

CONFIDENTIAL



DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORT  
2 MARSHAM STREET LONDON SW1P 3EE

The Rt Hon Francis Pym MC MP  
Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster,  
Paymaster General and Leader of the  
House of Commons  
Privy Council Office  
Whitehall  
LONDON  
SW1

Prime Minister

Mr Fowler has it in mind  
to accept the Opposition  
motion on lorries next  
Wednesday. Content?

15 June 1981

MAD 15/6

Dear Chancellor,

ARMITAGE REPORT: SUPPLY DAY DEBATE

The Opposition have chosen the Armitage Report as the subject for a three hour Supply Day Debate next Wednesday. Although we do not yet know the terms of the Motion they propose to put down, we believe it will be along the following lines:

This House, conscious of the problems caused by the existing heavy lorry, is opposed to the recommendations of the Armitage Report to raise maximum weights to 44 tonnes.

If our information is correct and the Motion is tabled in these terms, I hope that colleagues will agree that we should accept it.

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The Armitage Report has a range of recommendations on the control of heavy lorries, including weight increases from our present maximum 32.5 tonnes to higher figures - 34, 38, 40 and 44 tonnes depending on the number and arrangement of axles. There is a great deal of concern amongst members of the public, and amongst our own backbenchers, about heavier lorries generally, and the Motion as drafted would be extremely attractive to a significant number of our supporters. In focussing on 44 tonnes the Opposition have chosen what is certainly the most contentious of all the Armitage proposals and I think there is a real risk of our actually losing the vote if we were to oppose it.

At the same time, I would intend to make clear that there are economic arguments for raising our present weight limit of 32.5 tonnes. These are being urged on me by all sectors of industry. With the weights proposed by Armitage the savings in transport costs from using fewer more efficient lorries is estimated at £180m per year at current prices. And as the vehicles would be subject to the same controls on size, noise etc, the reduction in numbers would bring actual environmental benefit.

The question is how best we can keep the initiative in our hands and avoid having our options unnecessarily pre-empted at this stage. We have stressed all along that Armitage was an entirely independent inquiry, refuting allegations that it was merely a device designed to enable us to put lorry weights up as high as possible. Acceptance of a motion rejecting the extreme Armitage proposal would reinforce these arguments. We have made it plain that the Government is in no way committed to accepting its recommendations and I think this opens a tactical way to capitalise on a motion in these particular terms.

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The evidence is that most of the industrial and environmental benefits would come from an increase in maximum weight to something less than 44 tonnes. Although nearly all other European countries allow 38 tonnes, only a few allow 44 tonnes vehicles, and the European Parliament has recently recommended a weight limit of 40 tonnes. To exclude the 44 tonne vehicle would affect only a few heavy traffics - the main ones being bulk liquids, steel, construction materials and fully loaded containers.

In my view, therefore, there is much to be said for accepting an Opposition motion in the terms above. In short, rejecting the 44 tonne vehicle offers, in my view, the best way forward at the present time if we are to preserve options to bring forward at an early stage proposals for lesser increases in weight, should we decide to take this course, without running the risk of a total defeat. We would of course come back to Parliament with specific proposals if and when we decide what the new limits should be. Our proposals would have to be part of a complete package of proposals including many of the less controversial and more publicly acceptable proposals of the Armitage Report.

I should be grateful if you and other colleagues to whom I am copying this letter could let me know very quickly whether they agree with this line.

I am sending copies of this to the Prime Minister, other Cabinet colleagues, Michael Jopling and Sir Robert Armstrong.

Yours Sincerely,

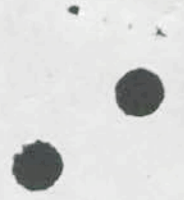
Anthony Mayes

NORMAN FOWLER

(Approved by the Secretary of State  
and signed in his absence.)

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15 JUN 1969



SECRETARY OF STATE FOR ENERGY  
THAMES HOUSE SOUTH  
MILLBANK LONDON SW1P 4QJ

Tel: 211 6402

✓ MAP

*[Handwritten signature]*

The Rt Hon Norman Fowler MP  
Secretary of State for Transport  
Department of Transport  
2 Marsham Street  
London SW1P 3EB

17 June 1981

*Dea Norman*

ARMITAGE REPORT: SUPPLY DAY ENERGY DEBATE

Thank you for copying to me your letter of 15 June to Francis Pym.

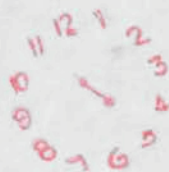
I accept the reasoning in your letter for accepting the Opposition Motion, if it is in the terms you expect. I note that, in doing so, you would intend to leave the door open for some increase in the present lorry weight limit. I also note from paragraph 358 of the Armitage Report that most of the 12-15% fuel saving envisaged with 44 tonne lorries could still be achieved if we were to settle on the 40/42 tonne limit proposed by the EEC. In energy policy terms, that sort of saving is well worth having.

I am copying this letter to the recipients of yours.

*[Handwritten signature]*  
*[Handwritten signature]*

D A R HOWELL

17 JUN 1981





*From the Secretary of State*

The Rt Hon Norman Fowler MP  
Secretary of State for Transport  
Department of Transport  
2 Marsham Street  
London, SW1P 3EB

17 June 1981

*Dear Norman,*

ARMITAGE REPORT: SUPPLY DAY DEBATE *with PM*

You wrote to Francis Pym on 15 June concerning the Supply Day Debate on the Armitage Report.

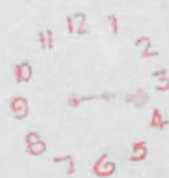
As you know, the British shipping industry, as a major operator of container services, has welcomed the Armitage recommendations as a package. However, its interest is primarily in securing an increase in gross lorry weights at the lower end of the scale, notably from 32.5 tonnes for a four axle lorry to 34 tonnes or more. I am content therefore to go along with your proposals for handling the tactical situation in the House on the understanding that our options for proposing increases at the lower end of the scale will remain fully open.

I am copying this letter to the Prime Minister, other Cabinet colleagues, Michael Jopling and Sir Robert Armstrong.

*John Biffen*

JOHN BIFFEN

17 JUN 1981







Treasury Chambers, Parliament Street, SW1P 3AG

The Rt Hon Norman Fowler MP  
Secretary of State for Transport  
2 Marsham Street  
LONDON  
SW1

17 June 1981

✓  
MFD

Dear Secretary of State

ARMITAGE REPORT: SUPPLY DAY DEBATE

I have seen a copy of your letter to Francis Pym of 15 June, and of Keith Joseph's letter of today's date about the line to take in response to the Opposition Motion on Armitage. I understand that at a meeting this afternoon it was agreed that the Motion should be accepted. This letter confirms that I am content with that line.

I also understand that in your speech during the Debate, and in a Written Answer, you wish to announce the advancement of a number of by-pass schemes. I recognise, of course, that the Debate on Armitage provides a suitable occasion for outlining your plans to alleviate the nuisance caused by heavy lorries in towns. But I hope that you will feel able to do so in terms which will not lead to embarrassment if it should become clear later in the year that not all of these schemes can be afforded within the public expenditure totals which emerge from the discussions which we are about to embark upon in Cabinet.

I am sending copies of this letter to the recipients of yours.

May Feldstein  
Private Secretary  
NIGEL LAWSON  
(approved by the Financial  
Secretary and signed  
in his absence)

0/0

0/0

17 JUN 1987



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Brief for debate on Wednesday 17th June 1981  
on an opposition motion the Armitage report on  
lorries people and the environment

## Contents

- A. Background
- B. Armitage report recommendations
- C. European Dimension
- D. Government's position
- E. The Heavy Lorry - Arguments for and Against
- F. Political Points

A. Background

Before the last Labour Government left office, Mr. William Rodgers, Labour's Secretary of State for Transport, announced that he would be setting up an independent enquiry into the heavy lorry and its effect on the environment. On coming into office, Mr. Norman Fowler accepted this commitment and appointed an independent enquiry, headed by Sir Arthur Armitage, to look at the problems of the heavy lorry. This enquiry reported back on 9th December, 1980. The Government is still considering the report.

## B. Armitage report recommendations

1. Heavier Lorries - from present 32.5 tonne maximum up to 44 tonne maximum on 6 axles. But -
2. Not Bigger Lorries - should be new controls on vehicle size. Most important, to limit length of trailer. Also control on height. Small increase in length by  $\frac{1}{2}$  meter - from 15m to 15 $\frac{1}{2}$ m would be on tractor, not trailer, to improve safety, noise insulation and driver comfort (sleeper bunk in cab).
3. Increased Speed Limits - from 40 to 50 mph travelling on unrestricted dual carriageways. Police support for such a change is quoted.
4. Improved Vehicle Standards - Various improvements are suggested for future research and/or discussion in EEC (e.g. on noise, braking, spray, etc.).
5. Reversal in Government's Policy of Reducing Road-Building - special need for by-passes round historic and other towns and villages badly affected by traffic.
6. Creation of "Lorry Action Areas" - special subsidies where traffic nuisance is great and by-passes cannot easily be provided - for better noise insulation of houses; better

road surfaces; and, in extreme cases, relocation of traffic generators, such as factories.

7. Improved and Extended "Section 8" Grants - (from 50-60%) to industry for new rail connections - and extension of S.8 scheme to include Freightliners and Speedlink; and also waterways and pipe-lines.
8. Higher Taxes on heaviest lorries which do not cover true costs.

C. European Dimension

The background to the Armitage report is that the end of 1978, the European Commission produced a draft directive proposing that EEC countries should harmonise the maximum permitted weight of lorries travelling in the Community to cut haulage costs and improve conditions for trade and competition in the Community. The maximum limit suggested was 44 tonnes. This draft directive was submitted both to the Council of Ministers and to the European Parliament.

The transport Committee of the European Parliament has meanwhile produced its own recommendations in the Carossino report. This report recommended a compromise between the member states of a maximum of 40 tonnes on 5 axles and a maximum axle weight of 11 tonnes. During a plenary session debate in May, the EDG, with a few exceptions, supported the Carossino report, but failed to get an amendment passed recommending a lower axle weight of 10.5 tonnes. However, they did manage to win acceptance for some amendments concerning safety and the environment. In particular, the parliament agreed that national governments would be required only to 'inform' the Commission about their policies on 'no go' areas or lorry cordon rather than as the Commission suggested "be required to consult" the Commission about national policies. The Parliament is now waiting for the Commission's reaction to the Carossino report.

D. Government's Position

The first point to be made is that the report is not a government report - it is totally independent.

The Government has welcomed the report, but has not taken a view on whether or not it would support its findings. The Secretary of State has guaranteed that there would be no final decisions before a Parliamentary debate.

However, the Government has acted to implement one recommendation of the report already. The present Transport Bill provides for increased taxation for heavier lorries, reflecting relative costs of heavier lorries on road damage.

E. Heavier Lorries - Cases for and Against

Introduction

The Transport Committee has had meetings with various organisations concerned with transport to listen to views and discuss the findings of the Armitage report on heavy lorries.

These organisations were :

The Freight Transport Association and the CBI  
Friends of the Earth  
British Rail  
General Council of British Shipping

Although opinions differed strongly on the question of the findings of the Armitage report it emerged that there were some parts of the report which should give some cause for concern.

Evidence from the CBI FTA

The CBI and FTA were enthusiastically in favour of Armitage's recommendations. They made the following points:

- 1) Implementation of Armitage proposals would offer industry savings of as much as £500 millions per annum with negligible public expenditure implications.
- 2) The report has positive environmental implications as well. All Sir Arthur Armitage's recommendations are aimed at improving environmental protection. The Department of Transport has stated that there would be no need for additional expenditure on road and bridge strengthening arising from the recommendations. If Armitage's weight and axle configurations were accepted, by 1990 there could be a reduction in the operating fleet of 15,000. This would save fuel and would mean that lorries would be less of a nuisance to the public.
- 3) Bringing UK weights more in line with EEC proposals will be of great benefit to industry, although for environmental considerations, the CBI and FTA support Armitage's recommendations of slightly lower axle weights. In particular, it would facilitate trade with the EEC.
- 4) The recommendation to increase the speed limit for lorries from 40 mph to 50 mph on roads designed for 70 mph cars will save an estimated £225m per year.

Evidence from British Rail

British Rail were concerned about some aspects of the Armitage report and its proposals to increase lorry weights and dimensions.

In particular

- 1) In certain circumstances heavier lorries will cause more damage to bridges and pavements than the existing heaviest vehicles. Both the proposed 34 tonne and 38 tonne articulated vehicles could become over-loaded on the rear axle of the trailer when a lorry is badly loaded, or when some of the back of the load has been dropped. A possible solution would be to permit no vehicle above the existing 32.5 tonnes 2 + 2 configuration unless it has a 3 axle trailer.

Any increase in vehicle length must increase the likelihood of bridge damage due to the difficulty in manoeuvrability of long vehicles.

- 2) BR are also worried about the safety recommendations of the report. Armitage does not recommend anti-locking braking systems. BR think that as much care and cost should be spent on regulations for lorry design as that spent on ensuring safety on trains.
- 3) The recommendation of an increase of £800 in VED for existing heaviest vehicles is not high enough or discriminating enough. Vehicles that travel longer distances will profit at the expense of others which do not.

The VED cost still will not cover the higher percentage of new road construction costs recommended by TRRL report LR910.

#### 4) Bridges

With the arrival of heavier and heavier lorries in recent years there has been a rapid rise in the incidence of impact damage to BR bridges. If the trend towards heavier bigger and faster lorries continues, the evidence suggests that damage incidents will continue to worsen in the future. In many cases BR cannot reclaim costs from those who caused the damage. Thus the road haulage industry is externalising some of its costs.

BR believes that the contention that the Armitage recommendations will necessitate no extra spending on bridge strengthening is wrong. The measures should not be introduced until the carrying capacity of all bridges has been assessed against the new loading and action taken to strengthen bridges as necessary.

Other areas where time and money are required to carry out investigations include :

- Long span bridges
- Bridges continuous over several supports
- Widened bridges
- Spandrel walls of arched bridges
- Retaining walls

5) Enforcement

Railway operations are subject to constant supervision by the Railway Inspectorate. BR believes that it is essential that sufficient resources be devoted to enforcing lorry regulations as well. Otherwise BR is subject to unfair competition. In particular, action to curb illegal operators is needed. There should be higher penalties for hauliers who break the law. Also greater effort is needed to eliminate overloading.

The General Council of British Shipping

The GCBS is the representative body of the British Shipping Industry. Membership includes all UK shipping companies operating container services.

The GCBS made the following points about Armitage.

- 1) At the moment UK container operators operate at a disadvantage to other European operators. Although all shippers use the same types of containers, UK regulations restrict container gross weights to 21-22 tonnes. Thus they can be underloaded by weights of up to about 6 tonnes in comparison with other West European containers carrying the similar goods for export. The economic consequences of underloading are hard on UK operators in a trade where rates are usually quoted on a 'per box' basis. Harmonisation is therefore desirable.
- 2) There are two basic sizes of containers -
  - the 20 footer (about 70-75% of total) -
    - gross weight 20-24 tonnes
    - mostly 8'6" high
  - the 40 footer (about 25-30% of total)
    - gross weight limit 30 tonnes (average loaded weight considerably less)
    - mostly 8'6" high

On the road these are carried by 4 axle artics. The GCBS would like the maximum weight on 4 axles to be increased to 34-35 tonnes and perhaps 38 tonnes on 5 axles (which could be useful if companies invested in triaxle trailers or converted the existing biaxle trailers). It is very unlikely that container operators would find it economic to go to the 40-44 tonne configurations.

The 4 axle artics are likely to suffer the highest tax penalty if the government follows Armitage when they implement the new gross weight basis for tax, because 4 axle artics are classified by Armitage as the type causing most road damage. This is unfortunate as very few containers actually run at maximum weight and an unfair tax burden is in effect a penalty on international trade and exports.

- 3) The GCBS were not happy with the height limit. At present there is no limit, but Armitage recommends a limit of 4.2 metres. This is not enough for the standard 8'6" container. The height limit should be raised to 4.25 metres at least or preferably to 4.35m if the rarer 9'6" box is to be accommodated. These limits are lower than for a double decker bus.
- 4) The GCBS reminded the committee that container operators can show a good record on rail usage - more than 90% of containers travel on land by rail.

### Friends of the Earth

Friends of the earth expressed disappointment with the Armitage report. In particular, they said that

- 1) The report says that heavier lorries will reduce numbers, but there is no evidence to suggest this will be the case. In fact the opposite has occurred.
- 2) They were disappointed that Armitage did not take up the potential for transfer of freight to rail. Armitage says the potential is small - about 40m tonnes but since this is long haul freight the effect would be to reduce road ton miles by about 8%. This could mean a 20% drop in heavy lorry mileage. Armitage actually admits that a heavier faster lorry could mean transfer of freight away from rail.
- 3) They welcomed the increased taxation of heavy lorries.
- 4) They were dubious about the effect of a general increase in road building in reducing the impact of the heavy lorry. Firstly, the heavier lorry could be here next year, road building will take a lot longer. The cost of building and maintaining roads will be very high indeed. The existing infrastructure is not used to its full advantage anyway.
- 5) Safety  
Armitage does not recommend the anti locking braking systems despite annual savings of 60 lives. He also says nothing about the problem of spray from heavy lorries. Instead Armitage actually proposes an increase in maximum speeds on dual carriageways; that will exacerbate the problem. We need better enforcement of existing speed limits.

- 6) Noise

There is no reason why we should wait until 1990 before noise levels on new lorries are reduced to 80 decibels. The technology is already here. The recommendation for monitoring noise levels is very vague and with the recent demise of the Noise Advisory Council makes FOE pessimistic about the future.



- 7) Armitage justifies heavier lorries on economic grounds but the savings of £150m in the first year and £210m per year by 1990 are negligible.

The proposals include the 4 axle 34 tonne long vehicle estimated to be 15% more damaging than the present 32.5 tonne lorry.

Armitage dismisses the damage to underground services in six lines but the National Water Council quoted a figure of £50m on the annual repair bill for sewerage and water mains. Road traffic is responsible for much of this damage. Armitage says there is "insufficient evidence" to estimate damage or cost of the proposals on underground structures, then proceeds regardless.

8) Bridges

The Husband report on bridges stated that on long span bridges the weight of all the axles (gross weight) and the length of the vehicle are crucial. Armitage discounts the figure of £100m that will be needed to strengthen longer bridges as it will be spent even if we do not accept higher weights. However, it is another bit of evidence of the cost to the community from the present fleet of heavy lorries. Furthermore, Armitage produces a figure of £1200m in bridge maintenance that would be needed if the EEC proposals were implemented, but then reduces that to nothing by slightly reducing axle weights and altering axle spacings. He obviously assumes that road hauliers are precise in the way they load their lorries. They are not.

- 9) More research should be done into the effects of air and ground borne vibration. Armitage is imprecise on this.

F. Political Points

Most members will probably have strongly held views on the question of heavy lorries and the Armitage report recommendations, however it might be helpful if members questioned the government on its willingness to implement certain environmental and safety recommendations of the report. In particular the following recommendations :

- a) The width for all lorries should remain at 2.5 metres and a height limit of 4.2 metres should be imposed. There should be a limit on the length of semi-trailers of 12.2 metres.
- b) The government should adopt as explicit aims of policy that an EEC directive should be agreed requiring lorries to be manufactured to a maximum noise level of 80dB (A) and that a new limit should be introduced as soon as practicable in the light of discussions with manufacturers and operators and no later than 1990 (the Government has already announced its support for this proposal).
- c) The government and local authorities should pay particular regard to the effect of lorries on the environment when assessing priorities for new road schemes (ie will the government give more emphasis to by-passes?)

- d) The Government should pursue improvements in lorry safety ie
- more stringent braking standards
  - research into means of reducing spray
  - Underrun and other guards (eg side guards) should be mandatory for all new lorries.
- e) More roadside checks and better equipment to assess levels of smoke emission.
- f) Better policing of overloading, particularly of foreign lorries whose record of overloading is bad.
- g) The Government should make Section 8 grants more widely available - eg. to canals.
- h) The Government should act to ensure that lorry control schemes can be better enforced.

Conservative Research Department,  
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15.6.81  
KM/KM

Y SWYDDFA GYMREIG

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The Rt Hon Nicholas Edwards MP

WELSH OFFICE

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From The Secretary of State for Wales

17 June 1981

*D. Edwards*

*✓ MRP*

ARMITAGE REPORT: SUPPLY DAY DEBATE *201P*

Thank you for your letter of 15 June. I agree the line you propose. There has been much opposition in Wales to the proposal to increase permitted heavy lorry weights. In particular, local highway authorities in the rural areas are very concerned about the effect of the proposals on old bridges and on roads supported by dry stone walls. Representations from the public and local civic societies - and I have received many - all express concern about the effect on the environment generally.

However, cheap and efficient transport is also important, particularly in regions such as Wales which are on the periphery of the national economic system. I also take your point about the benefits of having fewer vehicles. Finding the right balance and the best way of presenting the various arguments will not be easy but I agree with the approach set out in your letter.

/ Copies of this letter go to the recipients of yours.

*Norman Fowler*  
*NCF*

The Rt Hon Norman Fowler MP  
Secretary of State for Transport  
Department of Transport  
2 Marsham Street  
London SW1P 3EB

17 JUN 1987





10 DOWNING STREET

PRIME MINISTER

You saw Mr. Fowler's letter, proposing to accept the Opposition motion on lorries tomorrow.

In the course of the day, Keith Joseph objected to foreclosing options in this way - see his letter below. But he has been persuaded that it is not practicable for the Government to oppose the motion, as there could be considerable difficulty in getting Government troops through the lobby against the terms of the Opposition motion. There will therefore be no amendment, and the motion will be accepted.

*MJD*

*[Handwritten signature]*

16 June 1981



Secretary of State for Industry

DEPARTMENT OF INDUSTRY  
ASHDOWN HOUSE  
123 VICTORIA STREET  
LONDON SW1E 6RB

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16 June 1981

The Rt Hon Francis Pym MC MP  
Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster  
Paymaster General and  
Leader of the House of Commons  
Privy Council Office  
Whitehall SW1

Dear Chancellor

ARMITAGE REPORT: SUPPLY DAY DEBATE

I have seen a copy of Norman Fowler's letter to you of 15 June.

It is of course unfortunate that the Opposition should have chosen the Armitage Report as the subject of a Supply Day debate before we have had a chance collectively to discuss the recommendations of that Report and to agree our response. But I think it would be a mistake to pre-empt consideration of the report by agreeing in tomorrow's debate that we are not prepared to go as far as Armitage proposed in respect of lorry weights (or by giving any commitment on any other recommendation). I believe that a comprehensive response to the Report is required and I would prefer to see us reserve our position. I hope we could promise an early response and use the opportunity presented by tomorrow's debate to explain that heavier lorries do not mean larger lorries and to draw attention to the economic and environmental benefits that would flow from increases in permitted lorry weights. This does of course mean opposing the motion but on the grounds that we have yet to make up our minds on the issue and on the many other and wide ranging recommendations in the Report.

I am sending copies of this letter to Norman Fowler and to the other recipients of this.

Catherine Bell

pp KEITH JOSEPH  
(Approved by the Secretary of  
State and signed in his  
absence)

16 JUN 1981

