Transport

PRIME MINISTER cc: Mr. Gow

MT

HEAVY LORRIES STATEMENT

David Howell had a tough time in the House. He was attacked so vehemently from the Government benches that the Opposition found their work done for them.

Albert Booth, leading for the Opposition, argued that the statement and accompanying White Paper did not meet the commitment given by Mr. Fowler that he would respond in detail to each of the Armitage recommendations. He also argued that the Government's decisions ducked the issue of taxation for heavy goods vehicles.

John Peyton then rose. From Britons who lived, worked, or shopped in the streets of our towns, he said, Mr. Howell's statement would get "a welcome a good deal short of rapturous". The heavier lorries would bring much greater damage and inconvenience, at a time when the Government was making negligible progress on trunk roads and bypasses. The bitter pill would have been more palatable if it had been accompanied by some reference to lorry routes. This led Stephen Ross to call for the return of Mr. Peyton as Transport Minister, as he had stuck at a 32 ton limit. David Crouch was simply "appalled" by the announcement. He gave notice that he would vote against the proposals. Anthony Kershaw joined in the attack, and Robin Maxwell-Hyslop told Mr. Howell that he should have had the courtesy to listen to a debate on the subject in the House after becoming Minister, before coming to make this statement. Only Peter Fry offered any support from the Government benches.

From the Opposition benches, Ted Leadbitter, George Foulkes, and Jack Straw joined general criticism.

Mr. Howell tried to defend his proposals, and made it clear that there would be time for consideration before the House was

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asked to approve them. But he had a poor day, and his troubles were increased because he gave the impression that he was not the master of his brief on this subject.

MAD

1 December 1981

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cc B
AD

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ASHDOWN HOUSE
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Secretary of State for Industry

1 December 1981

NBPM

The Rt Hon David Howell MP
Secretary of State for Transport
Department of Transport
2 Marsham Street
London SW1

Dear David,

THE PROPOSED WHITE PAPER: LORRIES, PEOPLE AND THE ENVIRONMENT

Thank you for copying to me your minute of 26 November to the Prime Minister and the draft of your proposed announcement about the White Paper on Lorries, People and the Environment.

I have only one comment on the draft. I would prefer to see the second sentence of paragraph 3 rephrased on the following lines:

> "The lorry gives offence to many people and the nuisance it causes will become progressively worse unless we take decisions now which will change the trend over the coming years"

I feel that the present text goes rather too far with its reference to the lorry being an offensive element in the environment which will make the environment progressively worse and there is no doubt that it would not be well received by a struggling vehicle industry.

I am copying this letter to the Prime Minister, to colleagues of E Committee, and the Lord President and both Chief Whips, the Secretaries of State for Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland and Sir Robert Armstrong.

Yours ever

Patrick

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affect the broad basis of the decision I have taken today, I would ask the right hon. Gentleman and the House to approve the situation as it stands.

Mr. Speaker: Mr. Secretary Howell: statement.

Mr. Andrew Faulds (Warley, East): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. By, I am sure, a momentary oversight, you have forgotten that I have spoken on these matters from the Front Bench. I might have had a fairly valuable contribution to make—[*Interruption.*]

Mr. Speaker: Order. As usual, I am much obliged to the hon. Gentleman. He has given me the opportunity to say that I do my very best to ensure that those on the Front Bench who run back up to the Back Benches, are not given the same preference as real Back Benchers. I think that is fair and I am quite sure that the hon. Gentleman's sense of fair play will lead him to agree with me.

Mr. Faulds: I am happy to yield to your suggestion, Mr. Speaker, because we are about to have the happy introduction of moderation, reason and true feminity in contrast to the tough adamantine type that we usually have to suffer.

Mr. Speaker: We shall have the statement first. Mr. Secretary Howell——

Mr. Kenneth Lewis (Rutland and Stamford): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I simply draw your attention to the fact that some hon. Members, who are not in the happy position of being able to go from the Front Bench to the Back Benches, have difficulties in being called—never mind the hon. Member for Warley, East (Mr. Faulds).

Later——

Mr. Peter Snape (West Bromwich, East): Without repeating the point of order raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Warley, East (Mr. Faulds), may I ask you, Mr. Speaker, how you decide which Front Bench spokesmen can be called to speak from the Back Benches? Are all Front Bench spokesmen equal? Some of us regard the matter that has just been discussed as at least as important as Front Bench responsibilities.

Mr. Speaker: I believe that I called one of the hon. Gentleman's colleagues who is a member of his union, if that is what is worrying him. Otherwise, I am not anxious to make a firm rule that no one who speaks from the Front Bench can ever be called when he is on the Back Benches. If it were the will of the House, of course, I would respond to it, but I have not yet had any indication of that.

Lorries, People and the Environment

The Secretary of State for Transport (Mr. David Howell): With your permission, Mr. Speaker, I wish to make a statement on lorries, people and the environment.

Heavy lorries have been the subject of continuing debate and controversy for over 10 years. The problems are complex and intractable, but decisions have to be taken. We need above all to end the present uncertainty about future lorry weights which is currently placing a handicap on investment in the commercial vehicle industry:

To clarify the issues, the Government appointed Sir Arthur Armitage in July 1979 to conduct an independent inquiry into the whole problem of lorries and their effects on people and the environment. Sir Arthur and his four independent assessors took evidence very widely, and reported in December 1980. The Government are very grateful to them for their wide-ranging report. It has aroused great interest. A large number of people and organisations have put their views to me and there have been two debates in the House. The Government thought it right to take time to consider fully the many points that have been raised.

The effect of big lorries on people and commmunities is a matter of deep concern. The lorry is an offensive element in the environment, and it willl make the environment progressively worse unless we take decisions now which will change the trend over the coming years. Our aim is to ensure a more civilised development of freight transport in the future, which will mean a better environment as well as a healthier economy.

The measures the Government will be taking to achieve this objective are outlined in a White Paper published today. These measures are directed to keeping lorries away from the places where people live, through the provision of more bypasses, to making the vehicles quieter and cleaner, and, in particular, to keeping their numbers down.

However, to keep costs down, road transport must be efficient and economic. Our present maximum weight limits on lorries place an economic handicap on much of our industry.

Mr. Norman Atkinson (Tottenham): Disgraceful.

Mr. Howell: Our regulations prevent many existing lorries from being loaded to their full technical weight carrying capacity. This is wasteful. It makes transport costs higher than they need be, which in turn feeds through into prices and makes our exports less competitive.

The Government agree with Armitage's rejection of the heavier axle weights proposed by the European Commission. We have also announced our rejection of a maximum weight as high as 44 tonnes, which was the heaviest vehicle recommended in the Armitage report. All the safeguards suggested in the report have been considered very carefully and the Government are now convinced that maximum lorry weights can safely be raised to 34 tonnes for four-axled vehicles, and 40 tonnes on five axles. These changes are set out in draft amending regulations which are being circulated today by my Department for consultation. Copies are available in both the Vote Office and the Library of the House.

[Mr. Howell]

The proposals outlined in the White Paper will apply to Northern Ireland and, where appropriate, will be given effect through separate action under the relevant Northern Ireland legislation.

As well as bringing economic benefits to industry and ultimately to the consumers, through savings in industry's transport costs of around £150 million a year, there will be benefits to the environment. The heavier vehicles will be no bigger than the biggest vehicles on the roads today. Their higher load capacity will enable industry to meet demands for freight services with fewer vehicles than would otherwise be needed. There will be safeguards in the regulations on the design of the heavier vehicles to protect roads, bridges and underground services.

We cannot afford delay. To do nothing would help neither the environment nor the economy. Freight users, vehicle operators and manufacturers are unable to plan ahead while the present uncertainty lasts. It is through the decisions taken now, and the actions initiated, that we can achieve over the years ahead the improvements we are seeking.

Mr. Albert Booth (Barrow-in-Furness): Does the Secretary of State for Transport recall that his predecessor, in the debate on the Armitage report, said:

"Whatever we decide on this issue,"—

he was referring to heavy lorry weights—

"I shall make a comprehensive statement on Armitage covering all of the main recommendations."—[*Official Report*, 17 June 1981; Vol. 6, c.1088.]

The Secretary of State's statement lamentably fails to measure up to that undertaking, as does the White Paper which it introduces. To that extent he will be judged as having reneged on his predecessor's undertaking.

The lorries that the Secretary of State is proposing will be more damaging to the roads of this country than the 44 tonne lorries proposed by Armitage, when measured by Armitage's own criteria. The Secretary of State is proposing to allow on the roads of this country a 38-tonne lorry with a 10·5 drive axle—a higher drive axle weight than any at present on our roads.

Why has the Secretary of State made no proposal whatever to allocate to heavy goods vehicles the higher costs that they impose on road building and maintenance, to which the Armitage report referred? Why is the Secretary of State ducking the heavy goods vehicle taxation issue, which Armitage highlighted very effectively?

Why is the Secretary of State ignoring 90 out of the 91 recommendations in the Foster report relating to lorry operator licensing?

The Secretary of State's offer to have a study made of the need for lorry action areas in a number of our cities—when compared with the clearcut Armitage proposal that the Government should make grants to local authorities to cope with some of these problems and recoup that cost by taxation of the heavy goods vehicles—is lamentably inadequate.

The bypass commitment in the White Paper, measured against the requirement, as acknowledged by the Government, for 400 bypasses, is like feeding a peanut to a hungry elephant. It recognises the problem but responds to it by a pathetic gesture. The minor amelioration of a major problem is a figleaf behind which the Secretary of State cannot hide a massive concession to the road freight haulage lobby.

Those who are now suffering from the effects of the present heavy lorries will be among those who are most disappointed or shocked by the Secretary of State's announcement.

Mr. Howell: I do not accept the right hon. Gentleman's version and interpretation of what I have said this afternoon or of the White Paper. The proposals in the White Paper are comprehensive and cover—indeed, go beyond—the full range of points made in the Armitage report.

The overall effect of the proposals, as there would be up to 10,000 fewer lorries, would mean that there would be 5 per cent. less road damage for any given level of activity.

The right hon. Gentleman mentioned the question of higher taxation on the lorries which do the most damage. The White Paper makes it clear that we have taken the powers to prepare for that, and we propose to go in that direction. There is no question of ducking that. In the Department, we are making a new assessment of track costs to enable us to move along that path. I do not understand, therefore, why the right hon. Gentleman raised that point.

It is true that the Armitage report made several proposals concerning lorry action areas. We have already started to discuss them with local authorities. We are not shelving the idea, but it raises a number of sensitive and difficult local issues, as the right hon. Gentleman knows full well. He would be the first to criticise if we rushed into general undertakings before discussing matters properly and fairly with the local authorities.

The right hon. Gentleman spoke of the proposals as being a concession to the freight industry. He is totally wrong in that respect. There is a major advance for the environment within our grasp here, because there will be lorries which are no bigger and which will be greatly reduced in number. At the same time, they will benefit industry in terms of more investment and more jobs. If he is not in favour of that, it is a strange departure from what I understood his position to be.

Mr. John Peyton (Yeovil): Is my right hon. Friend aware that those who live, walk and push prams in the narrow streets of many of our towns and villages are likely to accord to his proposals a welcome that falls a good deal short of rapturous?

Is my right hon. Friend aware that his observations on the environment and on keeping lorries away from people would carry a good deal more weight if the road programme were not at such a low ebb and if progress on bypasses were not so sluggish? Is he further aware that his proposals would be more palatable if some reference had been made to his preparedness concerning ideas on lorry routes? There appears to be nothing forthcoming there.

Mr. Howell: I am aware that the present lorry size and weight are very unpopular. If there were any suggestion about bigger lorries—apart from the 1½ ft. extra on the cab—and if we were talking about lorry trailers, I should be wholly against it. We are talking of the same size of lorry loads and about fewer lorries. While I certainly do not expect rapture, I believe that this is a move in the right direction, towards civilising the lorry.

LORRIES, PEOPLE AND THE ENVIRONMENT

Heavy lorries have been the subject of continuing debate and controversy for over 10 years. The problems are complex and intractable, but decisions have to be taken. We need above all to end the present uncertainty about future lorry weights which is currently placing a handicap on investment in the commercial vehicle industry.

To clarify the issues the Government appointed Sir Arthur Armitage in July 1979 to conduct an independent inquiry into the whole problem of lorries and their effects on people and the environment. Sir Arthur and his four independent assessors took evidence very widely, and reported in December 1980. The Government is very grateful to them for their wide-ranging Report. It has aroused great interest. A large number of people and organisations have put their views to me and there have been two debates in this House. The Government thought it right to take time to consider fully the many points that have been raised.

The effect of big lorries on people and communities is a matter of deep concern. The lorry is an offensive element in the environment, and it will make the environment progressively worse unless we take decisions

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now which will change the trend over the coming years. Our aim is to ensure a more civilised development of freight transport in the future, which will mean a better environment as well as a healthier economy.

The measures the Government will be taking to achiev this objective are outlined in a White Paper published today. These measures are directed to keeping lorries away from the places where people live, through the provision of more by-passes; to making the vehicles quieter and cleaner; and, in particular, to keeping their numbers down.

However, to keep costs down, road transport must be efficient and economic. Our present maximum weight limits on lorries place an economic handicap on much of our industry. Our regulations prevent many existing lorries from being loaded to their full technical weight carrying capacity. This is wasteful. It makes transport costs higher than they need be, which in turn feeds through into prices and makes our exports less competitive.

The Government agrees with Armitage's rejection of the heavier axle weights proposed by the European Commission. We have also announced our rejection of a

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maximum weight as high as 44 tonnes, which was the heaviest vehicle recommended in the Armitage Report. All the safeguards suggested in the Report have been considered very carefully and the Government is now convinced that maximum lorry weights can safely be raise to 34 tonnes for 4 axled vehicles, and 40 tonnes on 5 axles. These changes are set out in draft amending regulations which are being circulated today by my Department for consultation. Copies are being placed i the Library of the House.

The proposals outlined in the White Paper will app to Northern Ireland and, where appropriate, will be giv effect to through separate action under the relevant Northern Ireland legislation.

As well as bringing economic benefits to industry and ultimately to the consumers, through savings in industry's transport costs of around £150m a year, ther will be benefits to the environment. The heavier vehicles will be no bigger than the biggest vehicles on the roads today. Their higher load capacity will enabl industry to meet demands for freight services with fewe vehicles than would otherwise be needed. There will be

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Mr Speaker, we cannot afford delay. To do nothing would help neither the environment nor the economy. Freight users, vehicle operators and manufacturers are unable to plan ahead whilst the present uncertainty lasts. It is through the decisions taken now, and the actions initiated, that we can achieve over the years ahead the improvements we are seeking.

File

cc: CWO
LPO
CSO

10 DOWNING STREET

From the Private Secretary

30 November 1981

Dear Anthony.

PROPOSED WHITE PAPER: LORRIES, PEOPLE AND THE ENVIRONMENT

The Prime Minister was grateful for your Secretary of State's minute of 26 November with the attached draft oral statement.

The Prime Minister suggests that in order to make the statement more balanced, there should be some mention of those Armitage proposals which the Government has turned down. She recalls that when E Committee discussed these matters in September there was an estimate of savings for industry at large of £150m. per year, and that these savings were particularly attractive given that they were unmatched either by increased public expenditure, or by heavier taxation. The Prime Minister suggests that it would be helpful to deploy this point in the statement. Finally, the Prime Minister suggests the deletion of the last sentence of the antepenultimate paragraph of the statement ("It makes no sense at all in our present economic circumstances"): she thinks that this sentence adds nothing to the sense, and could stimulate opposition.

I am sending copies of this letter to the Private Secretaries to the Chief Whip, the Lord President and the Chief Secretary, HM Treasury.

Yours sincerely,

Michael Scholar

Anthony Mayer, Esq.,
Department of Transport.

cc Mr Ingham
Mr Duguid

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Might we have shown on the report proposals? Or at least to be mentioned so that the statement is balanced not.

Prime Minister

Content with this draft statement, which would be given on Tuesday? MAP 26/XI

Prime Minister

PROPOSED WHITE PAPER: LORRIES, PEOPLE AND THE ENVIRONMENT

As I indicated in my minute of 19 November about this proposed White Paper, my intention is to announce publication, which we have now agreed should be on 1 December, by way of an oral statement. I should be grateful to know whether a statement on the lines of the attached draft would raise any difficulties.

I am copying this to colleagues on E Committee, including the Lord President and both Chief Whips, the Secretaries of State for Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, and to Sir Robert Armstrong.

DH.

DAVID HOWELL

26 November 1981

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DRAFT STATEMENT: LORRIES AND THE ENVIRONMENT

In July 1979 the Government appointed Sir Arthur Armitage to conduct an independent inquiry into the whole problem of lorries and their effects on people and the environment. Sir Arthur and his four independent assessors took evidence very widely, and reported in December 1980. The Government is very grateful to Sir Arthur and his assessors for their wide-ranging report.

The Report contained much complex argument and made a number of recommendations covering a wide range of issues. It has aroused great interest. A large number of people and organisations have put their views to me, and there have been two debates in this House. The Government thought it right to take time to consider fully the many points that have been raised. As a result the Government now has a much clearer understanding of the issues and of the practical measures that need to be put in hand.

The effect of big lorries on people and communities is a matter of grave concern. The lorry is an offensive element in the environment, and it will make the environment progressively worse unless we take decisions now which will change the trend over the coming years. Our aim is to ensure a more civilised development of freight transport in the future, which will mean a better environment as well as a healthier economy.

The measures the Government will be taking to achieve this objective are outlined in a White Paper published today. These measures are directed to keeping lorries away from the places where people live, through the provision of more by-passes; to making the vehicles quieter and cleaner; and, in particular, to keeping their numbers down.

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The Government recognises that the lorry is essential to the functioning of the whole economy. Indeed, it is the only possible means of delivery and collection from farms, shops and most factories and warehouses. Our exports depend on it. The cost of road transport is a fundamental part of the cost of living. To keep costs down road, transport must be efficient and economic.

Our present maximum weight limits on lorries place an economic handicap on much of our industry. Our regulations prevent many existing lorries from being loaded to their full technical weight carrying capacity. This is wasteful. It makes transport costs higher than they need be, which in turn feeds through into prices and makes our exports less competitive. It makes no sense at all in our present economic circumstances.

Suggestion sentence is deleted. It would make nothing come possible.

The Government has considered very carefully all the safeguards suggested in the Armitage Rport, and is now satisfied that maximum lorry weights can safely be raised to 34 tonnes for 4 axled vehicles and 40 tonnes on 5 axles. As well as bringing economic benefits to industry, and ultimately to the consumers, there will be benefits to the environment. Industry will be able to meet demands for freight services with fewer vehicles than would otherwise be needed. There will be safeguards in the regulations on the design of the heavier vehicles to protect roads, bridges and underground services.

Our objective will not, of course, be achieved overnight. But we cannot afford delay. To do nothing would help neither the environment nor the economy. Freight users, vehicle operators and manufacturers are unable to plan ahead whilst the present uncertainty lasts. It is through the decisions taken now, and the actions initiated, that we can achieve over the years ahead the improvements we are seeking.