



DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORT  
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The Rt Hon William Whitelaw MP  
Home Secretary  
Home Office  
50 Queen Anne's Gate  
LONDON SW1

8 June 1979

*From Willie.*

I have seen the preliminary report that officials have prepared for you to send to the Prime Minister on the London Underground strike. I thought it would be helpful if I were to set out before our meeting on Tuesday my ideas about the general handling of the transport and fuel situation in the event of the strike taking place.

It will be important for us to avoid any appearance of intervening in the tactical position that exists between the LTE and the transport unions. We shall have to watch this point particularly carefully in our contingency planning.

*In fact he says v. little on fuel.*

If pressed to state what action I intend to take to resolve the dispute, I propose to make clear that it will be no part of the Government's policy to advise a local authority to go beyond its means in order to reach a pay settlement.

But the obvious aspect on which the public will expect us to have taken action is to ensure there are adequate fuel supplies in London during the period of the strike both for public transport operators, and for those for whom there is no alternative to travelling by car. I have written separately to David Howell about this, in the context of the general line I shall be taking about the need for energy conservation by motorists. Many of the steps I shall be recommending - car-sharing and sensible driving practices - will be highly relevant to easing any transport crisis in London.

The remarks I shall be making on this over the weekend should provide a useful context for any further practical advice I may be giving people about how to cope should the strike take place. I envisage this might cover a rather wider range of matters than officials in their report, on the lines

1. do not come into Central London unless absolutely necessary
2. through traffic should give it a wide berth
3. the freight industry should plan to avoid local London deliveries in this period, at least in normal working hours
4. if people are obliged to come in, they should use public transport - rail where it is available

5. if people have to drive in, then share cars and give lifts. I am anyway planning a publicity campaign on car-sharing in the general energy context, and will look at the timing of this in relation to 18 June

6. If at all possible, park outside the ring of main London termini.

Meanwhile there are some practical points of planning I am putting in hand

1. it is important that the Civil Service - a large employer in Central London, does everything possible not simply to minimise work disruption and inconvenience to staff; but also to ease the strain on London travel facilities. I am looking into this from the point of view of my own staff, but Paul Channon may want to consider a general initiative for all departments and perhaps Michael Heseltine would think it worth raising the corresponding point with the London local authorities.

2. as I have said in my letter to David Howell it is crucial to ensure London Transport buses and BR London services have adequate fuel supplies. There is also the wider question of fuel for motorists.

3. there may be a special problem with the Heathrow ground links with London. I have asked for this to be looked at urgently.

I shall be seeking the help of the FTA, the RHA, BR, LT and the motoring organisations in discussions over the next few days.

*There is  
indeed!*

This last point leads me to what I see as the most tricky point on which we take a view and that is the treatment of private vehicles within Central London. I see this strike as possibly creating rather different conditions in the centre from those we have experienced either with BR rail strikes or bus strikes. The two issues are how can we keep the buses moving - they will be crucial to the whole operation - and how to ensure that central traffic does not seize up completely.

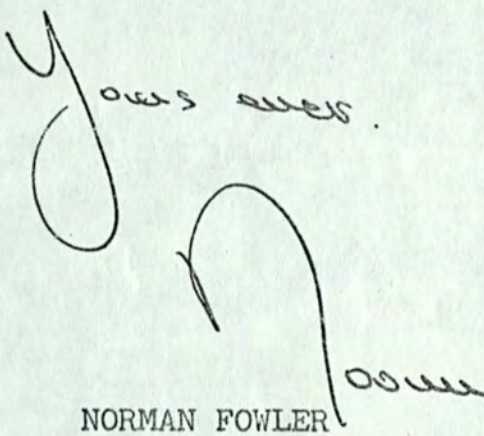
There are quite different approaches we could adopt. We could do all we can to discourage the motorist from coming into central London by reducing parking facilities. This would help the free flow of traffic there, including buses and taxis once they are inside the area. But it could be highly unpopular with motorists and pose enforcement problems for overstretched police. At the opposite extreme we could expand the parking facilities, open the Royal Parks and so forth. The question is whether this might cause the seizing-up of Inner London movement I have touched on above and add to the traffic movement problems in the areas beyond.

Clearly we shall have to rely heavily on the advice we get from the Metropolitan police as the situation develops. But my inclination is to take the line that we start 'neutral', not significantly increasing the parking facilities as we have done during the BR strikes and certainly not in the Whitehall area but have alternative contingency plans either to do so or to make parking more difficult in the light of the traffic conditions that emerge.

Almost  
unworkable  
I wd. have  
thought.

This is a point we might discuss at your meeting to establish the balance of the arguments.

I am copying this to the Prime Minister, Cabinet colleagues, Sir John Hunt and to Sir Clive Rose.

*yours ever*  
  
NORMAN FOWLER

1-8 JUN 1979

