

C.P.R.E.

CONFIDENTIAL

Transport

C.B.I.

Ch. P. J. J.

P.0660

PRIME MINISTER

Lorries, People and the Environment

E(82)12

Env. Sec. -

Ind. -

Welsh -

Scottish -

L.P.S. Soc. Sec. -

BACKGROUND

The maximum lorry weight permitted in the United Kingdom is 32.5 tonnes. The Armitage Report recommended in December 1980 that the limits should be raised; in some cases to 44 tonnes.

2. In December 1981 the Government proposed that maximum weights should be increased:

- (a) to 34 tonnes for lorries with four axles;
- (b) to 38 tonnes for lorries with five axles, two of them on the tractor;
- (c) to 40 tonnes for lorries with five axles, three of them on the tractor.

In presenting these proposals the White Paper "Lorries, People and the Environment" (Cmnd 8439) drew attention to a number of steps which the Government had taken or were taking to reduce the environmental problems caused by lorries.

3. In a Supply Day debate on 9 December these proposals were the subject of considerable criticism, some of it from the Government's supporters. Forty of them put down an early day motion (Annex I to E(82)12) which implicitly criticises the Government's policy.

4. In E(82)12 the Secretary of State for Transport argues that the Government cannot command sufficient support for its December proposals on lorry weights to get through Parliament. the necessary Order amending the Motor Vehicles (Construction and Use) Regulations (negative resolution). He proposes:

- (a) that the Government should keep to its proposal to allow 38 tonne articulated five axle lorries;

- (b) that in order to achieve this the Government should withdraw as many of its other proposals to increase lorry weights as are necessary to win sufficient back bench support;
- (c) that in presenting the Government's proposals he should concentrate on the measures to reduce the environmental impact of lorries listed in paragraph 2 of E(82)12;
- (d) that he should make a full announcement of the package of proposals in early March; and
- (e) that there should be a full debate on the package as a whole, combined with a vote on the new weight Regulations, in the week of 22 or 29 March.

MAIN ISSUES

5. The Committee will need to consider

- (i) how far the Government should modify its proposals to increase lorry weight limits;
- (ii) the 'sweeteners' in paragraph 2 of E(82)12;
- (iii) the Secretary of State's procedural suggestions.

Weight Limits

6. It is likely that most members of the Committee will support the Secretary of State in the view that, despite the opposition to heavier lorries, the Government should at the very least try to raise to 38 tonnes the weight limit for lorries with five axles; this would be by far the most widely used of the heavier weights proposed in December. Not even to proceed with this part of the proposals would lead to much criticism of the Government from industry. Discussion is therefore likely to centre on how far it is necessary to sacrifice other aspects of the Government's previous proposals, and the economic benefits which would



accompany them, in order to gain sufficient support in the Commons. The Committee will not however be able to reach final agreement on what concessions the Government should offer if it agrees that the Secretary of State should further sound back bench opinion.

7. Annex II to E(82)12 lists three possible modifications to the proposals in Cmnd 8439.

- (a) Abandon the proposal to allow 40 tonne five axles lorries.
- (b) Make no increase on the present 32.5 tonne limit for lorries with four axles.
- (c) Do not increase the 32.5 tonne limit for drawback trailers.

8. On merits there is most to be said for the second concession. Increasing to 34 tonnes the weight limit for four axle lorries would be of particular benefit to small operators; but it is the only part of the Government's proposals of last December which would increase permitted axle weights and thus, in itself, lead to increased road damage. It was only after some hesitation that the Committee agreed to include in Cmnd 8439 the proposal to permit four axled 34 tonners.

9. Of the other two concessions which Mr Howell suggests, that on drawback trailers would have little economic impact: they are little used in this country. Presentationally it could be a helpful move: these vehicles look like a particularly intimidating sort of 'juggernaut'. Keeping the present 32.5 tonne limit for them might be criticised by countries like Germany and Italy whose hauliers make much use of them; but (subject to the advice of the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary or the Lord Privy Seal) it should be possible to rebut any such criticisms.

10. Mr Howell's first suggestion is the hardest to defend on logical grounds. 40 tonne five axle lorries are not more environmentally damaging than the four axle vehicles currently in use; their introduction would be economically useful. The 40 tonne lorry however has a symbolic importance to the opponents of heavier lorries.

'Sweeteners'

11. There should be no need to discuss most of the measures to reduce the environmental damage caused by lorries which are listed in paragraph 2 of E(82)12 and on which the Secretary of State merely wishes to repeat what was said in Cmnd 8439 or slightly to modify his Department's existing policies, within agreed expenditure and manpower totals. The tax measures to which he refers (taxing lorries on the basis of laden weight rather than unladen, as at present) will be introduced in this year's Finance Bill. Improved safety requirements for lorries (sideguards and rearguards) are the only completely new measures; I understand that they are not likely to be resisted by the road haulage industry (for which the Secretary of State for Transport is the sponsor Minister).

12. The Committee however will probably want to discuss Mr Howell's revived proposal that the grants paid under section 8 of the Railways Act 1974 to encourage the transfer of freight to the railways should in future apply to Freightliner and Sealink; and that the maximum rate of grant should increase from 50 per cent to 60 per cent. The Committee rejected this proposal in September on the grounds that it was pointless without an increase in expenditure on section 8 grants, which the Secretary of State does not propose. Quite apart from that argument, it might be thought inopportune to announce anything which looks like further support for the railways in present circumstances.

Procedure

14. The Committee may wish to comment on the Secretary of State's proposed Parliamentary tactics, ie an announcement in about the first week in March, followed by a full debate on the package of proposals, including a vote on the weight regulations, in the week beginning 22 or 29 March.

European Communities

15. There is a draft Directive on lorry weights. But it proposes an increase in axle weights to which the Government cannot agree; and is not a constraint on the Government's own decisions.

HANDLING

16. The Secretary of State for Transport will wish to introduce his proposals. Much of the discussion will be concerned with the difficulty of getting support in the Commons for increasing lorry weights: the Lord President's and Chief Whip's comments will therefore be of great importance. The Secretary of State for the Environment may wish to comment on the likely 'environmental' reaction. On the other hand those Ministers with industrial responsibilities will probably want to argue the case for sticking as near as possible to the proposals in Cmnd 8439: the Secretaries of State for Industry, Trade, Scotland and Wales. (Scottish and Welsh producers, far from the Channel ports, would benefit particularly from the cost reductions which heavier lorries would bring).

17. Treasury Ministers will probably want to comment generally; and in particular about section 8 grants.

18. Foreign and Commonwealth Office Ministers may want to comment briefly on Community and international implications.

CONCLUSIONS

19. You will want to reach conclusions on:



- (a) the modifications to the Cmnd 8439 proposals on lorry weights which the Secretary of State for Transport suggests may be necessary;
- (b) the measures to limit the adverse environmental effects listed in paragraph 2 of E(82)12;
- (c) the procedure which the Secretary of State proposes.

20. If the Committee agrees that the Government's proposals on lorry weights should not be decided finally until the Secretary of State for Transport has further sounded out back bench opinion, you will probably want to invite him to consult the Committee again before making any public statement. He could be invited either to seek the Committee's agreement; or merely to inform colleagues: the choice depends in part on how discussion goes at this meeting.

PL
P L GREGSON

17 February 1982