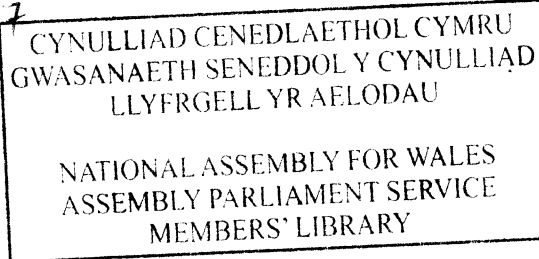


DP 950/03-07

210445-1001



Alun Cairns AM
National Assembly for Wales
Cardiff Bay
Cardiff CF99 1NA

4 December 2006

WAQ ANSWERS 49377 and 48190

Thank you for your letter of 9th November concerning the responses you received to the above Written Questions. I have had this looked into.

I regret that the responses caused you such frustration; officials do seek to provide factual information to Assembly Members in a timely and effective way and I agree with you that the use of FOI requests to achieve this can be unnecessary and inappropriate for data of the kind you were seeking.

In this case the problem was caused by two unconnected issues. The first relates to the fact that your WAQ 30636, tabled in 2004, referred specifically to the Welsh Motorway and Trunk Road network. The first question asked in October this year (WAQ 48190), on the other hand, did not and was phrased in such a way as to lead officials to believe you were seeking information on all roads in Wales. The Assembly Government does not hold such data and so the response was intended to be a helpful one, explaining the background to this and suggesting a possible source for the information you sought (EuroRAP).

You subsequently tabled WAQ 48377 which was phrased in exactly the same way, but also referred to WAQ 30636 tabled in 2004. Because of the similarity of the question, it received the same reply as the previous question (WAQ 48190). The reference to WAQ 30636 was not picked up. If it had been, then there would have been a good chance of those concerned in preparing the reply understanding your real intentions and providing a reply based on the motorway and trunk road data: that is, on the same basis as the 2004 reply.

The Division concerned recognise that they ought to have researched and responded to this latest question more carefully and thoroughly. They were depleted by staff sickness absences at the time, but that is no excuse. I can, however, assure you that this in no way reflects an unwillingness by officials to provide factual information and data. I have now arranged for you to be provided with a supplementary answer giving the information you sought in relation to the Motorway and Trunk Road network.

My apologies for the inconvenience this has caused, but I hope the explanation above allays your concerns as well as showing how important it is that the question being asked is as clear as possible on the specific information being sought.

JON SHORTRIDGE