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Email to: XXXX

Web Site: www.dft.gov.uk

Our Ref: F0008568

20 February 2012

Dear XXXXXXXX

Freedom of Information Request F0008568

I am writing to confirm that the Department has now completed its search for the information which you requested on 23 January 2012. You asked:

“Could you please give me details of work carried out by DfT/Highways Agency on the redesign of brown tourist signs since the Coalition came into power?”

Could you provide details of costs spent, reasons for any redesign, the work done and any details of the actual changes.”

Policy work is being undertaken by this Department and the Highways Agency, and we have published information about the project in paragraphs 5.24 – 5.26 in our document “Signing the Way”. This is on the Department’s website at –

<http://www.dft.gov.uk/topics/tpm/traffic-signs-signals/> .

I can confirm that we do hold some relevant information, however this is being withheld in reliance on the exemption at section 35(1)(a) of the Freedom of Information Act 2000 which provides a qualified exemption for information which is held by a government department relating to the formulation or development of government policy. The full text of the exemption is attached at Annex A.

In applying this exemption we have had to balance the public interest in withholding the information against the public interest in disclosure.

There is a clear public interest in road traffic signs, including brown tourist signs, as they play an important role in the everyday life of road users. Disclosure of information on the work that has been undertaken to date would allow the public to see and better understand how decisions are being made. It may also help the public better contribute to the policy making process. The Department should be open, honest and transparent.

However, the work on brown tourist signs is ongoing and policies are still being formulated and developed prior to the final proposals being presented to Ministers. If we were to disclose this information now it could mislead the public into thinking this was the final agreed policy. DfT Ministers & officials and those in other parts of Government need a free space in which to continue to develop policy ideas and investigate whether or not it would benefit the driving population to change a well understood directional signing system. Initial findings may change as the policy making process develops and it would be wrong for these to be analysed and discussed at such an early stage in the proceedings.

On balance the public interest arguments for withholding the information out weigh those for disclosure.

If you are unhappy with the way the Department has handled your request or with the decisions made in relation to your request you may complain within two calendar months of the date of this letter by writing to the Department's Information Rights Unit at:

Zone D/01
Ashdown House
Sedlescombe Road North
Hastings
East Sussex TN37 7GA
E-mail: FOI-Advice-Team-DFT@dft.gsi.gov.uk

Please see the details below of DfT's complaints procedure and your right to complain to the Information Commissioner.

If you have any queries about this letter, please contact Anna McCreadie in the DfT Press Office on 0207 944 6898. Please remember to quote the reference number above in any future communications.

Yours sincerely,

XXXXXXX

Your right to complain to DfT and the Information Commissioner

You have the right to complain within two calendar months of the date of this letter about the way in which your request for information was handled and/or about the decision not to disclose all or part of the information requested. In addition a complaint can be made that DfT has not complied with its FOI publication scheme.

Your complaint will be acknowledged and you will be advised of a target date by which to expect a response. Initially your complaint will be re-considered by the official who dealt with your request for information. If, after careful consideration, that official decides that his/her decision was correct, your complaint will automatically be referred to a senior independent official who will conduct a further review. You will be advised of the outcome of your complaint and if a decision is taken to disclose information originally withheld this will be done as soon as possible.

If you are not content with the outcome of the internal review, you have the right to apply directly to the Information Commissioner for a decision. The Information Commissioner can be contacted at:

Information Commissioner's Office
Wycliffe House
Water Lane
Wilmslow
Cheshire
SK9 5AF

ANNEX A

FOI section 35: full text of exemption

1. Information held by a government department or by the National Assembly for Wales is exempt information if it relates to:
 - (a) the formulation or development of government policy
 - (b) Ministerial communications
 - (c) the provision of advice by any of the Law Officers or any request for the provision of such advice, or
 - (d) the operation of any Ministerial private office.

2. Once a decision as to government policy has been taken, any statistical information used to provide an informed background to the taking of the decision is not to be regarded:
 - (a) for the purposes of subsection (1)(a), as relating to the formulation or development of government policy, or
 - (b) for the purposes of subsection (1)(b), as relating to Ministerial communications.

3. The duty to confirm or deny does not arise in relation to information which is (or if it were held by the public authority would be) exempt information by virtue of subsection (1).

4. In making any determination required by section 2(1)(b) or (2)(b) in relation to information which is exempt information by virtue of subsection (1)(a), regard shall be had to the particular public interest in the disclosure of factual information which has been used, or is intended to be used, to provide an informed background to decision-taking.

5. In this section:

"government policy" includes the policy of the Executive Committee of the Northern Ireland Assembly and the policy of the National Assembly for Wales;

"the Law Officers" means the Attorney General, the Solicitor General, the Advocate General for Scotland, the Lord Advocate, the Solicitor General for Scotland and the Attorney General for Northern Ireland;

"Ministerial communications" means any communications:

- (a) between Ministers of the Crown,
- (b) between Northern Ireland Ministers, including Northern Ireland junior Ministers, or
- (c) between Assembly Secretaries, including the Assembly First Secretary,

and includes, in particular, proceedings of the Cabinet or of any committee of the Cabinet, proceedings of the Executive Committee of the Northern Ireland Assembly, and proceedings of the executive committee of the National Assembly for Wales;

"Ministerial private office" means any part of a government department which provides personal administrative support to a Minister of the Crown, to a Northern Ireland Minister or a Northern Ireland junior Minister or any part of the administration of the National Assembly for Wales providing personal administrative support to the Assembly First Secretary or an Assembly Secretary;

"Northern Ireland junior Minister" means a member of the Northern Ireland Assembly appointed as a junior Minister under section 19 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998.