This position paper has been produced with the kind support of the Transport Planning Society through the award of a study bursary to the author.

From DETR to DfT via DTLR, what are the potential implications for transport planning of these changes in departmental organisation?

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Abstract

This essay explores the relationship between transport and environment in government. It focuses upon the creation and eventual break-up of the Department for Environment, Transport and the Regions (DETR). It discusses the potential consequences of separation taking into account how the new arrangements under the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) and the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (DTLR) worked in the year following reorganisation. It then considers the implications of the further reorganisation brought by the creation of a dedicated Department for Transport (DfT) and the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) in May 2002.

Introduction: The Early Years - Transport and the Environment 1970-1997

> *The benefits claimed for reorganisation are debatable. As well as signalling political intention, they may give a fresh perspective to policy-making by bringing together topics which had previously been kept apart, but they may also separate other topics which had usefully been held together* (Glaister et al, 1998).
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> *Changing Whitehall departments requires an enormous amount of time and energy. Moving staff, reformulating objectives, restructuring management can all in the short term impede a Government's ability to deliver its electoral mandate. For many senior civil servants (and unadventurous ministers) this is an excuse not to consider the idea at all. Yet a new department with a clear policy agenda can deliver political objectives more efficiently and send a message about the values underlying Government thinking* (Hunt, 2001).

Ministerial representation for transport predates similar provision for the environment by over 50 years. The Ministry of Transport was created in 1919 and given responsibility for highways, light railways, tramways, canals, inland waterways, roads, bridges and ferries, vehicles and traffic thereon, harbours, docks and piers. The Ministry assumed additional responsibility for aviation from 1953-1959 (NDAD, n.d.). From 1919 until 1970 there was an independent Ministry of Transport. During these years the Ministry was

responsible for the nationalised rail, bus, tube and air transport services. The Ministry was effectively charged with running a transport industry and in these circumstances was primarily concerned with operational rather than planning objectives.

By contrast, the environment was only awarded departmental representation in 1970 when the Department of the Environment (DoE) was created by the merger of the Ministries of Transport, Housing and Local Government, and Public Buildings and Works. The decision was said to have originated from a desire to co-ordinate policy relating to environmental matters (NDAD, n.d.). At first glance this decision appears to represent a remarkable promotion of environmental issues on the political agenda. Indeed, the fact that road schemes required the approval of both transport and environment ministers from this point represented an enlightened step forward. However, it would be wrong to interpret the new organisation as the sudden triumph of green interests, as they are known today, in government. What is notable about the department created is how closely the ministries that were brought together represented the DTLR formed in 2001:

> *The bulky bureaucracy of the DTLR is a rerun of the Department of the Environment that saw the light of day in 1970 as a Heathite super-ministry, based on the old ministries of transport and housing. "Environment", meaning green issues, was always a tiny part of the empire* (Walker, 2002).

Transport and the environment remained in the same department until 1976 when the Department of Transport (DoT) was reconstituted. In his cabinet reshuffle of September 1976 the Prime Minister, James Callaghan deemed transport sufficiently important and complex a topic to merit its own department under William Rodgers (Rodgers, 1999). The level of integration achieved between 1970 and 1976 ensured separation did not equate to isolation. Links had been established and many relationships were prolonged by administrative inertia. For example, in 1971 regional departmental offices were created in 9 centres and they continued to be shared after separation. In London staff retained 'common citizenship' until 1989 and shared a headquarters until 1995.

> *For 25 years they used the same library and the same staff canteen, as well as the same enormous underground car park, so that an unusually dense network of informal relationships persisted throughout the years of formal separation.* (Glaister et al, 1998).

Separation, however, did cause problems and heightened tensions between the aims of transport and environmental policy provided the catalyst for their eventual reunion in 1997. During the 1980s coordination in national policy between transport and the environment became less evident. Whilst the DoE was led by a series of political high flyers such as Michael Heseltine, Nicholas Ridley and Chris Patten, the DoT was seen as something of a ministerial backwater (Tindale, 2001 & Walker, 2002).

By the late 1980s awareness and interest in the environment had reached unprecedented levels in the UK. In the 1989 European elections the Green Party achieved 15% of the

vote, then the highest share achieved by any European Green Party (European Greens, 2002). Transport policy and its impacts upon the environment became an increasing focus for environmental protest, which in turn raised the profile of transport issues in the media. Road building schemes at Newbury and Twyford Down embodied the perceived conflict between transport policy and environmental concerns. In this climate it became clear that there was an urgent need to better coordinate transport and environmental policy. From 1992 informal efforts to coordinate across the two departments were evident in fora such as cabinet committees on the environment and public expenditure. This was followed in the same year by the joint submission made by the DoE and DoT to the Royal Commission on Environmental Pollution (Glaister et al, 1998).

Cross-departmental cooperation between transport and the environment was facilitated by the appointment of John Gummer as Secretary of State for the Environment in 1993. Gummer strongly supported integration and drove forward this agenda. A significant step forward was achieved in 1994 with the production of Planning Policy Guidance Note 13 – Transport (DoE, 1994b). The document pooled the expertise of the two departments although its principal impetus came from Matthew Quinn at the DoE. Planners and environmentalists were encouraged by the new title of PPG13, 'Transport', which replaced the 1988 version 'Highways Considerations and Development Control'. PPG13 was seen to provide the regulatory framework at the centre of the new UK strategy for sustainable development (DoE, 1994a). PPG13 sought to reduce the (environmental) impacts of transport through careful land use and transport planning. The aim was to provide the same degree of access to facilities whilst reducing the need to travel overall (Quinn, 1994 & Glaister et al, 1998). DETR was created in 1997 against this backdrop of heightened environmental awareness and concern.

The period of reconciliation - DETR created

> *A sustainable environment requires above all an effective and integrated transport policy at national, regional and local level that will provide genuine choice to meet people's transport needs. That is what we will establish and develop* (Labour Party, 1997).

The Labour Party manifesto for the 1997 General Election emphasised the linkage between transport and the environment and made a commitment to this linkage point 8 of a 10 point 'contract with the people'. The linkage was manifested in the creation of the Department for Environment, Transport and the Regions (DETR). By bringing transport and the environment (as well as land use planning) under a single Secretary of State the Government recognised the interdependence of these subjects and the benefits that could be accrued by more joined-up thinking in formulating policy. The rationale seemed perfectly attuned to the political context of the time:

> *Combining the ministries in 1997 made great sense – the environment was seen as an important issue, transport plans were seen as too intrusive, and it was felt that by merging the departments, the environment could be considered at an early*

> *stage. Rather than planting a few trees to hide a road, the road could be avoided altogether by cleverer, greener thinking* (Pease, 2001a).

Personalities and politics also played an important role in the creation of the DETR. The Government sought to represent the new department and its leadership as symbolic of the new level of priority that was being given to transport and the environment. Not only were the subjects to be brought together in a large and powerful ministry or 'super-ministry' as it became known, but the department was to be headed by the Deputy Prime Minister, John Prescott. The DETR reflected the personal interests of its leader. Prescott's personal and family employment background was in the transport sector. He served as an opposition spokesman on transport on four separate occasions between 1972 and 1993. He also served as an opposition spokesman on regional affairs and devolution between 1981 and 1983.

> *A major challenge for Blair will be what to do with John Prescott. Prescott has let it be known that he is not keen to be Deputy Prime Minister, since it is a post which does not bring much real Whitehall clout. One possibility is that there might be a super-ministry for Prescott to head up, based around the Department of the Environment, and including the promotion of Labour's regional economic policies - or a remerged Department of Transport/Department of the Environment* (General Election 97, 1997).

Going their separate ways - the break up of DETR

The lifetime of the DETR was confined to the first term of the Labour government from 1997 to 2001. Following the re-election of the Labour government in June 2001 the department was reorganised. Many reasons were given for the break up of DETR by media commentators. The most widely quoted explanation was that the DETR was so large and unwieldy that effective policy formulation and delivery was not achieved (Bhutta, 2001, GHL Intelligence, 2001b, Kirby, 2001, Maguire, 2001, Minutes, 2001b, Minutes, 2001c, Purnell, 2001 & Soltani, 2001).

Matthew Parris laid the blame squarely at John Prescott's door. He stated that Prescott simply took on too much, prioritising the size of his brief rather than achievement (Parris, 2001). His unrealistic claims for what could be achieved in the short term damaged his standing and that of the department. The size and range of the DETR meant priorities to be made and this was reflected in the uneven nature of its achievements. Progress was made in the fields of constitutional reform, international climate change and wildlife protection, but little impact was made in improving the UK's transport system (Kirby, 2001).

The perception of the DETR's constitution as being fundamentally flawed gained widespread endorsement after its demise. However, many of the problems faced by the DETR had very little to do with departmental organisation. The principal reason for the failure to invest substantially in the transport system in the first two years of the

Parliament was the decision to adhere to the previous Government's restrictions on transport expenditure. (Tindale, 2001, Walker, 2001 & Foster, 2001). Failure to get transport legislation through Parliament in the first two years was related to the departmental structure as legislation on local and regional government was prioritised over transport. It is unlikely, however, that this was the decisive factor in the failure to obtain transport legislation:

> *The Department for Education and Employment - in charge of New Labour's avowed priority - has not had any difficulty securing all the legislative time it has needed. Transport was not a priority, so it got no bill* (Tindale, 2001).

A change in the political climate in 1999 signalled the beginning of the end for the DETR. According to Sir Christopher Foster, from that summer the focus groups were telling Number 10 that the government's transport policy was not popular. As a result the Prime Minister and his advisers put pressure on John Prescott, who was already being criticised for his 'failure' to solve the UK's transport problems within two years, to adopt more road user-friendly policies (Foster, 2001).

The most significant indication of this policy shift was the appointment of Lord MacDonald as Transport Minister in July 1999. Prior to MacDonald's appointment Prescott had wielded unrivalled authority at the DETR, his three previous transport deputies had lasted a total of 30 months and he had persuaded the Prime Minister to remove the Transport Minister from the cabinet in Labour's first reshuffle. Lord MacDonald's close relationship with Downing Street made him a far more powerful figure. The media reported that two rival camps emerged within the DETR with Prescott and the environment wing regularly coming into conflict with Lord MacDonald and the transport wing over issues such as road building and the privatisation of air traffic control. The conflict prompted concern that the potential benefits of policy coordination of the merged DETR were being lost (Bennett, 2001 & Maguire, 2001).

The increasing priority given to transport was reflected in the publication in July 2000 of *Transport 2010: The Ten Year Plan* (DETR, 2000) made possible by the greater funding given to transport in the 2000 Comprehensive Spending Review. The Plan committed the Government to funding significant increases in capacity, reliability and safety of both road and rail, which were to get an about equal share of the extra £140 billion provided. A further catalyst to policy shift was provided by the fuel protests in the autumn of 2000 which sharply focussed the government's minds on the transport priorities of vocal sections of the electorate.

> *Worthy environmental aims were whittled away by fuel protesters and the appointment of the powerful pro-car Blairite Lord Macdonald as transport minister. With a pro-roads swing, the environmental arm of the DETR had to stand by and watch the effects of the policy reverse. Instead of environmental interests moderating the transport interests within the DETR, the swing saw transport interests being able to swamp environmental interests without discussion in the Cabinet* (Pease, 2001b).

In April 2001 the Institute of Public Policy Research (IPPR) offered its plan for the reorganisation of the DETR after the forthcoming General Election. It recommended moving local and regional government into a Department for Constitutional Affairs (along with the Welsh, Scottish and eventually Northern Irish Offices). This arrangement would leave a manageable and coherent Department of Environment and Transport (DET). DET would also assume the regulatory and environmental responsibilities of an abolished MAFF, whilst the promotion of the agri-business industry would be left to the DTI (Hunt, 2001 & Tindale, 2001). Of considerable importance would be the fact that the DET would provide a powerful enough brief to attract a front rank politician. The IPPR acknowledged the political reality that Departments were rarely rearranged as part of a grand plan, but more often for tactical reasons or to accommodate individuals:

> *Too often Cabinet reshuffles and departmental restructuring are the product of short-term political fixes. What fits one Cabinet ego and who refuses to work with whom typically exert greater influence than a dispassionate understanding of the need to model institutions around governing objectives* (Hunt, 2001).

Departmental reorganisation following the General Election did not reflect the IPPR's proposals. According to the media it was characterised more by tactics and political fixes than by any master plan. The key issue to determine the reshuffle was widely seen to be the Euro. Early reports suggested that Stephen Byers would stay at the DTI. As a vocal supporter of the Euro and close ally of Tony Blair it was envisaged that he would continue to press the business case for early entry into the Euro serving as a counterweight to the influence to the cabinet supporters of the more cautious Gordon Brown, who was rumoured to favour the appointment of Alistair Darling at the DTI (Brown, K, 2001). Within a matter of days it was reported that Byers would be moved to the Transport brief, perversely because of the Euro. The removal of Robin Cook from the Foreign Office, with whom Byers was said to have agreed a pact to campaign for the Euro, signalled the Prime Minister's intention to diffuse tensions over the issue. Anxious to avoid cabinet infighting in the new Parliament Blair moved Byers to the transport brief where the Euro would be a far less significant issue (GHL Intelligence, 2001, Groom, 2001 & Ahmed, 2001).

There had been speculation that Jack Straw would lead an unreformed DETR (Wintour, 2001 & Purnell, 2001). The rumour proved unfounded as Straw was appointed to the Foreign Office. The affair showed that transport is not perceived in political culture to be a particularly attractive or desirable brief:

> *When Jack Straw was called to Number 10 on the afternoon after the election, he anticipated being asked to take over the DETR. Immediately before his audience with the Prime Minister, Mr Straw was in the middle of acquainting himself for the first time with the manifesto sections devoted to the subject in order to find out what were the transport policies he would be expected to deliver. This is no way run to a railroad, never mind a government. It was a stunned, happy and hugely relieved Mr Straw who emerged from his meeting with the Prime Minister to*

gasp: 'I'm Foreign Secretary.' The result is that transport lands in the lap of Stephen Byers who never dreamt he'd be rerouted there. I bet he was not consulted about, and probably did not read either, the manifesto promises he is now supposed to fulfil (Rawnsley, 2001).

Stephen Byers is a clever man and more than capable of presenting his brief, but rational persuasion is not what is missing: what's missing is money. For money you need clout. His appointment hardly raised a ripple in the media. It was universally seen as a slight demotion. All the talk of a new toughened-up Transport role was forgotten, for the press and broadcasters are as guilty as the political class of ignoring as secondary what for so many citizens is a primary concern. No more than being a transport minister is being a transport correspondent seen as a fast track to the top (Parris, 2001).

DEFRA and DTLR

The break up of the DETR after the 2001 General Election led to the creation of two new departments- the Department of the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) and the Department of Transport, Local Government and the Regions (DTLR). The reorganisation served to separate Transport from the Environment as they had been from 1976 to 1997. DEFRA took on the Environment Protection Group and Wildlife and Countryside Directorate from the former DETR as well as all the functions of the former MAFF (GHL Intelligence, 2001a). The DTLR took on responsibility for electoral law, local byelaws and the fire service from the Home Office. The Regional Co-ordination Unit moved to the Cabinet Office now under John Prescott's leadership, which shared responsibility for regional government with the DTLR. The Regional Development Agencies moved to the DTI which also assumed responsibility for the construction industry (GHL Intelligence, 2001b).

The creation of the new departments raised an interesting yet largely unexplored question about nomenclature. Why were rural affairs considered worthy of titular recognition in a department whilst urban affairs were not? Why was local government (and not planning) suddenly considered worthy of such recognition when it was not under the former DETR?

The creation of DEFRA was a response to the rising profile of countryside issues in the UK in the wake of the foot and mouth crisis. MAFF had been perceived as the friend of agri-business and at best indifferent towards consumers and the environment. It was blamed for a series of rural problems from BSE to foot and mouth and Labour's election manifesto promised its replacement (Brown, C, 2001, Kirby, 2001 & Newman, 2001). Margaret Beckett as head of DEFRA appeared before two House of Commons Select Committees in November 2001 to answer questions on the new department (Minutes, 2001a & Minutes, 2001c). When asked about the reasoning behind the dismantling of DETR her lack of involvement in the reorganisation proved expedient:

> *There is the general issue of departmental responsibilities as to where one draws boundaries and how you can encourage work across them. People will always want the boundaries to be drawn in different places from where they are. What is important is to try and make sure there is cooperative work across boundaries… I was not involved in the decision to change the perimeters. There are clear links between the policy requirement on the environment and transport or planning, nevertheless it is clear that there has come to be more and more emphasis on sustainable development and a growing belief within and across government in a department that had sustainable development as its prime focus* (Minutes, 2001c).

Mrs Beckett went on to address concerns that DEFRA might only be concerned with rural issues by saying that the department was committed to environmental protection in both the national and urban as well as rural contexts. She stated that while the department was to be seen as offering a focal point for rural issues many issues such as rural transport, rural policing and rural education were not its direct responsibility, the department would therefore have a cross-cutting role across government (Minutes, 2001a). Stephen Byers was also questioned on the creation of DEFRA and said that the new department reflected the growing political significance of environmental issues. He stated that if the UK was to be a global player in addressing environmental issues then a dedicated department with a Secretary of State was required (Minutes, 2001b).

Mr Byers went on to explain the reasoning behind the creation of DTLR. He stated that following the election the Prime Minister had made a number of major changes to the machinery of Government. The outcome was a set of streamlined departments with a sharper focus on the Government's key priorities for delivery of public services. He stated that it was now his responsibility to ensure that environmental considerations were taken into account in policy formulation and pointed to his credentials in achieving this when at the DTI (Minutes, 2001b). In announcing the creation of the DTLR, Downing Street emphasised that it was configured to achieve the delivery of improved transport services:

> *Transport was an issue that had come up time and time again during the Election. We now had the 10 year plan and the environmental issues had been factored into that plan. It was now important that we saw real improvements to our transport system, not least because of the importance of improving our infrastructure, deliver prosperity and improve productivity* (10 Downing Street, 2001).

Despite Byers' assurances that he would take on the environmental agenda when framing future transport policy the Downing Street statement raised concern with regard to the past tense in which environmental issues were referred to. It could be interpreted to suggest that environmental considerations had been considered with regard to transport under DETR to such an extent that they would not play an ongoing role in decision-making within the DTLR.

<u>Implications of the separation</u>

The decision to dismantle the DETR raised a myriad of issues. Some argued that the reintroduction of an environment minister at cabinet showed that sustainability would be given a more powerful voice in government. Given that the transport wing had come to dominate the environment wing in the latter years of the DETR it might mean that environmental interests were best served in a different department (Pease, 2001a & Pease, 2001b). However, Margaret Beckett was not solely an environment minister, as she was responsible for a wide brief. It was significant that despite being generally recognised as an effective environment minister at the DETR, Michael Meacher was still not given a place in cabinet when his responsibilities transferred to DEFRA.

The majority of commentators greeted the separation of transport from the environment with dismay seeing it as indicative of a lower priority being given to the environment (FoE, 2001b, Gummer, 2001 & Kirby, 2001). Prior to the election Stephen Tindale of the IPPR, gave evidence of the benefits brought to the environment brief from its location within DETR:

> *Under John Gummer, officials in the DoE became used to putting forward green ideas in the knowledge that they would be rejected by other ministries. Gummer lacked the weight in Cabinet to overcome the opposition of departments like the DTI. One of the factors in Michael Meacher's success has been the ability to deploy the authority of the Deputy Prime Minister in support of departmental proposals. When I started as Meacher's Special Adviser in 1997 I was often told that something was 'a sensible idea, but DTI (or MAFF or whoever) will never allow it'. Officials had to be persuaded that with the Deputy Prime Minister on our side it was worth putting forward ideas we knew other Departments wouldn't like; that sometimes we would get them agreed* (Tindale, 2001).

John Gummer regretted the demise of DETR saying it had been the best-structured and most powerful environment ministry in the world. He saw the creation of the DEFRA as turning back the clock and relegating the environment to the margins of government. He described the DEFRA as a department with no direct power except over the nation's agriculture and its landscape (Gummer, 2001). The creation of the DEFRA might revive the common perception that the environment related only to the countryside and animals. With urban dwellers accounting for around 95% of the UK population the location of the environment in a specifically rural department raised fears that important issues relating to urban environments and affecting the vast majority of the population would be neglected. Issues such as air quality, congestion, regeneration and impacts from industry were identified as being particularly vulnerable to neglect (EBM, 2001, FoE, 2001b, Gummer, 2001, LTT, 2001b & LTT, 2001c). This neglect was expected to be accentuated by the department being predominantly concerned with sorting out the fallout from the foot and mouth crisis in its early months. The crisis itself had illustrated the interdependence of rural and urban needs. (Haskins et al, 2001 & Pease, 2001a).

The division of transport from the environment was widely perceived as a retrograde step. It signalled fears of a return to the situation in the 1980s and early 1990s when transport projects were seen to be promoted at the expense of other environmental

impacts and sustainable development considerations with frequent policy disagreements on transport between the DoT and the DoE as a result. Environmental groups questioned what environmental input would be made to decisions regarding airport growth and new road schemes (FoE, 2001b & Kirby, 2001). It was also unclear whether separation would lead to a change in the application of environmental impact assessment policies and standards in relation to vehicles and infrastructure. The emphasis on delivery of improved transport services might bring dubious environmental compromises under a minister with no green remit:

> *In his haste to reform he (Tony Blair) appears to have created potentially serious weaknesses in the future stewardship of transport policy, and in ensuring it is kept in its proper wider context... Mitigating the environmental impacts of the future transport schemes which Stephen Byers will be in a rush to deliver, could become an irritating afterthought for the Government, rather than an integral element of the decision-making process* (LTT, 2001b).

Concern was raised over the status of rural transport issues with the rural agenda relocated away from transport. Would accessibility and transport issues in rural areas be marginalized? Similarly the new arrangements raised fears that issues related to the movement of food and other agricultural goods would be overlooked by the new departments. Clearly freight transport had an integral part to play in making the UK's food supply chains more efficient and sustainable and this issue might be neglected by a rural affairs department divorced from transport (LTT, 2001c & Haskins et al, 2001). In general terms, how could integrated and strategic planning be properly pursued when rural and urban issues were being dealt with in different departments and what could be done about areas where the distinctions between urban and rural were not clear cut?

Some benefits were perceived from the separation for transport policy. It was argued that environmental issues had been only a small part of the responsibilities of DoE and DETR compared to local government, housing, and the town and country planning system. The delivery of the Ten Year Plan and the objectives in the White Paper would rely heavily on integration with local authorities and their Local Transport Plans. The removal of environment from the department could be interpreted as enabling more efficient policy delivery (Coates, 2001).

The first evidence of this desire for more efficient delivery came in the form of the Planning Green Paper published in December 2001. The paper was conceived under the belief that wholesale reform of the planning system was necessary to bring about a simpler and more streamlined process for considering planning applications. By March 2002 the DTLR had received over 7,000 responses to consultation on the document. Widespread concern was expressed that the reforms proposed would undermine links between land use and transport planning. In particular, the Institution of Highways and Transportation objected to the proposal to strip county councils of their structure planning powers and thereby break the link between land use planning and Local Transport Plans (LTT, 2002a & LTT, 2002b).

The separation of environmental policy from land use planning policy was almost universally seen as a dangerous and unwelcome move (FoE, 2001b, Gummer, 2001, Haskins et al, 2001, Kirby, 2001 & WWF-UK, 2001). There appeared to be a fundamental flaw in the fact that achieving DEFRA's goals of preserving the landscape and facilitating conservation and its wider environmental remit would be highly dependent on planning decisions for which the department did not have responsibility (Minutes, 2001c). This was revealed in Stephen Byers' evidence to a House of Commons Select Committee on relations between the two departments:

> *If there is a major decision coming up then we will consult DEFRA, sometimes formally, sometimes informally, about the way in which our decision making process is going. The one exception to that, because of the quasi-judicial role that I play as Secretary of State, is in planning matters (where) we cannot formally involve DEFRA. We receive advice and representations from them but we have to treat them like any other organisation in terms of the representations that they make* (Minutes, 2001b).

Judgement on the implications of the split would be likely to be based upon a series of future high profile planning decisions. These included the issues of the Heathrow Terminal 5 inquiry, the Hastings bypasses and the Dibden Bay terminal development. Early results have been inconclusive with Heathrow Terminal 5 approved, the Hastings Bypasses rejected and the Dibden Bay terminal development yet to be decided. In stating his reasons for rejecting the Hastings bypasses Stephen Byers hinted at the important roles that both economic and environmental factors played in the decision making process:

> *The question was whether the two bypasses would lead to the economic regeneration of Hastings town centre and areas just outside Hastings. I had to balance that with the effect of building two bypasses through areas of outstanding natural beauty. The arguments for economic regeneration were not strong and it was so detrimental to the environment that it should not go ahead* (Minutes, 2001b).

The retention of land use planning and transport within the same department was broadly welcomed. The decision to give Sally Keeble responsibility for local transport, planning and regeneration indicated a continuing desire for an integrated approach to transport and land use (LTT, 2001c). This integration could have been given greater prominence by incorporating planning in the title of the new department (LTT, 2001b). However, Lord Falconer's appointment as planning minister meant there was no longer a dedicated planning minister in the House of Commons (FoE, 2001a).

The position of regional policy following the break up of the DETR appeared confused with responsibility split across three departments - DTLR, DTI and the Cabinet Office (see page 7). The split raised the possibility of policy fragmentation and inter-departmental friction over the relationship between regional transport, economic and environmental policy (Brown, K et al, 2001 & LTT, 2001c). Indeed, tensions were

manifested over the Regional Government White Paper being drafted by John Prescott. Labour's manifesto pledged that regional chambers would have responsibility for co-ordinating transport, economic development and land use planning and whilst Prescott favoured widespread devolution of powers, the DTLR ministers were less keen (Forster, A et al, 2002). How much the confused distribution of authority had resulted from the need to accommodate Prescott's interests remained unclear:

> *There are disturbing signs of confusion about how the new strengthened centre is intended to work. Prescott seems to have been given responsibility without power - writing a white paper on the regions that Stephen Byers will have to deliver and retaining a role in climate change negotiations when the expertise lies elsewhere. This is more likely to result in tension than in co-ordination* (FT.com, 2001).

The people appointed to head the DEFRA and the DTLR offered some cause for optimism. Both Beckett and Byers had developed a reputation for promoting environmental concerns whilst at the DTI (Gummer, 2001 & Tindale, 2001). However, there was disquiet about Byers' and his Transport Minister John Spellar's close links with the motoring industry (LTT, 2001b). Effective communication between DEFRA and DTLR would be vital in allaying fears over the new departmental structures. A concordat was produced between DEFRA and DTLR that covered working arrangements between ministers and officials in the areas of transport, planning, rural affairs and sustainable development. It paved the way for promoting a common agenda on transport and the environment and on the relationship between the rural and urban agenda, including joint publications. Also a joint Appraisal Group was formed to provide a forum for methodological issues on appraisal and evaluation to be discussed. A senior DEFRA official would sit on the DTLR Transport Board and a Green Minister at the DTLR would be responsible for sustainable development and 'greening operations' issues within the department (Minutes, 2001b).

From DTLR to DfT - streamlined or blinkered?

In May 2002 the resignation of Stephen Byers led to the dismantling of the DTLR. From Autumn 2001 he had been subject to almost constant media attack over his handling of both departmental discipline and the demise of Railtrack. These problems combined with some outspoken comments on the Euro served to ensure that the attention he was receiving from the media was detracting from the Government's work. Matters came to a head when the House of Commons Transport Select Committee produced a very critical response to the Ten Year Plan (Forster, 2002, LTT, 2002e & LTT 2002f).

The perceived failures of the transport system, and consequently of Government policy, had led to calls for departmental reorganisation from February 2002. It was argued that the problems were so acute that a department solely dedicated to transport was necessary (Stoker, 2002). This came into being in with Byers' resignation in May 2002 when most of the responsibilities of the former DTLR were brought into the newly created Office of the Deputy Prime Minister alongside John Prescott's existing responsibilities for social

exclusion and the regions (including the Government Offices in the Regions). Regional and local government and the Government's cross-cutting agenda for neighbourhood renewal and social inclusion would be handled by this department which also assumed responsibility for implementing the Regional Government and Local Government White Papers. The DTLR's former responsibility for the Electoral Commission and for policy on electoral law, referendums and party funding were transferred to the Lord Chancellor's Department (10 Downing Street, 2002).

The creation of DfT accentuated trends begun earlier with the creation of DTLR. The key message that the Government took from the 2001 General Election was that the electorate expected policy delivery. The DTLR had been created to enable more efficient delivery of transport policy and DfT served to further streamline the operation of the transport brief. A key question raised by the creation of a dedicated transport department was whether streamlining would actually equate to blinkering whereby important considerations relating to transport policy and its impacts would be ignored or downplayed in the drive to deliver results? It would require meaningful dialogue, close liaison and real interaction with other departments to ensure this did not happen.

The choice to head the DfT reflected the change of style and approach with which the transport brief would be tackled. Alistair Darling and Rachel Lomax, his former permanent secretary at the Department for Work and Pensions, were described by Downing Street as an experienced team with a proven track record of delivery. Darling was seen as one of the Government's safest pair of hands and it was hoped that he would stabilise the department in the same way that he brought order to the social security department in 1998 (Watt et al, 2002).

> *Mr Darling has a reputation for being able to grab hold of a brief, do the detail and simply get on with it. He is not the most charismatic man in the cabinet and appears to be one of the few ministers to concentrate his efforts on policy development. What is needed in the department of transport is someone who can knuckle down, ignore all the distracting flak and come up with workable solutions* (Assinder, 2002a).

Darling's pacifying qualities were questioned by motoring interests when his past experience of transport policymaking was revealed. As a Labour councillor on Lothian Regional Council in the 1980s, he chaired the Transport Committee from 1986 to 1987. One of his first actions was to cancel the construction of a Western Relief Road in Edinburgh (Forster, 2002).

The creation of the DfT brought support from the sustainable transport charity, Sustrans and the freight and road haulage industries who believed that separating transport from local government and the regions would help focus energy on the nation's transport problems (Sustrans, 2002, BIFA, 2002 & RHA, 2002). Endorsement of the change was not wholesale. The Rail Passengers Council regretted the fact that the change brought with it a degree of uncertainty that the industry could ill afford (RPC, 2002). Fears were

expressed that the DfT might turn the clock back to the days of the Ministry of Transport when operational rather than planning issues held centre stage.

Conclusions

Departmental reorganisation has made coordinated planning in the transport sector difficult. For example, the creation of the DETR provided a common home for a series of government agencies. The pre-existing Highways and Environment agencies were joined by the Countryside and Regional Development agencies under a clear common agenda. Reorganisation saw these agencies dispersed across a range of departments pursuing a range of agendas. For planners working on local transport agendas the changes were similarly disruptive as a spokeswoman for the Birmingham Chamber of Commerce and Industry explained:

> *Campaigns for a better transport infrastructure in the West Midlands have been stop-start affairs because of the number of changes at Government level. Each time a new Minister is appointed, bodies such as Advantage West Midlands and the Confederation of West Midlands Chambers of Commerce, have to start all over again to convince them that the strategic transport priorities for the region are an absolute 'must' if the level of inward investment is to be kept up and business growth sustained. What we need is stability at the Department* (BCCI, 2002).

The plea for stability at the centre reflected a growing concern amongst transport professionals that what transport planning needs most is stable leadership from the centre based upon rational, long term policy objectives. The impression given over the last five years has been of a ministry in flux, reacting to events with short-term policy initiatives and organisational and personnel changes. There is widespread agreement within the transport planning profession that transport needs to be diffused as a political issue and consensus needs to be built regarding the best way forward.

In assessing the potential implications for transport planning of departmental reorganisation the general impression is that the negatives outweigh the positives. The creation of the DETR appeared to represent the triumph of an ideology of integration and sustainability which was widely supported. Its demise seemed to represent the failure of a vision that proved too big to be practically achievable in the political and administrative context of the times. The further reorganisation which saw the replacement of the DTLR by the DfT was far less significant. DTLR could be seen as a poorly designed halfway house between a 'superministry' and a department dedicated to a single brief. It might be argued that the best departmental organisation could lie somewhere between DETR and DfT.

The message that could be derived from the essay is that the ideal arrangement would be a department that sought to integrate transport and environmental policy such as the Department of Environment and Transport (DET) proposed by the IPPR in April 2001. However, it might be beneficial to suggest a variation on the IPPR proposal in the form

of the DETP – the Department for the Environment, Transport and Planning. This arrangement would recognise the importance of the links between the environment and transport whilst crucially acknowledging the pivotal yet undervalued role that land use planning plays in relation to both of these policy areas.

Further Research

The process of researching this essay involved making a lot of choices. A large number of pathways to further research opened up and I had to decide which options were best to pursue given the limited resources available. In order to facilitate future research that might follow from this paper I will highlight some potential research avenues which I was unable to pursue.

It would be useful to look at departmental arrangements regarding transport and the environment in other countries, with a focus on Western Europe and North America likely to be most relevant. This would enable an assessment of whether the kind of departmental organisation in the UK and the processes of reorganisation that have taken place in recent years are a unique or common experience across the world.

The impact of departmental reorganisation on policy delivery could be further explored in relation to Local Transport Plans, the Ten Year Plan and Multi Modal Studies. An in depth study of one or all of these policy tools could be undertaken looking at how they have been implemented during and after reorganisation. It might then be possible to construct a matrix presenting an overview assessment of the impact of reorganisation on policy delivery whereby for each policy tool an evaluation is made as to whether the impacts have been largely positive, negative or neutral.

Technical issues relating to decision making also merit further exploration. For example, under the DETR the licensing of environmental works was the responsibility of a single minister, with transport and environment now in separate departments who takes the decisions now?

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