Dear Sir

WINTER MAINTENANCE –
SNOW CLEARING AT RAILWAY LEVEL CROSSINGS, FROM ROAD BRIDGES
OVER RAILWAY AND ROAD SYSTEMS AND FROM ROADS IN THE
VICINITY OF RAILWAYS

1. The following amendment should be made to Circular Roads 18/77 dated 28 June 1977. In paragraph 7 of the Appendix the second sentence should now read – “Rotary ploughs should follow the requirements of the signs at level crossings concerning slow vehicles as set out in diagram 649 of The Traffic Signs Regulations and General Directions 1975.”

Yours faithfully

J L HAMMOND
Dear Sir,

WINTER MAINTENANCE – SNOW CLEARING AT RAILWAY LEVEL CROSSINGS, FROM ROAD BRIDGES OVER RAILWAY AND ROAD SYSTEMS AND FROM ROADS IN THE VICINITY OF RAILWAYS.

1. Circular ROADS No. 15/74, prepared in consultation with British Rail, gave guidance in its appendix on the execution of snow ploughing operations at railway crossings, and emphasised the need for local liaison between railway and highway authorities.

2. Experience during the recent winter has pointed the need to extend advice on winter maintenance activities on over-rail bridges and on over-road bridges and on roads in the vicinity of railways. Paragraphs 9 and 10 of the attached appendix contains that advice after appropriate consultation with British Rail and the opportunity has also been taken to make an increase in emphasis throughout the appendix. Circular Road No. 15/74 is accordingly superseded and copies of it should be destroyed.

3. Reference should also be made to Circular Roads 37/75 concerning safety to automatic half barrier level crossings and to current Traffic Sign Regulations.

Yours faithfully,

J L HAMMOND

Note: Any correspondence concerning this Circular should be addressed to the Department of Transport, Highways Management 1 Division, 2 Marsham Street, London SW1P 3EB. Telephone enquiries should be made to 01-212-7110 or 7111. (Distribution enquiries 01-212-4944).
SNOW CLEARING AT LEVEL CROSSINGS; FROM ROAD BRIDGES OVER RAILWAY SYSTEMS AND FROM ROADS PROXIMATE TO RAILWAYS.

1. CLEARANCE TO BE EFFECTED BY HIGHWAY AUTHORITY

British Rail rarely need to use snow ploughs, and even when they do so the result may be unsatisfactory for highway purposes. It has, therefore, been agreed that the appropriate highway authority should continue its ploughing operation over crossings situated on roads which are being cleared. There must, however, be proper liaison between the highway and rail authorities and care must be taken that snow does not build up across the tracks or against gates and barriers.

2. GUIDANCE ON THE USE OF VARIOUS VEHICLE TYPES – MECHANICAL SAFETY

2.1 Snow-Ploughs, Snow Blowers and Snow Cutters of the Rotary Type.

Rotary equipment should NEVER be used to clear snow from any type of level crossing since there is a danger of the lower blade and support shoes fouling the rails.

2.2 Department of Transport/Ploughing/Salt Vehicles.

These may be used for snow clearance at level crossings subject to observance of paragraphs 3 and 6 below.

2.3 Local Authority Vehicles

Winter maintenance equipment, owned or operated by local authorities, varies considerably. Close co-operation is therefore essential between an authority and British Rail about the machinery available and how it can be used with safety and to the fullest advantage for clearing snow from, and spreading salt on, level crossings.

3. GUIDANCE RELATED TO VARIOUS TYPES OF LEVEL CROSSING

3.1 Unmanned Crossings with Automatic Half Barriers

These are connected by telephone to the signal box controlling that particular section of line. The driver of a snow-plough must always obtain permission by telephoning the controlling signalman for safety clearance before proceeding on the crossing.

It is essential that snow be cleared from both lanes of a carriageway at half barrier crossings for a distance of at least 45 metres on either side of the crossing. If one lane is cleared and the other left covered with snow, even for a short time, road users may be tempted to weave around one of the half barriers in order to get on to the clear lane. With the opposite half barrier closed vehicles could be trapped or staff on the crossing with a train approaching. After the snow has been cleared the driver must park his plough at a safe distance from the railway track and return on foot to report to the signal man as quickly as possible that he is now clear of the crossing. In so doing he must confirm to the signalman that snow has not been built up across the track in such quantity as to impede trains.

3.2 Unmanned Crossings Controlled by Miniature Red/Green Lights

These too are connected by telephone to the appropriate signal box. Again the driver of the snow-plough must always obtain permission by telephoning the controlling signalman for safety clearance before proceeding on to the crossing and subsequently report that he is clear in the same way as for crossings with automatic half barriers.
3.3 Closed Circuit Television and Remotely Controlled Crossings Operated by a Signalman located some way from the Crossing.

These are also connected by telephone to the appropriate signal box and here again the driver of the snow-plough must always obtain permission by telephoning the controlling signalman before proceeding on to the crossing and subsequently report that he is clear.

3.4 Manually Controlled Crossings Operated by either a Crossing Keeper or a Signalman Located Adjacent to the Crossing

Snow-plough drivers must at all times obtain clearance from the signal-man or crossing keeper before driving on the level crossing.

3.5 Unmanned Uncontrolled Crossings, Usually Having Farm Type Gates or, Occasionally without Gates.

These are generally on minor roads; ploughing of unmanned uncontrolled crossings must only be carried out in accordance with prior arrangement made with British Rail.

4. EFFECTS OF PLOUGHING OPERATIONS

4.1 Snow-plough drivers must ensure, so far as it is possible, that accumulated snow is not deposited on railway tracks. Passing trains and rail snow-ploughs tend to leave windows of snow across the path of the carriageway. It is therefore suggested that highway authorities and British Rail co-ordinate plans which can be put into effect if and when this occurs.

4.2 After the crossing has been cleared the snow-plough driver must park his vehicle at a safe distance from the crossing, then return on foot to ensure that no solid objects have been deposited by the blade on or near the rails.

5. CROSSINGS UNSUITTABLE FOR PLOUGHING

There are some crossings which are dangerous or impossible to plough; for instance where the road descends steeply on both sides of the crossing, or where the rail protrudes to such an extent that plough blades might be fouled. For such crossings the local highway authority should consult the appropriate Divisional Civil Engineer of British Rail about the methods best employed to clear the snow.

6. PRIVATELY OWNED CROSSINGS

Where a level crossing is privately owned, agreement should be obtained from the owner by the local authority so that the authority can take the same action as they would in the case of a public crossing. Ploughing of unmanned uncontrolled crossings should only be carried out in accordance with prior arrangements made with British Rail – see paragraph 3.5 above.

7. VEHICLES TRAVERSING LEVEL CROSSING FITTED WITH SNOW PLOUGHS IN THE TRAVELLING POSITION (ie NOT IN USE)

When Department-owned vehicles are driven over level crossings, otherwise than for snow-clearing, the plough should always be locked in the raised position. Rotary ploughs should follow the requirements of the signs at level crossings concerning slow vehicles as set out in Diagram 649 of Traffic Signs (Amendment) and (Disqualification for offences) Regulations 1969.

8. GENERAL STANDARD OF CARE

Apart from the operational requirements detailed above, highway authorities must take special care to ensure that the strictest safety precautions are taken when winter maintenance vehicles are negotiating level crossings. All snow-plough drivers must be conversant with provisions of the Highway Code and in particular those parts about the use of level crossings.
9. SNOW CLEARING FROM ROADS OVER OR NEAR RAILWAY LINES

9.1 Snow ploughs of all types can throw snow and slush distances of 10 to 15 metres (the rotary type even more) when driven at speed. Drivers of snow plough vehicles must, therefore, be made aware of road bridges over railways and stretches of road near to railways, where they should operate at an appropriate speed in order to prevent thrown snow building up on railway lines or becoming a hazard to passing trains.

9.2 Particular care must be taken where there is a danger of thrown snow damaging or creating an electrical path from overhead railway electric power lines.

9.3 Care must be taken to avoid packing snow against bridge parapets, fences or walls such that, for instance, children could climb nearer to and so tamper with overhead electric power lines.

10. SNOW CLEARING FROM ROADS OVER OTHER ROADS AND ON DUAL CARRIAGEWAYS

10.1 The opportunity is taken to draw attention to similar problems in relation to road-over-road bridges where drivers of ploughs should be aware of the dangers of throwing snow on to the lower road which would become a hazard to traffic and pedestrians.

10.2 Excessive speed when ploughing snow on to the central reserves of dual carriageway roads can result in danger to oncoming traffic in the opposite carriageway. Drivers should adjust their speed to prevent this happening.