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CABINET

MINISTERIAL COMMITTEE ON ECONOMIC STRATEGY

LORRIES, PEOPLE AND THE ENVIRONMENT (CMND 8439) - THE NEXT STEPS

Memorandum by the Secretary of State for Transport

1. The Supply Day debate (on 9 December) on this White Paper showed that we needed to win much more support from our backbenchers. Their determined resistance to heavier lorries has been maintained in the general belief that this will be in the interests of the environment. My whole approach has been to start at the other end with measures to help the environment and to help industry and the hauliers to face their part in the cost of these measures. I do not envisage additional public expenditure on the programme, which rest heavily on the use I am making of the roads measures. I need a programme of action and announcements presenting my case in this way, carefully prepared with our supporters, and carefully timed so that the impact is not dissipated. None of this means a wholly new policy. The December White Paper remains central to my proposals, but with some extension and compromise.

2. The clearest expression of our backbench opinion is in Early Day Motion 165 on "Heavy Lorries and the Demands of the Community", signed by 40 Government supporters (copy at Annex I). It places the emphasis on tackling the environmental problems caused by heavy lorries. It calls in particular for stronger action on enforcement, taxation of heavy lorries to cover track costs, more by-passes, lorry routes where practicable, and limits on weights and dimensions which "would more satisfactorily meet the demands of the Community". This suits my line very well. I am concentrating mainly on:-

- By-passes, as the most effective way of dealing with the effects of lorries, on town centres and villages. When I publish my Roads White Paper on 17 February, I shall be making much of the great progress which has already been made in this area and the continuing large programme of Government and local authority schemes.

- More effective enforcement of the lorry weight and safety regulations with more enforcement officers, and a faster programme of modern weighbridges for enforcement purposes.

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- Taxation better related to the track costs imposed by different types of lorry.
- Better controls over lorry routes. The powers here rightly belong to the local authorities. They are not a panacea, but we must move from neutrality to positive encouragement of well designed schemes, drawing on examples of best practice.
- The development of lorry action areas, where special ameliorative action would be taken. I expect to announce pilot schemes in co-operation with individual local authorities later this month.
- Section 8 grants to assist in attracting traffic from unsuitable roads to rail. They are effective, and presentationally valuable: a recent grant to the private sector port of Felistowe will take 300 heavy lorries a day off the roads. I have proposed to the Chancellor of the Exchequer that eligibility for grants should be extended to Freightliner and Sealink, as proposed by Armitage and that the maximum rate of grant should be increased from 50% to 60% where that is necessary to ensure that an environmentally desirable project goes ahead. I do not propose that the total amount of public expenditure on these grants should be increased above what it would otherwise be.
- Better safety requirements to make lorries more acceptable, with the heavier lorries fitted with sideguards to protect cyclists and pedestrians; and sideguards mandatory for all new trailers. And all new lorries will be required to have rear guards capable of withstanding the impact of vehicles at considerable speed.

Lorry Weights

3. The haulage industry must be helped to cut its costs, for the general good of industry and of the economy, and also because some of my measures will cost them money. We can do this best by letting them load their vehicles more fully, which has the further important environmental advantage that fewer lorries will be needed to carry the goods than if present limits remain unchanged. We have to act in an emotional and deeply suspicious climate in which reasoned argument has so far made little headway. We must take into account that many people do believe strongly that heavier weights would mean more and nastier "juggernauts" on the roads. My judgement, on the basis of soundings of backbench opinion, is that compromise on our weight proposals themselves is essential if we are to win support for any worthwhile improvement on the present position. That may well mean abandoning all our proposals except the important 38 tonne articulated lorry on 5 axles. I set out the details in Annex II.

4. On economic grounds I would have preferred to keep the weights proposed in the White Paper. But I do not believe this can be achieved. I shall be continuing consultations and soundings with industry and backbenchers in the period up to the announcement of the package. I shall offer no more by way of compromise than absolutely necessary. But my present judgement is that compromise on all but the 38 tonnes articulated 5 axle lorry will be needed. I therefore ask colleagues' approval to proceed in this way.

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Tactics

5. I have the advantage that opponents of the Government on this issue do not have a policy which would bring practical benefits to people and the environment; they would just leave the situation to deteriorate. Over the next few weeks I shall be trailing various elements of the package, and publicising all we are already doing, eg in enforcement blitzes. My aim is to make a full announcement of the package in about the first week of March. At the same time I will lay the amending regulations on lorry weights. This will enable us to have the full debate which we have promised on the whole Government package, on a Government motion welcoming the measures, and a vote on the weight regulations, in the week of 22 or 29 March.

Conclusion

6. I seek colleagues' approval for the contents of the package of additional environmental measures and a compromise on lorry weights; and for the presentational and handling measures described in this paper.

DARH

Department of Transport
2 Marsham Street
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15 February 1982

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EARLY DAY MOTION 165

ANNEX I

HEAVY LORRIES AND THE DEMANDS OF THE COMMUNITY

That this House welcomes Her Majesty's Government's intention, as expressed in the White Paper 'Lorries, People and the Environment' to tackle the environmental problems caused by heavy lorries; and therefore urges Her Majesty's Government to submit amended proposals, including stronger action on enforcement, taxation on heavy lorries to cover track costs, an accelerated and enlarged road programme of by-passes and lorry routes where practicable; together with limits on weights and dimensions of lorries which, while recognising the need to improve the international competitiveness of the road haulage industry, would more satisfactorily meet the demands of the community.

Sir Angus Maude
Mr Geoffrey Rippon
Mr Terence L Higgins
Mr Roger Moate
Mr Keith Speed
Mr Hugh Dykes

Mr Robert Adley
Mr Patrick Cormack
Mr Denshore Dover
Mr Robert McCrindle
Mr Peter Lloyd
Mr Jack Aspinwall
Mr Nicholas Baker
Mr Anthony Grant
Mr Peter Mills
Miss Janet Fookes
Mr Peter Temple-Morris

Mr Matthew Parris
Mr Richard Alexander
Mr Michael Shersby
Mr Ivan Lawrence
Mr Chris Patten
Mr Julian Critchley
Mr Toby Jessel
Dr Alan Glyn
Mr Kenneth Lewis
Mr John Farr
Mr John Watson

Mr Richard Body
Mr Alan Clark
Mr Geoffrey Dickens
Mr John Hannam
Mr John Gorst
Mr Tom Benyon
Mr Harry Greenway
Mr Robin Squire
Mr Tony Durant
Mr John Heddle
Mr Robert Rhodes James
Mr Richard Needham

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ANNEX II

PROPOSED INCREASES IN LORRY WEIGHTS

The White Paper proposals

1. The White Paper proposals are for -

Articulated vehicles

34 tonnes on 4 axles

38 tonnes on 5 axles (two on the tractor; three on the trailer)

40 tonnes on 5 axles (three on the tractor; two on the trailer)

Drawbar trailer combinations

The same limits to apply to drawbar trailer combinations with the same number of axles.

The Possibilities for Change

2. The 38 tonne articulated vehicle on 5 axles is the most attractive from the industry's point of view, and research indicates that it would be by far the most widely used of the heavier vehicles proposed. To abandon it would effectively vitiate the whole package. This leaves the following three practicable options:-

- To abandon

- 40 tonne articulated vehicles on 5 axles;
- any increase on the present 32.5 tonne limit for 4 axled articulated vehicles ie abandon 34 tonnes;
- any increase of the present 32.5 tonne limit for drawbar trailer combinations of any kind.

3. Taking these individually:-

(1) 40 tonnes on 5 axles. The 40 tonne lorry with its 3 axle tractor is the safest and least damaging of the vehicles proposed. Industry would like to have it and the European Parliament wants a 40 tonne 5 axle lorry for the whole of the Community. But it is - however irrationally - a symbol of what is regarded as the Government's determination to foist huge juggernauts onto people. The public recognises the figure of 40 tonnes. Compromise is possible because industry would still very much welcome a 38 tonne lorry.

(2) 34 tonnes on 4 axles. E(81)(29th) recognised that it might be necessary to reconsider the case for this vehicle, depending on the reception of the White Paper. It has been the subject of much criticism and on objective grounds it is the type of lorry on which we are most vulnerable to well-founded complaint.

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Lorries could carry 8% more load immediately, without the need for new vehicles and equipment. It would be attractive to the small operator who does not have the resources to buy the new and more costly 5 axled vehicles; it would be attractive for food distribution and for the container shippers; and it would bring us nearer into line with other European countries most of which allow at least 36 tonnes on 4 axles, and with which there is an increasing international traffic. But, taken in isolation, this lorry would do more damage to the roads than the present 4 axle lorries (whereas the new lorries taken together would reduce road damage).

(3) Drawbar trailers (lorries pulling a trailer) were the subject of special concern in the debate on 9 December because of their length (18 metres maximum as against 15.5 metres for articulated vehicles). They have never been widely used in this country. It is claimed that higher weights will make them relatively more attractive to hauliers. A decision not to allow these vehicles at the higher weights would have hardly any effect on the domestic road haulage industry. On the other hand, these vehicles are safer and less damaging than articulated vehicles on the same weight. Countries such as the Federal Republic of Germany, Austria and Italy, where they are widely used, might see this as a discriminatory measure directed against their operators trading into the UK and they might retaliate against our international haulage operators (who require quotas to operate in these countries). Nevertheless the case for making no increase for drawbar trailers is strong because of the lack of demand for the vehicles from UK industry.

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