

Restructuring Queensland Railways to Focus on the Customer

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Abstract:

The paper describes the methodology for restructuring QR and findings and conclusions reached.

The restructuring was directed at bringing about the necessary cultural changes to create a business-led organisation where the primary focus is on the customer

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Introduction

Background

The Minister for Transport had recognised the need for Queensland Railways (QR) to become more commercial and to limit its demand for scarce State funds. It was perceived that the management structure required change from functional groups to business groups to support the cultural changes needed. The existing structure (see Appendix A) had lost direction with users' needs and had overemphasised other objectives. The implicit objective of the Review by the Minister was to restructure to promote customer focus.

Over the past decade many private enterprise and government-owned railway systems around the world have been forced into managing their organisations along market driven business lines for a variety of reasons. These include:

- mounting deficits;
- intolerable cross subsidisations;
- financial under-performance; and
- a highly competitive environment to which railway management practices must now respond.

With the exception of mounting deficits, Queensland Railways (QR) was no different. It was essential that the culture and structure be changed to one in which managers are able to concentrate on financial performance and be accountable for their own bottom-line results in meeting customer needs.

The overall objective of this review was to:

- carry out a comprehensive and impartial evaluation of structural alternatives;
- recommend an appropriate commercially-focused option; and
- identify relevant issues relating to the phasing in of a new structure.

A five person working group staffed from internal resources carried out all phases of research and submitted a draft report to the steering committee within the four week deadline.

Steering committee guidelines

It was recognised that physical organisational structure was only one aspect contributing to a customer focus. The working group was to provide a strategic overview of the steps that would be necessary to turn QR from a "running the railways" focus to a bottom-line commercial focus. Recognition was to be given to any dysfunctional consequences that could result from such a change and also to the steps or modifications to the structure necessary to overcome these effects.

The revised structure should be framed to take into account:

- reductions in administration staff levels;
- orientation to the business group approach;
- the positions of Assistant Commissioners, General Managers and Regional Managers as they existed would no longer be appropriate.

As a guide, the new structure should:

- promote accountability and clarity of management;
- include a small number of business units;
- have a high degree of asset dedication for clarity of cost control;
- minimise internal trading;
- minimise sharing of costs.

The first step was to determine the key management structure before proceeding further into the restructuring exercise. It was expected that there would be a number of production areas such as field operations, maintenance and servicing which would need to be considered to determine whether they should be integrated with the business units or, alternatively, contracted to them

A central services area was to be considered which would notionally provide activities such as financial services, industrial relations, human resources etc. Resource savings were primarily expected within the central services area and consideration should be given to its relationship with other parts of the organisation.

An important factor would be the supporting management and financial systems to underpin the new structure

Research objectives

As stated already, the general objective of the review was to formulate an appropriate organisation structure for a commercially-driven railway. However, given the four week time constraint placed upon the study team it was not intended that the study would extend to the lower levels within the organisation.

More specifically, recommendations were to be provided on:

- an appropriate upper-level QR structure based on "best experiences" of other commercially-oriented railways and contemporary studies in pursuit of these objectives;
- further studies required to change from the existing structure to the new structure;
- how the interim transition from existing structure to new structure is to be progressed until the further studies are completed;
- conceptual position descriptions for the senior positions identified in the new hierarchy

Research strategy and methodology

Overview

A formal research phase was included in the study to allow the working group to formulate an appreciation of the issues involved and hence develop appropriate recommendations.

Activities performed during this phase included:

- a situation audit of QR;
- discussion and consultation with stakeholders and other sources of relevant information; and
- a literature search.

Each of the above research methods is discussed in the following sections. Implicit in the brief was the direction to avoid "reinventing the wheel". However, considerable scope was given in the study approach. Consequently, the study methodology placed considerable emphasis on two areas, these were:

- other experiences from restructuring (primarily railways);
- consultation with stakeholders (QR employees, Unions, Government Agencies and other relevant interested parties).

As a first step, stakeholders were given a letter from the Minister outlining the need for change, signalling his support and endorsement of the study, giving positive comments and seeking their co-operation

Queensland Railways' situation audit

Without an analysis of relevant situation specifics it would be difficult to measure:

- the extent to which change was necessary;
- issues which may impinge upon the success of a new structure, e.g culture; and
- how existing resources will meet the needs of a new structure.

In order to obtain relevant situation-specific information the situation audit focused on:

- present organisation structure;
- key management roles and operation; and
- prevailing organisation culture.

Literature search

A requirement decided upon by the working group from the outset was that all research and consequent recommendations be underpinned by sound evidence of validity. To achieve this position an extensive literature search was carried out.

The focus of this element of the project included:

- organisation structure options;
- methodologies associated with change management;
- the experience of other railways, both Australian and overseas, in terms of organisation restructuring;
- the role of Government and commercially-driven Government owned enterprises;
- reward structures; and
- implementation strategies.

Discussions and consultations

The Working Group considered that consultation was a vital step in managing the change process. In addition it provided a means of obtaining information from knowledgable people with experience in strategic repositioning. In addressing this requirement the working group conducted in excess of 80 interviews involving over 500 people. Groups involved included:

- QR management and employees;
- unions;
- major customers;
- other railways; and
- other organisations experienced in strategic repositioning.

A standard interview format was developed prior to commencement of the consultative phase to ensure consistency of research and that each group received an equal opportunity to participate and contribute to the organisational review.

Findings

Queensland Railways' situation audit

Overview: Queensland Railways was structured in a traditional functional form with the organisation tending to be operationally and engineering driven. The decision-making processes were hierarchical in nature and accountability for profit performance was effectively centred on the Commissioner.

Prior to 1983 Queensland Railways was structured along military organisational lines similar to many railways worldwide. In 1983, following an investigation by PA Consultants, changes were implemented with the intention to provide an improved commercial thrust with emphasis on greater productivity and improved quality of service. These changes allowed QR to address many inefficient areas of operation.

Current structure: The structure in place at the time of the review, as shown in Appendix 1, provides for a line of functional management in the form of Assistant Commissioners reporting to the Commissioner Each Assistant Commissioner had a functional area of responsibility, e.g. the Assistant Commissioner (Engineering) was responsible for the Civil, Electrical, Mechanical and Signal and Telecommunications Engineering areas.

The organisation was also broken up into three geographical divisions where functional managers report to a divisional general manager. There was largely a duplication of the head office functions in Brisbane. However, all divisional functional managers reported to their General Manager. Their relationship with head office was based on the traditional "dotted line" related mainly to professional standards, productivity performance and the development of "across the board" cost-saving initiatives, rather than direct control.

Key management roles and operation: Under the previous management structure, the general focus was on receipts and costs in isolation rather than on focusing attention as far as possible on the bottom line, profit/loss situation. The budgeting process dictated that decisions by managers were taken in isolation, i.e. not related to customer related objectives.

Culture: A culture identification session conducted during a recent workshop of senior executives of QR revealed some significant cultural issues. Traditionally, there hasn't been a culture of risk-taking but a culture which promotes pride in workmanship and an expectation of a job for life. Whilst there seems to be some conflict between the various functions, for example engineering and operations, overall there is the notion of loyalty to the railway family.

Railways' management has developed a reputation for being technically progressive and operationally efficient. There was, however, a loss of customer needs and requirements, a lack of accountability for bottom-line results and lack of incentives, with no reward system for outstanding results.

The Myers-Briggs Type Indicator instrument was introduced to senior management to determine awareness and cultural preference. It provided the following analysis:

 There was a high preference for decision-making without sufficiently taking on board the views of others.

■ There were too few people in the management team having a preference for conceptual thinking and most managers displayed an overly-rigid approach to determining outcomes.

There was a preponderance of managers who were very compliant to rules, regulations, orders and directions.

Literature search

Organisation Structure: For the change desired, QR should aim for a flat organisational structure generally organised along decentralised business/product divisions (Thompson and Strickland, 1986). Johnson and Scholes (1984) suggested it was critical that authority and responsibility should promote internal consistency within the organisation.

Where more than one business uses the same railway facilities, the principal user should own and operate the facilities and others paid agreed charges for their use (Williams, 1989). Hoppe (1989) points out "under no circumstances should functions which are captive monopolies be set up as stand alone units (e.g. workshops/engineering) and should be included in the predominant business segment" (p.83). Geographic divisions should be structured to correspond with principal traffic flows where practical.

Brown (1990) highlighted the importance of captive monopolies such as workshops, civil maintenance, etc having productivity measured in absolute terms in comparison to best practices. Failure to do this will tend to have budget targets met but workload reduced, resulting in the same money for less work. Another useful approach is to compare staff levels for similar categories of work in other areas in other railways.

Staff: The business groups should be led by entrepreneurially oriented general managers having enough authority to formulate and implement a business-driven strategy (Sumita, 1989 and Larsson, 1989).

In selecting staff, it is important that their attributes match the new organisation rather than be what is needed to be successful in the existing organisation structure (Katz and Kahn, 1978). While it is recognised that a large number of existing internal staff will display considerable ability once the bureaucratic shackles are removed (Hyde, 1989), it will also be important to ensure that staff are selected with a high degree of achievement orientation for the management positions of the business groups (Luthans, 1985).

Change Process: A key requirement for successful restructuring will be managing the change process (Gattorna and Day, 1986). Part of that process requires commitment by Government and management, effective communication throughout the organisation, a clear vision of what changes in behaviour are required and training support as the new culture emerges. In addition, individuals threatened by change and unions should be involved in the implementation process.

Management must be committed to the changes, maintain the change momentum and have the full support of Government. Government must also clearly define its financial objectives for the railways (Industries Assistance Commission, 1989).

Government Interface: There were several arguments in favour of removing employee relations and conditions from the public service. In addition, there were arguments in support of having a board of management which would be accountable to the Minister (Reid, 1989 and Queensland Government, 1990). That board should consist of credible business people who are not shackled to past railway traditions (Hoppe, 1989).

The change to a corporatised railway having considerable accountability moves the Government and Ministry into the more important role of focusing on strategic issues such as the policy framework within which the railways operates, major investment and funding decisions, and monitoring the performance of managers and the authority as a whole (Industries Assistance Commission, 1989).

As a priority, Community Service Obligations need to be clearly identified and explicitly funded by Government to help force railway management to focus on the business. There should also be performance contracts to ensure that Government gets value for money (Reid, 1989).

Consultant Role: A role for consultants was also clearly found in terms of offering solutions, resourcing needed studies, acting as a catalyst in changing attitudes or convincing Government of the need to change (Hyde, 1989).

Implementation Strategy. An implementation strategy must address the myriad of administrative tasks and concerns associated with change to ensure that ingrained behaviour is not perpetuated in the organisation. This will be achieved when every level within the organisation from head office down to each operating unit knows what is required to implement the new strategy (Thompson and Strickland, 1986).

Performing the required tasks and resolving the issues they present will entail a process of moving incrementally and deliberately to create a variety of administrative "fits" that bring the organisation's conduct of its internal operations into alignment with strategy. The management objective will be to create a work climate and a system of shared values and beliefs (Thompson and Strickland, 1986).

Discussions and Consultations

Lessons From The Past. From internal consultations in QR, it was evident that there were some inefficiencies in maintaining extremely tight control from central areas, with unnecessary duplication, lack of accountability and confusion over roles.

Advice from other railways suggests the changes need to be extensive and right across the organisation to ensure that no undesirable remnants of previous culture remain.

Staff Matters: It also needed to be pointed out that there is considerable talent within the organisation. However, not all appointments should be made from internal sources because a certain amount of 'new blood' would be desirable to help with cultural changes. It was generally felt that the right to hire and fire was necessary for a commercial railway.

Again, consultation with other railways supports the logic of removing employment, pay and conditions from the public service rules and in providing some incentive schemes for rewarding high performance.

There is a need for the chief executive and senior management to adopt the principle of "management by walking around" and communicate with staff as to what the changes are and what the vision for QR will be. Advice is that outplacement consultants may be useful for assisting any displaced senior management with alternative employment.

The experience of other organisations has shown that a relatively small number of existing staff become enthusiastic about the changes from the outset. Advice is that the "right people" from this group should be encouraged and ultimately placed in key positions. The majority of staff, who have remained "lukewarm" during the initial phases of change, will become supportive when the benefits of change become apparent.

The value of consultation with unions and communication with staff was highlighted.

Structure and Integration: The most salient points relating to QR's organisation structure and integration of functions within the business groups were:

Workshops should be integral to the business groups and should not be established as a separate business in competition with the private sector. From NZR experience, it was necessary for workshops to be compared with private sector "best practices" to ensure business gets value for money. The integrated approach, involving limited competition with the private sector, also seems to be more consistent with Government policy as determined by the Queensland Department of Business, Industry and Regional Development.

Head office engineering functions should be limited to a standards group which would look at minimum standards, procedures, proper reporting, safety issues and training

The new structure should allow for QR to be corporatised at some time and also allow for synergy and co-operation with the Department

Some companies have removed the obligation to trade with sister business units. This appears to have merit in introducing an element of competition.

Advice concerning property divisions has been mixed, but the most plausible is for property ownership to be part of the business units

The perceived lack of urgency exhibited by remote head office functions also lends support to the integrated approach outlined above

Customers' Views: Recognising that few customers were consulted within the limited time available (although collectively they represent approximately half of QR's revenue earnings), a common view held by all was that changes, if made, should not in any way compromise existing service levels. Indeed, only changes for the better should be considered.

Intuitively, in having a customer group focus, customer service should be generally improved.

Managing the Change Process. An important aspect highlighted by the unions is the need to remove obstacles which impede performance by QR.

Good advice was received from NZR concerning the need to manage the change process as part of the business rather than to encourage centralised head office control which will be counter to the philosophy of devolution of authority.

Key Success Factors

The following represents a summary of the key requirements for successful restructuring of QR:

Relationship With Government:

Government must clearly specify a policy framework within which management is given the freedom to manage. Performance targets should also be agreed between government and management each

CSOs should be clearly identified, quantified and explicitly funded by Government

A board of credible business people should be charged with ensuring that the activities of QR are carried out properly and efficiently

The structure should be decentralised business/product division with

decentralised authority and responsibilities.

Captive monopolies, for example workshops, need to adopt "best practices" to be sure that value for money is achieved by the businesses and they should be integrated into the business groups.

- The concept of prime user is the best means of demarcation between business units.
- The structure should provide for synergy and co-operation with the non-commercial divisions of the Department of Transport and be suitable for corporatisation.

■ Human Resources:

- Extreme care needs to be taken in selecting staff to ensure that people have the right attributes to manage the change process and to fit the new structure.
 - In view of the long learning curve, the majority of positions should be filled from internal resources. However, "fresh blood" from external sources is essential.
 - Employment conditions should be separate from the public service. Staff should be rotated through other sections to broaden their outlook and rewards should be contingent upon performance.
- Encouragement of Performance:
- Business Managers should be entrepreneurially-oriented and have enough decentralised authority to formulate and implement a business driven strategy.
- Consultants have an important role in identifying "best practices" for inclusion in engineering and operating standards.
- Any obstacles hindering performance should be removed.
- Management of Change:
- Management must be committed to changes, maintain momentum and have full support of Government.
- Management of change requires commitment from Government and management, effective communication, training support, involvement of affected individuals, consultation with unions and clearly specified desired behaviours
 - The Chief Executive Officer needs to show presence and share vision with all staff.
- Changes need to be radical across all sections to bring about major cultural change.
 - The change process must be managed in such a way that it reflects a decentralised approach to decision making.

These key success factors were subsequently used as a check list in evaluating options being considered.

Conclusions

Organisation Structure

Overview: The structure proposed (Appendix B) emphasises the business orientation with three business groups and two corporate groups reporting to the Chief Executive. This contrasts with the previous structure, where one business oriented group out of seven reported to the Commissioner.

Business groups: The business groups of mining, freight and passengers have been chosen because of:

the geographical nature of the major traffic flows

the ability to dedicate assets to those groups;

the ability to separate commercially viable traffic from community service obligations.

Each business unit will be "bottom-line" accountable. To achieve this "bottom-line", units have been structured to respond to market needs.

While assets correspond with the "prime-user" concept, a fee for service will apply for other business groups. As an incentive to reduce costs, the purchaser will "hold the cards" and be able to dictate service levels etc and thus keep pressure on the vendor. Similarly, the vendor will not maintain surplus resources unless underwritten by another business area.

The businesses will include all resources that can be dedicated to the business on a prime user basis including workshops and engineering. Experience from other railways suggests that workshops should not be separate, but part of the business. Advice has also been given that captive monopolies should be compared with best practices and exposed to competitive forces as much as possible.

Support services. The support services area is comprised of "cost centres" such as human resource management which are treated as a business overhead. In addition there are "self-accounting" units which provide service to business on a user-pays basis. It is intended that businesses would eventually have the option to buy from alternative sources.

A small Rail Safety Audit Group will set and audit standards and ensure that safety receives appropriate recognition.

There are grave concerns that areas which are effectively captive monopolies should not be established as stand alone units. For this reason engineering activities should be integral to business units. There may be a need for consultant assistance in appropriately allocating engineering resources and activities.

The Support Services area will be very lean to minimise the burden on overheads outside the control of business units

Financial services. This group will spearhead the adoption of commercial financial practices and will have little resemblance to the existing accounting functions.

OR's new direction

It is necessary for Queensland Railways to be unshackled in order to:

- be fully accountable;
- have commercial freedom in such areas as investment;
- fulfil the social role directed by Government through the medium of the Community Service Obligation (CSO);
- be treated as a Government Owned Enterprise (GOE) rather than part of the Queensland Public Service.

Such an arrangement, as in New Zealand, the other Australian States and the United Kingdom, is most likely to unleash the business potential of QR. Queensland Railways' staff must be committed to the changes and as such they need to be involved in the implementation program.

Commitment to the changes by Government is essential and objectives need to be clearly set. Corporatisation is a logical goal in the short term. It invokes all the principles necessary for successful restructuring and management accountability.

The structure proposed is considered to represent a good balance of accountability and practicality. The structure as presented will work only if authority levels are commensurate with commercial enterprises.

Under the model proposed, the Director-General has a more strategic role in overviewing rail's activities, advising on CSO requirements and ensuring integrated transport policy.

Management of the changes

Change is most successfully implemented if:

- committed to by Government and top management;
- changes are communicated to all levels of the organisation;
- the desired behaviour changes are specified;
- there is adequate training support as a new culture emerges.

Moving from the current culture to a new culture will be very complex and requires diligent attention to change management. The Chief Executive will have an important role in this area but also needs the capacity to focus on the business. Granted that the new business executives would have ownership of the change, there is a need for a small project team to assume the routine burden of change management. That team should be responsible for expediting the work still required to be undertaken and prioritising it, but not so far as involving more central control. Given the nature of the task the project team should be staffed from within the QR organisation.

There is general agreement that the change needed must be far-reaching to promote cultural change and overnight results cannot be expected.

Impacts on customers and staff

The impact on QR's customers is expected to be positive generally, mainly through prompt response and clearer lines of communication and responsibilities. The impact on staff will be mixed, with more challenging work generally resulting but difficulties for some with the change process and new values required. The impact in managerial levels will be considerable.

A key requirement for successful cultural change is for the structural change to be wide-reaching to avoid old value enclaves surviving. In general, the thrust towards down-sizing within the organisation will continue. There may, however, be some compensating effects if the organisation successfully obtains greater market share.

Other issues

There is clearly much uncertainty and urgent attention is needed to give staff a clear direction of where QR is headed. In addition, priority needs to be given to policy directions such as "what business should be sought?"

Consultants will be needed in specialised areas, for example, in determining best practices and in questioning standards. In order to proceed with the changes as a matter of priority, it is considered that some form of blanket approval up to say \$0.250M be given to expedite the engagement of consultants.

It is expected and indeed necessary for a substantial downsizing of head office functions to occur.

Careful attention to staff selection and the salary/reward structure will be vital to the establishment of accountable and motivated management. It may not be possible for all Public Sector Management Commission (PSMC) guidelines on employment conditions and remuneration to be accommodated.

Limitations and further work required

Limitations: In view of the tight deadline required for reporting, a number of areas received little more than scant attention. In recognising this limitation, a list of further work required to be carried out has been listed below.

It is also recognised that an internal review team cannot possess all the skills and knowledge needed for a comprehensive restructuring of a commercial enterprise.

The structure proposed should be considered a first draft, with revisions possibly being needed after detailed analysis of tasks being undertaken and responsibilities within each business unit.

Further work required: Further work has been identified and grouped as follows:

- (i) Government and legislation requirements:
 - develop Government objectives for QR;
- consider potential for resource sharing with DOT;
- identify and cost CSOs;

- determine what will happen with existing debt;
- develop charters for business units stating what business they are in; review all legislation for appropriateness to new arrangements.
- (ii) Human resource management requirements:
- determine what human resource policies are applicable to QR;
- determine and run appropriate senior management selection process;
- determine whether incentives will be paid to QR managers and how;
- institute graduate recruitment in areas other than engineering and continue to develop existing staff;
- institute and intensify staff development programs at all levels, from business management skills to customer relations training;
- develop and maintain effective communication and consultation mechanisms with staff and unions.
- (iii) Master plan to move to a commercial enterprise:
 - The detail required under this heading cannot be adequately identified at this stage but would include activities such as:
- appropriate debt to equity ratios;
- depreciation philosophies;
- cash flow/management strategy;
- ... marketing strategies...
- (iv) System requirements:
 - develop appropriate planning processes for the organisation, for business units, for branches and for projects;
 - develop and fast-track implementation of commercial accounting and management information systems;
- develop appropriate recording and costing feeder systems for accounting
- (v) Reorganisation requirements:
- develop new delegations and authority levels;
- streamline decision-making processes;
 - review and reduce all head office functions to minimum requirement;
- allocate engineering resources and activities to appropriate business units. There may be a need for consultant assistance during this phase.
- (vi) Resource requirements:
 - prepare briefs and engage suitable consultants with expertise in best practices for the areas of:
 - rollingstock maintenance and standards of maintenance;
 - track maintenance and standards of maintenance;
 - signal, communications and overhead maintenance and standards of maintenance;
 - administration and accounting procedures and methods.

Recommendations and action plan

Recommendations

It is recommended that:

- (i) the model proposed for restructuring QR, to provide it with a commercial focus, be endorsed by Government and commitment made to corporatisation.
- (ii) A small QR project team be established under the direction of the CEO to:
 ensure that activities associated with both restructuring and
 corporatisation are meshed;
 prioritise, timetable and cost necessary activities and tasks;
 expedite the implementation process;
- assist businesses to facilitate the orderly change process.

 (iii) The change process be carefully managed, including:
 direct communication with all stakeholders;
 training support for all employees;
 involvement of threatened individuals;
 consultation with unions at all stages of implementation;
- (iv) Development of business strategy for various products proceed as soon as possible in order to overcome present uncertainty.
- (v) Consultants be engaged for specialist requirements.
- (vi) Considerable flexibility be exercised in the salary/reward structure to promote positive reinforcement of desired behaviours.
- (vii) Government develop and clearly specify objectives for the railway.
- (viii) Careful selection of staff be carried out to ensure appointees are committed and have appropriate attributes and business acumen.
- (ix) The Policy and Planning Unit perform a watching brief and agree with QR and Treasury on the method of quantifying CSOs.
- (x) The action plan be endorsed.

Action plan

The following key tasks have been identified along with a proposed timetable from endorsement of the report:

- (i) By 14 September, 1990:
 - establish small project team;
 - communicate changes firstly to staff and then to other stakeholders.
- (ii) By 30 September, 1990:
 - set salary levels for executive positions;
- (iii) By 1 January, 1991:
 - advertise, appoint and have executive group in place; advertise and appoint consultants in specialised areas; changes to Railways Act and other legislation to be in place;

(iv) By 1 July, 1991:

business groups to be in place;

line sections (sections of tracks used as building blocks for accounting and other statistical systems) and expenditure charge codes to be set up for the new structure;

preliminary split of assets, resources and charges to be in place; interim accounting systems in place;

Government objectives and CSOs specified.

(v) By 1 July, 1992:

QR corporatised and Board in place;

accounts and management systems to be refined.

(vi) By 1 July, 1995:

transition to the business oriented railway to be complete.

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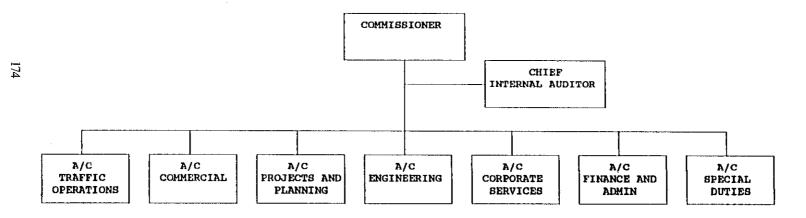
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QUEENSLAND RAILWAYS' ORGANISATION STRUCTURE

AT THE TIME OF THE REVIEW



NOTE: A/C = Assistant Commissioner



