

MEMORANDUM

To: Dean Gillespie

From: W. Kidd, Chairman, Geological Sciences

Date: 11 October 1994

Subj: Geological Sciences passenger van

I have been informed, indirectly, and not in writing despite an e-mail request to Dennis Stevens for such confirmation, that the 12-passenger Dodge van [license 85-1188] currently assigned to the Department for instructional and research purposes will not be replaced, although it is long overdue for replacement. This van is almost ten years old and has over 100,000 miles on it; while it recently passed its state inspection, it is, according to the Vehicle Operation Center staff, unlikely to do so in future without excessive expense. It also (inevitably) looks and feels its age, and its current appearance does not reflect well on this institution.

We request that resources be found to replace this vehicle before its next inspection in August 1995, and preferably sooner. Besides the "mobile classroom" justification, in which the vehicle is equivalent for us to a laboratory in another science [see below], I point out that, apart from the very welcome replacement of microscopes from the President's allocation last year, the Department has had next to no equipment allocation for many years. This vehicle is also legitimately regarded as vital instructional and research equipment. It would be put at the top of our current list of equipment needs, far above any other need, if it is the case that the Physical Plant Department cannot now find the means to replace it from their budget.

Background and justification

The original Department 15-seater van I am informed by Bob McFarland was purchased in 1975 partly by funds from Academic Affairs and part from equipment funds assigned to the Department. It was replaced with somewhat used equivalent vehicles twice before the current vehicle was provided in 1985. Art Burt of the Vehicle Operation Center told me that OGS provided all these replacements, including the current vehicle. The fact that OGS no longer provides vehicles is the reason, I was told, that our Physical Plant Department cannot supply a replacement. The original vehicle purchased new had an A license plate [35788A] and university decals on the doors; its used successive replacements all had state decals and year plates like the present vehicle. I think there is a case to be made that the assignment in 1980 of our vehicle from university-purchased to OGS-sourced replacements has now put us at an unfair disadvantage relative to other campus vehicle replacements.

The justification for the Department having an assigned vehicle was and still is that we have: 1) required courses for majors that require attendance on field trips [GEO 300; GEO 400 - the Field Mapping course, which requires use full time during three weeks in August]; 2) other required courses that include field trips [GEO 200, GEO 230, GEO 240, GEO 435, GEO 440/545, and GEO 470/517]; 3) students doing field research projects requiring a vehicle for their MS and PhD degrees in Geological Sciences; and 4) graduate student and advanced undergraduate departmental field trips. Also, if we are to develop closer integration of programs with the Earth and Environmental Sciences Department at RPI, a vehicle will be an important contribution to that effort. The primary justification for this vehicle is therefore that of being a "mobile classroom" for the Geological Sciences programs. I also point out that few Geological Science Departments, including those at undergraduate institutions, and none that I know of at those with PhD programs, lack such a facility, even in these fiscally difficult times. The reason why this is the case is that potential employers of graduates from geology programs regard field training and experience as an essential part of the education of any geologist.

Because of our growing population of undergraduate majors, we cannot rely only on the uncertain availability of sufficient suitable vehicles from the Vehicle Operation Center to cover the required course needs. The Department has always agreed to return the assigned vehicle to the general University vehicle pool between December and mid-March, when geological field work is difficult in these parts, despite a depressing experience of minor damage to the successive vehicles by unknown users during these intervals, and to loan it at other times if not in use by us on a particular day to Biology or Atmospheric Science faculty with field trip needs.

We presume, unless informed to the contrary, that the Vehicle Operation Center would continue to provide maintenance for any replacement vehicle. I would like explicitly to acknowledge here the long and consistent history of cooperation and help, in both provision of pool vehicles and maintenance of our assigned vehicles, that we have received from the staff at the Vehicle Operation Center, particularly Mr Art Burt and Mr Ken Wolven.

cc: K. Hitchcock, Vice-President for Academic Affairs
D. Stevens, Vice-President for Physical Plant Administration
A. Burt, Vehicle Operations Center

Attachment [memorandum of 6 November 1983]