



10 DOWNING STREET

THE PRIME MINISTER

14 December 1981

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Transport
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Thank you for your letter of 25 November in which you asked me to provide you with copies of the CPRS report on mainline railway electrification.

I have given your letter careful thought but I have concluded that I should not comply with your request. It is well established that advice by officials to Ministers on policy issues is not made available to the House itself or to select committees, whether in confidence or otherwise, save in the most exceptional circumstances. I recognise the importance of the enquiry which you are making into mainline railway electrification, but I am sure that there is enough publicly available material to permit your Committee to come to its own conclusion on Government policy in this area without access to the CPRS advice.

(SGD) MARGARET THATCHER

Tom Bradley, Esq., M.P.,

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Ref. A06267

MR PATTISON

SELECT COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORT: THE CPRS REPORT ON RAILWAY ELECTRIFICATION

In your letter of 27th November to David Heyhoe you requested a draft reply for the Prime Minister to send to the Chairman of the Transport Committee in response to his request to the Prime Minister to over-ride Mr Howell's refusal to provide the Committee with copies of the CPRS report on railway electrification. I have agreed with both the Lord President's office and the CPRS that we should reply.

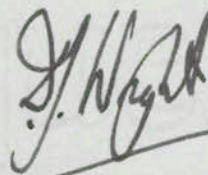
2. A similar request was made direct to the CPRS and subsequently to the Prime Minister herself last year by the Chairman of the Select Committee on Energy, when he sought to obtain a copy of the CPRS Report on the future of Heysham II and Torness. On that occasion the Prime Minister agreed that the CPRS should refuse the request on the basis that it was confidential advice to Ministers and it was a well established convention that such advice is not made available to those outside the Government. When the Chairman of the Committee himself raised the matter with the Prime Minister, the Prime Minister maintained this position and refused the request. I attach a copy of her reply of 9th July 1980.

3. Her refusal led to a subsequent wrangle with the Committee over a request that the members of the CPRS who had contributed to the Report on Heysham II and Torness should appear before the Select Committee to give oral evidence. In the event the CPRS did not appear and the Committee decided not to press the matter any further, although they signified that they did not regard this as a precedent for the future.

4. As for the Transport Committee's request, Sir Robert Armstrong believes that the Prime Minister should take the same line as she took over the Heysham II

and Torness report, arguing as in that case that it is well established that advice to Ministers is not made available to the House itself or to its select committees. I attach a draft for the Prime Minister to send to Mr Bradley in this sense, which has been agreed with the Lord President's Office, the Department of Transport, the Chief Whip's Office and the CPRS. If this refusal leads the Committee to follow up with a similar request to that made last year for the appearance of the CPRS members concerned in order to give oral evidence, this will have to be duly considered.

5. I am sending copies of this minute and of the draft to David Heyhoe, Anthony Mayer, Murdo Maclean and Gerry Spence.



D J WRIGHT

9th December 1981



10 DOWNING STREET

THE PRIME MINISTER

9 July 1980

Dear Sir,

Thank you for your letter of 26 June in which you ask me for a copy of "the recent report to Ministers on the future of the two AGR stations at Heysham II and Torness".

I have considered your request with great care, but have concluded that I should not comply with it. It is well established that advice by officials to Ministers on policy issues is not made available to the House itself or to Select Committees, whether in confidence or otherwise, save in the most exceptional circumstances. It does not seem to me that the circumstances in this case are so exceptional as to justify a departure from the rule. I am sure that the Select Committee on Energy will have no difficulty in making up its own mind on whether the Government's decisions on these two AGR stations were sensible, without access to the work done by the CPRS.

Yours sincerely

Rayner

Ian Lloyd, Esq., M.P.

Pl type for PM

cc 16 ✓ 9/12

DRAFT LETTER FROM THE PRIME MINISTER TO TOM
BRADLEY MP

Thank you for your letter of 25th November in which you asked me to provide you with copies of the CPRS report on mainline railway electrification.

I have given your letter careful thought but I have concluded that I should not comply with your request. It is well established that advice by officials to Ministers on policy issues is not made available to the House itself or to select committees, whether in confidence or otherwise, save in the most exceptional circumstances. I recognise the importance of the enquiry which you are making into mainline railway electrification, but I am sure that there is enough publicly available material to permit your Committee to come to its own conclusion on Government policy in this area without access to the CPRS advice.

~~Kay~~
Please refer
to me for retention
20/11
CF



A TRANS
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CO

JFA

10 DOWNING STREET

From the Private Secretary

27 November 1981

I enclose a copy of a letter to the Prime Minister from the Chairman of the Transport Committee. You will see that Mr. Bradley asks the Prime Minister to overrule Mr. Howell, who has refused to provide for the Committee copies of the CPRS report on railway electrification.

B/F (

I am sure that the Prime Minister will wish to sustain Mr. Howell's judgement on this point, and I should be grateful if, in consultation with other Departments as necessary, you could let me have a suitable draft reply. I am sure you will wish to prepare the reply on the basis that this may become a standard point of reference on these matters, and not simply a further refusal in this specific case.

I am sending a copy of this letter to Anthony Mayer (Department of Transport), Murdo Maclean (Chief Whip's Office) and David Wright (Cabinet Office).

M. A. PATTISON

David Heyhoe, Esq.,
Lord President's Office.

cc Mr Ingham ✓

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PRIME MINISTER

Tom Bradley, Chairman of the Transport Committee, asks you to over-rule David Howell's refusal to provide the Committee with the CPRS report on Railway Eletrification.

I am sure that you will wish to uphold the line taken by Mr. Howell, but we will invite Mr. Howell and Mr. Pym to contribute to a draft reply.

MAD

[Handwritten signature]

27 November 1981

MFJ

27 November 1981

I am writing on behalf of the Prime Minister to thank you for your letter of 25 November.

I will place your letter before the Prime Minister and a reply will be sent to you as soon as possible.

MAP

Tom Bradley, Esq., M.P.

✓ 16

from the chairman



COMMITTEE OFFICE
HOUSE OF COMMONS
LONDON SW1A 0AA
01-219 3423 (Direct Line)
01-219 3000 (Switchboard)

THE TRANSPORT COMMITTEE

827 25th November, 1981

Rt. hon. Margaret Thatcher, MP
Prime Minister and First Lord of the Treasury,
10 Downing Street,
London SW1

Dear Margaret,

As you may know, my Committee have decided to undertake a short inquiry into main line railway electrification. I enclose a copy of the press release issued last week announcing the terms of reference for this inquiry.

On the instructions of the Committee, I wrote to David Howell in October to ask him to make arrangements for copies to be supplied to us of the report made to Ministers on this subject by the Central Policy Review Staff. David Howell has now replied, and has rejected our request on the grounds that advice given by officials to Ministers should remain confidential.

Although the Committee recognise the importance of confidentiality in the relations between civil servants and Ministers, they are greatly concerned that, as the Committee responsible to the House for monitoring the work of the Department of Transport, they should have sufficient information to enable them fairly to assess the Department's policy decisions.

Rt. hon. Margaret Thatcher, MP

25th November, 1981

Since it is quite clear that the CPRS report on the joint review of main line railway electrification has been a significant factor in determining the Transport Department's approach to this question, my colleagues and I believe that we will be unable to provide the House with a fair assessment of the Department's position unless we are fully informed of the advice on which that position is founded.

Accordingly, the Committee have now instructed me to ask you, as the Minister responsible for the CPRS, to agree to provide us with copies of the CPRS report on main line railway electrification on a confidential basis. We have already agreed, in view of the delicacy of the issues involved, to take much of our evidence on this subject in private (including evidence from Transport Department officials on 9th December) and we will of course look sympathetically on requests for sidelining before publishing any of the evidence concerned.

Although I can give no complete guarantee that the Committee would not draw on the information contained in the CPRS Report in any subsequent Report we may make to the House, I can give you an undertaking that we would consult with the Department of Transport, or your office, before doing so, and that we would seriously consider any representation made to us on this point.

My main concern - which is shared by my colleagues in the Committee - is that we should not be led to false conclusions about the Government's approach to this important issue because we are forced to rely on press leaks about the advice given to you and your colleagues by the CPRS. The Government has, as you will know, already received generally unfavourable press treatment on this issue, and, since we know that the Government are in fact approaching the problem with a good deal more seriousness than the press would have us believe, we would hope that in our Report to the House we would be able to present the issues as fairly and reasonably as possible. If we are unable to study the CPRS advice to Ministers on this matter we will, I fear, be forced to rely on press information and there will be a real danger of our misinterpreting the Government's position.

I would be most grateful if you could consider, as a matter of urgency, what assistance you and your colleagues can give us on

(3)

Rt. hon. Margaret Thatcher, MP

25th November, 1981

this matter, in order to ensure that we are fully briefed on the considerations which have led to the Government's approach to main line railway electrification.

John Goss
Tom.

Tom Bradley, MP

CONQUEROR

HOUSE OF COMMONS TRANSPORT COMMITTEE

Inquiry into Main Line Railway Electrification

Terms of Reference

A statement outlining the terms of reference for the Transport Committee's inquiry into main line railway electrification is attached.

Interested organisations and individuals are invited to submit written evidence in connection with this inquiry, which should reach Mrs Joan Pickett, Assistant to the Clerk of the Transport Committee, Committee Office, House of Commons, London SW1, not later than Friday 29th January 1982. It would be helpful if 20 copies of any written evidence could be supplied.

A separate announcement will be made of any public hearings to be held in connection with this inquiry.

Committee Office
House of Commons
London SW1A 0AA

November 1981

Inquiry into Main Line Electrification

The Committee have agreed the following terms of reference:

The Department of Transport and the British Railways Board published their Final Report on the Review of Main Line Electrification early in 1981. The Report concluded that ".... a substantial programme of main line electrification would be worthwhile".¹ Four alternative options of varying scale were considered, and it was found that the larger options, involving the electrification of between 2,300 and 3,400 route miles, would give the best returns.

The Secretary of State for Transport subsequently announced² that he was "not prepared to give an unconditional commitment to the electrification of an extensive network", and invited British Rail to "submit a 10 year programme of schemes for electrification". He commented that "The approval of each successive electrification project will be conditional on the profitability of the investment in question and on the achievement of necessary improvement in productivity".

The Select Committee on Transport in their Fifth Report of the 1980-81 session stated that they intended "to undertake, as soon as possible, our own investigation to evaluate British Rail's electrification proposals and the Government's response".³ In particular, in view of the possibility that the Government's present proposal to examine projects individually may create serious uncertainty, the Committee commented that it would wish to "examine the problems of the relevant supplying and contracting industries".

1 Review of Main Line Electrification - Final Report, para 4, Department of Transport, British Railways Board, HMSO, 1981

2 Official Report, 22nd June 1981, cols. 21-2

3 The Transport Aspects of the 1981 Public Expenditure White Paper, para 42. Fifth Report of the Transport Committee, 1980-81

The Committee has now decided that the Terms of Reference for this enquiry should be as follows:

1. to confirm or otherwise that the findings of the DTp/BRB Review of Main Line Electrification are based on realistic assumptions about the cost savings and revenue to be generated from electrification, and whether or not the expenditures proposed do represent an appropriate use of the nation's resources;
2. to examine whether ad hoc approval of individual projects would seriously increase the costs of electrification, and create planning difficulties for both British Rail and the contracting industries, in view of the comment contained in the Review of Main Line Electrification (para 11) that a commitment to a specific programme of electrification should "help to avoid abortive expenditure and to secure the cost reductions [which] result from continuity of production";
3. to examine the extent to which the benefits from electrifying individual routes are inter-related, and whether it is therefore possible to satisfactorily evaluate individual proposals without knowing the future extent of the electrified network (see para 11 (iii) of the Review of Main Line Electrification);
4. to examine the extent to which the success of electrification will depend upon improvements in productivity and working practices on the part of the work force;
5. to examine the Government's contention that the "inter-city" business has not made progress towards earning an adequate return on the assets employed"¹, to determine what measures the Government regards as necessary in order to improve the rate of return and to assess whether further investment in electrification will help or hinder the move towards commercial viability of the inter-city business.

1 Official Report, 22nd June 1981, cols 21-2