

PRIME MINISTER

CHANNEL BRIDGE

I enclose a letter, which is self-explanatory, from Nigel Seymer, one of the members of the CPS Study Group on Transport.

Seymer spoke to me about this at the reception at St Stephen's Club last Monday. I have had his letter, which was rather badly typed, retyped. The subject is outside the normal remit of the Policy Unit, but is obviously important.

*John*

*John*

JOHN HOSKYNS  
11 February 1980

*We might ask Norman  
John check the status of play.*

*OK*

Nigel

*We would be grateful if you could phone  
this. Thanks.*

*Andrew*



COPY

Bathealton Court  
Taunton

6 February 1980

John Hoskyns Esq  
10 Downing Street

Dear John

The Channel Bridge

When we spoke on the phone just now, following our chat at the CPS party on Monday, you suggested that I should set down on paper what is worrying me about the way the possibility of a Channel Bridge is being handled.

What worries me is the danger, as I see it, that the case for a bridge - which could carry both road and rail traffic - is in some danger of going by default because the base for it is not being pushed by anybody with resources to back it, whereas the case for a single-track rail tunnel is of course being actively pushed by BR and SNCF - and the rail lobby seems to be strong both in London and in Brussels.

I heard yesterday from a partner in Freeman, Fox and Partners that the Coopers and Lybrand study on the effect of a fixed link, commissioned a year ago by the EEC, is not being published for the time being. Might this be because it is too favourable to the case for a bridge, and has therefore incurred the displeasure of the rail lobby?

As regards the Government's attitude, we know that Fowler commissioned Cairncross to report on the case for the single-track rail tunnel; but not to look at the case for a bridge. The EEC study was at least concerned with all types of link. But what nobody has been doing is finding answers to the outstanding questions regarding a bridge - notably as regards its effect on navigation in the Straits.

I might mention here that I attended a seminar on navigation in the Straits held by the Nautical Institute last May. On that occasion Captain Emden, RN, who is in charge of HM Coastguard surveillance of the Straits, told me that he favoured a bridge - because it would eliminate the cross-traffic.

In this country, the RAC has taken the lead in putting the case for the bridge before the Government (the BRF is a broken reed in this matter, partly because their membership includes the ferry operators). The RAC wrote to Fowler on 30 August, expressing the fear that there was a "real danger of premature decisions" being taken - in favour of a rail tunnel.

Fowler wrote back on 8 October, saying that no final decision would be taken without public debate, but pointing out that "so far no other fixed proposals" (ie other than the BR proposal) "have been formally submitted".

This is quite true: no bridge proposal has been FORMALLY submitted. At the same time Fowler's civil servants have been informed of the results of work done by Freeman, Fox over a year ago - in which I played some part.

The question I want to raise is this: on a matter of such great national importance, why does our transport ministry have to wait for a private



body to submit bridge proposals? Is it not (as I am inclined to think) a dereliction of duty on their part to fail to investigate fully all aspects of the bridge possibility?

It is perhaps worth mentioning that the Danish Government decided many years ago that the best type of fixed link across the Great Belt (10 miles wide) would be a road and rail bridge. If the Danes have got it right then we shall have got it wrong if we go for a rail tunnel: it's as simple as that.

Yours sincerely

Nigel Seymer