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DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORT
2 MARSHAM STREET LONDON SW1P 3EB

01-212 3434

The Rt Hon John Biffen MP
Lord Privy Seal
Privy Council Office
68 Whitehall
LONDON
SW1A 2AT

19 December 1984

Dear John

*NBPM
Jm*

LEGISLATIVE PROGRAMME

As I think you are aware, Sir George Engle has been discussing with my Permanent Secretary the state of drafting of two of my programme Bills this session: the Public Transport Bill and the Merchant Shipping Bill.

I understand that it will be impossible for Counsel to complete the drafting of the Public Transport Bill by the end of January without help. Sir George Engle suggested that help could be provided by means of directing the Counsel due to start work on the Merchant Shipping Bill (on which instructions have been ready for some time) to assist on the Public Transport Bill. I have said I am reluctantly prepared to agree.

This will mean dropping the Merchant Shipping Bill altogether for this session. I am very unhappy to have to do that; the disappointment caused to the industry will be substantial and staff savings in my Department will be delayed. Sir George has, however, suggested that the provisions making up the Merchant Shipping Bill - which are as you know non-controversial - could be attached to the pilotage provisions on which I have recently published a consultation paper, and for which I am bidding for a 1985/86 slot. But the immediate problem is that we must make a choice between Merchant Shipping and Public Transport. The political priority must (as I am sure you will agree) be given to fulfilling the manifesto commitment on buses.

I reached my decision on the firm assumption, with which I hope you will agree, that, if the Public Transport Bill can be ready by the end of January, there will be time for it to achieve Royal Assent before the end of the session.

I had been considering whether the provisions needed to take trust port finance out of the public sector might be incorporated in the Merchant Shipping Bill but, if you agree

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that resources should be concentrated on the Public Transport Bill, I must either return to my original suggestion that this point should be included in the Public Transport Bill or have as strong an assurance as you can manage that the single-purpose Bill which you mentioned in your letter of 26 November can be achieved.

Also, the rest of the Merchant Shipping Bill will have to be held over to the next session - disappointing the shipping industry, as I have said, and causing loss of momentum and delay of some staff savings. It could be combined in the next session with measures on pilotage - which will be my top priority for that session. As the instructions are already with Counsel (apart of course from those on pilotage), you may think that it would be useful for him to start drafting at the first opportunity so as to be sure the Bill can be introduced at the start of the session.

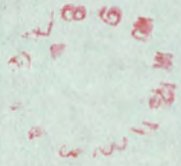
I am copying this letter to the Prime Minister, members of L, members of MISC 19, to Sir Robert Armstrong and to Sir George Engle.

Nicholas Ridley
Admiral

NICHOLAS RIDLEY

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Hand: registration



20 DEC 1984



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PRIVY COUNCIL OFFICE
WHITEHALL, LONDON SW1A 2AT

31 December 1984

*no you
dms
2/1*

Dear Nick,

LEGISLATIVE PROGRAMME: TRANSPORT LEGISLATION

Attached.

Thank you for your letter of 19 December and your welcome proposal that work on the Merchant Shipping Bill should be halted so that Counsel's resources can be devoted to the Public Transport Bill. As you know, I have been concerned for some time about the progress of the latter and I entirely agree that this is the best way to proceed given the circumstances in which we now find ourselves. I can, of course, give no guarantee that it will reach Royal Assent, but the Business Managers will exert every effort to ensure this.

The future of the Merchant Shipping Bill will of course be a matter for consideration by QL, but for my part, I can assure you that I will do my best to secure a place for it in the programme.

I do not think that I can say more about the position of a short bill on Trust Ports than I did in my earlier letter. When the proposals are in a fit state for drafting we can look at the position of the programme as a whole and see whether we can fit such a Bill into it. I can assure you, that I very much share your hopes that it will be possible to do so.

I am copying this letter to the Prime Minister, members of L, members of Misc 19, Sir Robert Armstrong and Sir George Engle.

*Yours
John Biffen*

JOHN BIFFEN

Rt Hon Nicholas Ridley MP
Secretary of State for Transport

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