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9 November 1994

Pages: 142

TO: HQ

FROM: BELFAST

FOR: P. Hennessy

FROM: S. Farrell

Re-opening of Border Roads

1. As discussed, I attended a meeting yesterday re the above held in the offices of the DoE (NI). Present on the Northern side were a number of officials from the Roads Division of DoE (NI), as well as the engineer with responsibility for the Fermanagh area, George Allister. On our side Peter McEvoy and Aeneas Langford of the DoE attended in addition to myself. An agenda listing also those present, is appended.
2. Discussion was fairly general and preliminary and a further meeting, which will be more focused, is to take place in DoE in Dublin, at a date to be settled but probably either 22 or 25 November. Our DoE pressed for a meeting as soon as practicable, emphasising the pressure on their Department from border communities to get things moving. The later meeting will seek to establish a co-ordinated programme of work to effect the smooth and orderly opening of roads as quickly as possible. Today's meeting saw both sides air problems and possible solutions as they saw it. The main points of interest to emerge follow.

3. **Numbers**

The NIO announcements about the lifting of Closure Orders refer to a figure of 104 crossings. Our DoE have identified 109 and passed over their list (copy appended). I referred the meeting to the discussions concerning closed roads which had taken place under the aegis of the Conference last year and which had produced an agreed list of crossings. I suggested that we would be able to provide the agreed list to both Departments to facilitate preparation of a consolidated list. McEvoy thanked me for this. I would be grateful if you could arrange to pass this list as agreed last year to him. The next step is for DoE (NI) to annotate the list, indicating the work required in respect of each crossing. They expect to finish this by the end of next week, in time for the next meeting.

4. **General Timeframe for Completing the Work**

DoE, (NI) anticipate that the vast majority of crossings can be repaired and reopened within a six to eight months

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timeframe. These will consist of crossings where work is essentially restoration and resurfacing. In the case of those crossings where more substantial structural work is required, e.g. rebuilding bridges, the process is likely to take much longer, from two to three years. Here a number of intermediate steps are required, before any construction work can commence, all of which will take time, including preliminary drawing up of design plans, preparation of and checking of detailed plans, putting the contracts out to tender, complying with any statutory requirements re planning permission, etc. Both Langford and McEvoy thought that the timescale proposed was quite reasonable.

5. Position of National Roads Authority and DoE

You will be interested to learn that Aghalane Bridge, apparently alone of the crossings, will be dealt with by the National Roads Authority and the DoE (NI) rather than between the two Departments. As McEvoy explained at the outset, the National Roads Authority has responsibility for National routes, such as the main road from Cavan to Enniskillen which includes Aghalane Bridge. The DoE liaises with the County Councils regarding local roads and non-national routes, which account for the overwhelming majority of the closed crossings. A meeting took place last week between the National Roads Authority and DoE (NI) concerning Aghalane Bridge.

6. Categorisation of Closed Roads

The meeting agreed that the closed roads could be divided into five rough categories:

- (a) Those already open;
- (b) Those with surface obstructions only;
- (c) Those including culverts of less than two metres diameter;
- (d) Those where small span bridges are involved; and
- (e) Those where fairly large bridge spans are necessary.

7. Apportionment of Cost

There was agreement that both sides would pay for road restoration on their respective sides of the border. In this connection the Northern side confirmed that they would be replacing rather than upgrading road surfaces. Regarding the repair of bridges, the Northern side were asked to provide as soon as possible a list of bridges which had been blown up by the NI security forces and where, therefore, the Northern side would be responsible

for the total cost of replacement. They indicated they would do this and confirmed that most of the bridges fell into this category (its not clear to me which ones would not). Our DoE estimated the number of bridges involved at 25, of which 20 occur in the Fermanagh-Tyrone area.

8. Logistics of Performing Work

Here Allister, who is based in Eniskillen, provided some interesting details of the logistics of tackling the job. Up to now either there is no work to be done or the Northern side has finished work on 10 crossings; work is still underway on another 14. Quite apart from the question of the availability of finance, there is also the matter of the availability of suitable contractors. For operational reasons Allister considered it preferable to proceed with the contractors moving into an area where, e.g. five or six crossings are located and completing work on all of them before going elsewhere, rather than moving personnel and materials considerable distances after each repair. In the area under his control, there is one main contractor operating in Fermanagh, with three attendant sub-contractors; in the Clogher Valley area there are a further two contractors working. Allister stated that was the optimum number for proper supervision, given his available resources.

9. Order of Priority in Road Reopening

There are obviously areas which will require further discussion between the two Departments and the hope is that these will be resolved at the next meeting. These areas include the order in which roads will be repaired. Here our DoE signalled clearly the political pressures which local communities are bringing to bear with regard to having their local roads opened as a priority. The Northern DoE seemed receptive to a notion that they should produce a fairly detailed programme of work for the first three months together with an indication of where subsequent work would be carried out, broadly banded. As soon as the Northern side has provided this preliminary programme, it will be discussed with Minister Smith. There was agreement, in any event, that when the major steps had been finalised, liaison at local level re tackling the work was desirable and should be encouraged. The notion of contractors (from either side) doing work on both sides of the border was not discussed but no doubt this will be examined at local level.

10. Funding

There was only a brief discussion on this. Our DoE stated that it was envisaged that funding would be provided specifically for the work on our side from central funds rather than from the annual roads allocations and thus they were anxious to reach early

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agreement so that sanction for the appropriate amount could be obtained. Their provisional estimate was approx £1.5 million, as Minister Smith had indicated.

The Northern side were not briefed on funding, beyond the fact that they understood that funds would be provided by the NIO (see the Joint Secretary's letter to Assistant Secretary O hUiginn of 27 October in this connection). I suggested that the possibility be examined that some or all of the funding might come from the anticipated additional funding from the EU, which it appeared would not be subject to additonality and referred to the interest in border roads shown by Carlo Trojan during his visit last week. It would seem appropriate to follow up on this with our DoE before the next meeting.

21 October 1994
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C O N F I D E N T I A L

P R E S S S T A T E M E N T

B O R D E R C R O S S I N G S

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, the Rt Hon Sir Patrick Mayhew QC MP, has today announced the rescinding of all remaining border road closure orders. He said:

"On the advice of the Chief Constable of the RUC and the General Officer Commanding, I have today rescinded all remaining border road closure orders, 88 in number.

No border crossing is now subject to a closure order, and a phased programme of reopenings will now begin. Because of the scale of the operation, this will take some time to implement. Work will, however, begin as soon as practicable at a number of locations.

As in other parts of Northern Ireland, the RUC, supported as necessary by the Army, will continue to provide appropriate levels of security in border areas, to ensure the protection and reassurance of local communities. Patrolling will continue to be carried out from the existing network of Patrol Bases and from other security force locations. Should the security situation require at any stage the reclosure of any border crossing in order to protect life or property, this will be done without hesitation."

C O N F I D E N T I A L

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Statement by Tánaiste
on opening of cross-border roads

The Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs Mr. Dick Spring T. D. this morning said:

I greatly welcome the Secretary of State's announcement of the lifting of all closure orders on border roads. This will be particularly welcomed by those living in border areas who have endured widespread inconvenience over many years, and whose concerns I have repeatedly raised in the Anglo-Irish Conference. The lifting of the closure orders, and the speedy return of these roads to normal use, will be of enormous benefit in the process of economic reconstruction and development in border areas. We are working actively on proposals to advance this process, and thereby underpin the achievement of peace and reconciliation to which the Government are committed.

21 October, 1994

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FAX (0)

21 October 1994

Pages: 1

TO: HQ
 FOR: P. Hennessy
 (copy to D. O'Donovan)

FROM: BELFAST
 FROM: D. Cole

Cross Border Roads

The other side have now advised me that a detailed programme of work has not yet been drawn up and in their briefing they will be referring to the need for consultation between the relevant authorities on both sides of the border. It is however intended that obstacles put in position by the security forces will be removed, remaking of roads etc to follow.

DEPARTMENT OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS

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