless it was fully satisfied this would be consistent with the needs of road safety and the environment. Some of the interests involved are suspicious of the motives of the Department, following the theft and publication last Autumn of an internal minute from which the Press inferred that the then Secretary of State was being advised to have an inquiry with narrow terms of reference rigged in favour of the hauliers. The chosen terms of reference were wide:

"To consider the causes and consequences of the growth in the movement of freight by road and, in particular, of the impact of the lorry on people and their environment; and to report on how best to ensure that future developments serve the public interest."

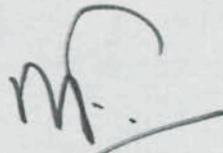
Such is the sensitivity of the subject, I think my best course is to keep the terms of reference unchanged but make it clear when I announce how and by whom my inquiry is to be conducted that I want the report quickly - say, by the end of this year - and that it must face squarely the question of lorry weights.

C O N F I D E N T I A L

C O N F I D E N T I A L

I am considering the best form for an inquiry - I see some advantage in one "wise man" with expert assessors - and names, and will put these forward shortly after the necessary interdepartmental consultations.

I am sending copies of this minute to Geoffrey Howe, Humphrey Atkins, Michael Heseltine, George Younger and Nicholas Edwards and to Sir John Hunt.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'NF' with a flourish underneath.

NORMAN FOWLER
15 May 1979

C O N F I D E N T I A L



15 MAY 1979

Transport



PRIME MINISTER

NBM

R 23/5

The Minister of Transport sent the Chancellor of the Exchequer a copy of his minute to you of 15 May on the proposed inquiry on the movement of freight by road.

2. There appears to be no clear-cut authoritative evidence on the economic impact of the heavy lorry (whether increases in industrial efficiency might be offset by the higher expenditure on road construction, road maintenance and other costs) let alone the social and environmental impact. An independent inquiry should help to ventilate the issues and give guidance on the right decision.

3. I therefore support the Minister of Transport's proposal to establish an inquiry with the same terms of reference as those announced by his predecessor. I also support the guidance he proposes to give to the inquiry.

I am sending copies of this minute to Humphrey Atkins, Michael Heseltine, George Younger, Nicholas Edwards, Norman Fowler and to Sir John Hunt.

W. J. B.

JOHN BIFFEN
22nd May 1979



1979



CONFIDENTIAL

Transport

b.c. Mr. James
Mr. Ryder



10 DOWNING STREET

From the Private Secretary

21 May 1979

HEAVY LORRIES INQUIRY

The Prime Minister has seen the Minister of Transport's minute of 15 May, and is content that he should go ahead as he proposes in that minute.

I subsequently spoke to your office, and was told that an announcement would be made by Written Answer tomorrow (Tuesday 22 May). I asked that the announcement should be made after 3.30 p.m. if it was to be made tomorrow.

I am copying this letter to Tony Battishill (H.M. Treasury), Joe Pilling (Northern Ireland Office), David Edmonds (Department of Environment), Kenneth MacKenzie (Scottish Office), George Craig (Welsh Office) and Martin Vile (Cabinet Office).

N. J. SANDERS

Mrs. E.C. Flanagan,
Department of Transport.

A large, stylized handwritten signature in the bottom right corner of the page.

CONFIDENTIAL

C O N F I D E N T I A L



Prime Minister

I have seen the Minister of Transport's minute to you of 15 May on the proposal for an inquiry into the issue of the lorry and its impact on the environment. I am generally opposed to enquiries which add little to already available knowledge, but in view of the history here and the tight timetable proposed by the Minister of Transport I agree with his proposals.

I entirely agree that the essential condition of the inquiry is that it should be impartial. We should be very vulnerable to criticism if the Inquiry team did not command the full respect of interested environmental groups and experts, as well as of the road freight transport industry.

I agree with the terms of reference proposed, and my officials will speak to those of the Minister of Transport about names.

I am sending a copy of this minute to Geoffrey Howe, Humphrey Atkins, Norman Fowler, George Younger and Nicholas Edwards and to Sir John Hunt.

WJH

MH

18 May 1979

C O N F I D E N T I A L

18 MAY 1979

12 1
11 2
10 3
9 4
8 5
7 6

