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GOLD COAST COLONY

# Report

of the

# Road-rail Transport Committee

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*Ordered by His Excellency the Governor to be Printed*

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GOLD COAST

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# Report of the Road-rail Transport Committee

YOUR EXCELLENCY,

We were appointed in April last a Committee to consider and report—

- (a) whether in view of the importance of securing cheap and efficient rail and road transport services for both passengers and goods, the existing system by which restrictions are placed on road transport by the Carriage of Goods by Road Ordinance, 1936, should continue ;
- (b) as to what form of Government control over road services should be introduced so as to assist the development of cheap and efficient road transport, due regard being had to the public interest in the Railway,

and to make recommendations.

2. We invited by public notice the submission of evidence and memoranda. The memoranda received are listed in the Appendix and represent a very limited response.

## THE LOCAL ROAD-RAIL ISSUE

3. We do not consider it necessary to set out again the whole complex problem of co-ordinating railway and road transport ; the comparative disabilities of a railway as a common carrier, with fixed rates, unable to carry from door to door, vulnerable to destructive competition from road transport, but yet an essential means of transport that must be paid for by its users ; or the proper advantages of road transport for short-haul traffic, providing flexible and convenient services for both passengers and goods and giving a large amount of direct and indirect employment. These general principles of the problem have been set out often enough. The inevitable general conclusion that the development and operation of railway and road transport services should be controlled by a common representative body in the interests of the users of both is found, on examination, to be idealistic to the extent that account has to be taken of actual local conditions and has for this reason to be whittled down to what is necessary and practicable under these conditions. The local situation in the Gold Coast is that as a result of the rapid expansion of road transport in the period following the last war and after examination of the problem by a Committee appointed in 1932 to consider what steps should be taken " in view of the serious losses suffered by the Railway during recent years mainly owing to road competition ", the Carriage of Goods by Road Ordinance was passed in 1936. This Ordinance provides not for licensing but for the prohibition of the carriage of specified goods over scheduled roads. It has been applied so as to prohibit the carriage of cocoa to the coast by road and the carriage of imported goods and beer by road from the coast into Ashanti. There are 16 sections of road to which these prohibitions apply. They are equipped with barriers at which vehicles passing through are inspected and recorded by the Police. This system has now been in use for nearly ten years and in spite of the objections that can be raised to it in principle, in fact it works and is generally understood—and for that reason accepted.

4. During the war two developments have taken place that require mention. First, on account of the general shortage of vehicles, tyres and petrol, road transport has been placed under strict control and reduced in volume. The census taken in January, 1945, showed 3,800 lorries then licensed as compared with 5,000 in 1930. Nearly two-thirds of the present total are of pre-war manufacture. Two thousand eight hundred and fifty were licensed in the Colony and 950 in Ashanti and the Northern Territories. The purposes for which the lorries are used are :—

Passengers and goods	...	...	...	...	...	2,533
Goods only	...	...	...	...	...	388
Logging	...	...	...	...	...	78
Contracting	...	...	...	...	...	71
Mining	...	...	...	...	...	54
Government and Town Councils	...	...	...	...	...	360
Miscellaneous ; and insufficient information	...	...	...	...	...	316

In addition there are 79 " buses ", 41 of which are owned by Town Councils and 38 are owned privately.

It will be seen from the above that about two-thirds of the total number of lorries in the country are used for the general transport of passengers and goods.

The gross weights are :—

Below	50 cwt.	...	...	...	...	180
	50 cwt.	...	...	...	...	1,411
	51-99 cwt.	...	...	...	...	572
	100-110 cwt.	...	...	...	...	1,291
Over	110	...	...	...	...	66
Insufficient information	...	...	...	...	...	280

5. The second development that has taken place is the standardisation of cocoa buying prices at all rail points and Senchi ferry. This system has been introduced as a part of the war-time machinery for the purchase of cocoa by the West African Produce Control Board. Since the producer thus gets the same price for his cocoa at up-country railway stations as he gets for it delivered to the port, there is no inducement to

send it by road to the coast. The operation of this scheme by which the purchasing agency pays the transport differentials is not only of considerable benefit to the up-country producer: it also assures to the Railway the transport of the cocoa crop.

6. The cocoa crop is of vital importance to the Railway, as is shown by the following statement of goods revenue for 1943-44:—

	£
Bauxite ... ..	90,900
Manganese ... ..	149,405
Cocoa ... ..	391,517
Timber ... ..	50,208
Native produce ... ..	58,500
Petrol and oil ... ..	62,500
U.S.A. traffic ... ..	58,800
General goods ... ..	276,850
Livestock ... ..	10,225
	£1,148,905

The total Railway Revenue for 1943-44, including Coaching (£402,400) and Miscellaneous (£39,760), amounted to £1,590,975, of which total 25 per cent was goods revenue on cocoa. This percentage is likely to increase as passenger and other goods traffic is lost to road transport in the post-war period—a loss estimated by the Railway Management to amount to not less than £350,000 annually.

7. With the exception of certain areas in the vicinity of the ports, including the surf ports of Cape Coast and Winneba which the Government for its part has said that it is willing to operate if the shipping companies have the inducement to use them, there can be no justification for transporting cocoa by road to any destination other than the nearest rail point. We assume that the present system of standardised cocoa prices will continue, whatever form of controlled marketing is adopted, and if and when it is established for certain that it will continue it would be possible, without risk of loss to the Railway, to remove the present prohibition of the carriage of cocoa over the scheduled road sections. But that state of certainty has not yet been reached and until it is we recommend that the prohibition should remain.

8. We see no reason, however, to retain the existing prohibition on the carriage of imported goods or beer over the 10 road sections to which such a restriction at present applies. No one is likely to wish to transport beer over these sections to any appreciable extent. But the present prohibition is absolute except with the permission of the Governor in Council. It may often prove desirable to use road transport for imported goods on these routes, and there is little reason to believe that this would cause any appreciable financial loss to the Railway, so long as there are no cocoa-lorries returning empty to pick them up. Such prohibitions are obsolete and unnecessary restrictions in present conditions, and we therefore recommend that in respect of the carriage of imported goods and beer they should be abolished.

9. The policy whereby in the past gaps were deliberately left in the system of road communications, so as to prevent competition with the Railway, has been abandoned.

10. In the case of a Government Railway such as the Gold Coast Railway, we hold the view that the well-known principle of rating according to "what the traffic can bear" must give way to the importance, in the public interest, of charging the lowest possible rate consistent with efficient transport and the avoidance of subsidy from taxation. The Railway rates in the Gold Coast are distinctly high, and the aim should be to reduce them, but we recognise that the possibility of reduction depends mainly on the securing of the cocoa traffic for carriage by rail. It is, moreover, impossible to estimate now with accuracy what the post-war losses of revenue on passengers and other goods traffic will amount to.

11. We do not consider that the Railway should attempt to operate road services, and should prefer to see these left to private enterprise. Nor do traffic demands justify in our view any further Railway construction. We think, therefore, that in present circumstances the answer to the road-rail issue, paragraph (a) of our terms of reference, can be simply expressed as the removal of all the prohibitions at present in force except that applying to cocoa, which should also be abolished as soon as the cocoa traffic is definitely assured to the Railway by its own marketing system or by any other means.

## ROAD TRANSPORT

12. The Gold Coast is well equipped with road communications, in comparison with other African territories, and the African has not been slow to develop the owner-driver single lorry transport business as an attractive and remunerative occupation. But the standard of transport provided at present is generally deplorable. The number of passengers carried is governed in practice not by the licensed carrying capacity of the vehicle or by safety regulations but merely by the physical limits of the space into which the passengers, together with the planks on which they sit and the goods and livestock which accompany them, can be squeezed. Passenger transport cannot be separated from goods transport; the reason why most people want to travel is to accompany their goods and so personally supervise their disposal. There is a very large unsatisfied demand for road transport, both on the main routes and from village to village. As soon as vehicles are available, there will be few villages of any size in the country without at least one African lorry-owner available for hire. This is essentially the small man's industry and any system of licensing the road services that he may operate would involve at once the consideration of several thousands of individual cases and routes and the task, impossible at present, of enforcing the conditions of the licences. An even greater practical objection to attempting to place the whole country under a system of road service licensing is

the pronounced seasonal factor whereby the lorries transporting cocoa during the six months' main crop buying season are not needed for that purpose for the remaining half of the year. An illustration of the difficulty of matching licensed road services to the economic needs of a route under local conditions is provided by the case where during the main fishing season a large catch is landed at a small place ordinarily requiring practically no transport. Such an event produces a cry of "send lorries", and unless the lorries are immediately available (not being delayed by the need for some special permit) the fish are not fit to transport.

13. We consider that the practical difficulties involved in applying any general route licensing system in the Gold Coast would be so great as to outweigh considerably any real advantage that such control would confer.

14. These difficulties do not however apply to the main long-distance routes on which services for the carriage of goods and passengers are regularly operated and on which road services are essential (because the only) means of transport. The standards of efficiency and public safety at present observed on these routes are very low, and they are not likely to be improved so long as the operators who try to improve them (in respect of maintenance and reliability of the vehicles, suitability of accommodation, time-tables, fares and freight rates) are subject to unlimited competition from private vehicles, generally bought on hire-purchase and run to death in a short time. Such competition ultimately generally tends to raise transport costs. The benefits of control of road transport services on a main route have been amply proved by experience. They have not yet been seen in the Gold Coast, because the system has not been tried. It would in our view be a very desirable experiment to make, with a view to demonstrating the benefits and to producing results on which would depend the decision as to how far it should be applied progressively to other routes. The purpose of controlling the selected experimental routes would not be to create any sort of exclusive licence or monopoly. Any person prepared to fulfil the conditions laid down by the licensing authority would be eligible for a licence: the time when the traffic offering is less than the capacity of the licensed services is a long way ahead.

15. We suggest that two routes should be taken for this purpose—Accra—Sekondi and Kumasi—Tamale. Both are important main routes carrying considerable traffic, especially in the carriage of passengers-cum-goods, they do not compete with the Railway (apart from the small stretch between Accra—Nsawam), and there can, therefore, be no ground for suggesting that licensing is being introduced as a medium to drive traffic to the railway.

#### THE LICENSING AUTHORITY

16. We accordingly recommend that legislation should be introduced to set up a licensing authority for these two routes. The authority should be a Board with membership on the following lines:—

*Chairman:* The Attorney-General or his deputy;

*Members:* The General Manager of the Railway or his representative;

The Commissioner of Police or his representative;

The Chief Transport Officer or his representative;

Up to three unofficial members appointed by the Governor.

17. The Ordinance should provide that no person shall operate a road service (i.e. a service operated for the carriage of passengers or goods for hire in any motor vehicle: to include the carriage by the owner of the vehicle of goods owned by him in the ordinary course of trade: but not to include a service by the Government) without or except in accordance with a licence issued by the Board. Licences should be annual and free and should be in scheduled form, i.e., to state as conditions—

- (i) number, class, and registration number of vehicles;
- (ii) freight and seating capacity;
- (iii) routes and frequencies;
- (iv) classes of goods;
- (v) passenger fares and freight rates;
- (vi) minimum rate of remuneration of drivers and conductors.

18. The Board should be empowered to refuse to grant or renew a licence on any one or more of the following grounds:—

- (a) that the route or routes specified in the application are in the opinion of the Board adequately served by other transport services;
- (b) that the vehicles are unsuitable or unroadworthy;
- (c) that the fares or rates to be charged are excessive;
- (d) that the service for which a licence is sought has not been operated with efficiency and with due regard to the interests of the public;
- (e) that there has been a breach of any of the conditions of the licence or of any law relating to motor traffic.

These grounds follow the Palestine provisions. An appeal against refusal should lie to the Governor in Council.

19. The Board should be empowered to cancel a licence at any time on being satisfied that there has been a breach of the conditions of the licence or of any law relating to motor traffic. An appeal against cancellation should, as in the case of refusal to grant or renew a licence, lie to the Governor in Council.

20. One difficulty with which the Board will be faced arises from the use of sections only of the route by vehicles joining it from other routes. We have considered whether the Board should be empowered to exempt from licensing operators who wish to use either a specified section or sections or a section not exceeding a mileage to be determined by the Board, but have reached the conclusion that only by complete control of the route could the purpose of licensing be achieved and that all road services plying on the route, for however short a section, should be required to be licensed.

## PUBLIC SAFETY

21. It is important to be clear that the licensing of vehicles and drivers under the Motor Traffic Ordinance, the requirements of which derive from safety considerations, is a quite distinct matter from the licensing of persons to operate road transport services by a licensing authority which would have regard primarily to economic and transport considerations. The safety provisions affecting the licensing, registration, and use of commercial vehicles require both to be tightened up and more strictly enforced. We invite attention to the Report of the 1936 Committee on Road Safety in this connection. The width of road surfaces is certainly too narrow, in many cases, for the traffic now operating, and some routes clearly require vehicles heavier than the present limit of 110 cwt. for economic transport.

## MUNICIPAL BUS SERVICES

22. Town Councils in the four towns in which they have been established (Accra, Kumasi, Cape Coast and Sekondi) have been empowered by Ordinance to "appropriate particular routes, roads and streets to the use of public vehicles employed in the transport services undertaken and conducted by the Council, to the exclusion of the use of such routes, roads and streets by other public vehicles plying for passenger hire; provided always that no such appropriation shall substantially affect to its detriment traffic proceeding to or from towns or villages outside the limits of the town". Councils are availing themselves of these powers and should be encouraged and helped to operate their own passenger services, but the standard of service provided under this protection will require watching, to avoid particularly any use of the services mainly as a source of revenue in aid of the rates.

## ROAD COSTS AND ROAD TAXATION

23. It may be of interest (if not of practical value) to set out the position regarding expenditure on roads and the revenue derived directly from road transport for the years 1936-44. The expenditure figures, which are the amounts expended under Road Votes plus 20 per cent for overheads and exclude any provisions on account of capital cost before 1936, are:—

1936-37	...	...	...	£305,000
1937-38	...	...	...	353,000
1938-39	...	...	...	334,000
1939-40	...	...	...	274,000
1940-41	...	...	...	241,000
1941-42	...	...	...	234,000
1942-43	...	...	...	240,000
1943-44	...	...	...	252,000

The revenue figures are:—

Year	Motor Licences	Drivers' Licences	Import duties on petrol and oil	Ferry tolls and rents (less pay- ments to N.A.A. and B.T.F.)	Total
1936-37 ... ..	£65,842	£2,610	£285,626	£6,507	£360,585
1937-38 ... ..	75,028	2,593	379,304	5,796	462,721
1938-39 ... ..	77,793	3,045	329,683	10,168	420,689
1939-40 ... ..	69,513	3,060	347,752	7,374	427,699
1940-41 ... ..	74,930	2,581	220,767	4,505	302,783
1941-42 ... ..	75,841	2,617	232,184	9,475	320,117
1942-43 ... ..	73,527	2,650	288,640	6,207	371,024
1943-44 ... ..	73,723	2,731	232,194	10,256	318,904

So expressed, revenue exceeded expenditure over the eight years by some £750,000, but the annual capital charge (which the 1932 Committee put at £125,000) would, if included, produce a deficit. We have not thought it necessary to pursue this matter of road costing, but give the figures as they stand for general information.

H. L. G. GURNEY  
*Colonial Secretary (Chairman).*

C. R. TURNER  
*General Manager, Gold Coast Railway.*

AMANFI III  
*Omanhene of Asebu (representative of  
the Joint Provincial Council).*

R. I. EDWARDS  
*President, Accra and Eastern Province  
Chamber of Commerce.*

HUGH THOMAS  
*Secretary, Gold Coast Chamber of Mines.*

J. C. L. TAYLOR  
*Acting Director of Road Transport.*

D. A. SUTHERLAND  
*Secretary.*

KWAME FRIMPONG II  
*Adontenhene of Kumasi (representative  
of the Ashanti Confederacy Council).*

*APPENDIX*

Memoranda or letters were submitted by the following :—

1. E. Kons Baiden, Esq., Registrar, Native Court, Komenda ;
2. K. Appiah, Esq., Transport Owner and Driver, Accra ;
3. The Aburi Commonwealth Council, Aburi ;
4. The Provincial Council of Chiefs, Central Province ;
5. R. J. M. Leakey, Esq., Acting General Manager of the Railway (comparison of railway revenue and expenditure) ;
6. D. S. Mackay, Esq., Certifying and Examining Officer, Government Transport Department, Kumasi ;
7. The Gold Coast Agriculture and Welfare Society, Accra ;
8. R. Knittel, Esq., General Manager, Union Trading Co., Limited, Accra.