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Plaid transport spokesman Jonathan Edwards claims Wales is due £1.9bn for transport under England's HS2 rail project

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Wales is entitled to nearly £2bn in transport funding as a result of England's new high-speed rail network, Plaid Cymru claimed yesterday, adding that the money could be a further boost to plans to electrify the nation's rail lines

The claim came as Welsh Secretary Cheryl Gillan came under fire for selling a house in a constituency affected by the £33bn HS2 project.

Plaid transport spokesman Jonathan Edwards has calculated that Wales should receive £1.9bn as a result of the investment in the HS2 network.

The Government last week gave the green light to the project, which has ignited fierce controversy because it will cut through areas of outstanding beauty in areas such as the Welsh Secretary's Chesham and Amersham constituency.

It has emerged that Ms Gillan sold a house in Amersham which lies approximately 500 yards from the proposed track in November for £320,000.

However, sources close to Ms Gillan stressed the house had been on the market since June 2010 and that neither the Welsh Secretary nor her husband used it because of mobility issues.

The sale, for 20% below the asking price had "nothing to do with HS2", the source said.

Supporters of the high-speed network say it will allow people to travel between London and Birmingham in 45 minutes.

Plaid's Mr Edwards is adamant that Wales must also get the investment it needs to improve its services.

He said Wales has "historically lost out on railway investment" – claiming that while the West Coast Main Line from London to Glasgow was electrified by 1974, Wales, like Albania and Moldova, has no public electrified railways.

He said: "HS2 is a £33bn investment in England with very little benefit for Wales.

"Before Christmas the precedent was set over the Olympic Games that a project primarily for the benefit of England should see a 'Barnett consequential' for Wales.

“That would mean £1.9bn for Wales over the course of the building of HS2 during the next decade and a half.

“The Westminster Government is in charge of main line rail development, which includes electrification of railway lines in Wales.

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“While the line from Glasgow to London was electrified as far back as 1974, there is currently not a single mile of public electrified railway in Wales, leaving us alongside Albania and Moldova at the bottom of the Eurozone table.

“Plans for electrification of the Great Western Main Line stop at Cardiff, meaning that 80% of the work will be done in England and there are no plans to electrify the line to Swansea, Carmarthen and further west.

“This £1.9bn could ensure improved railway services across Wales as well as creating jobs within our communities. I hope that the Welsh Government will ensure that we do not lose out under these plans for HS2.”

A UK Department for Transport spokesman said: “The construction costs of HS2 would be spread over two decades and, on this basis, would involve an average level of annual spend of less than £2bn a year.

“We’ve been quite clear that we will continue to invest in the rest of the country’s transport network as well as building HS2.

“For example we have already announced plans to electrify the Great Western Main Line between Cardiff, Bristol and Didcot. And we have also established that a strong high-level case may exist for electrifying some of the Valley lines north of Cardiff.

“We are now working with the Welsh Government to develop a business case for this.”

A Welsh Government spokesman said: “If it were to go ahead, we would expect investment in HS2 to be in addition to the broader investment in the modernisation of the UK rail network, which in Wales means investment in electrification.

“Officials remain in discussion with their department for transport counterparts on this issue.”

Professor Stuart Cole, a transport expert at the University of Glamorgan, said Wales needed to have the Newport to Chester line electrified among a host of rail improvements, and an hourly service to Aberystwyth from Shrewsbury.

On Ms Gillan’s house sale, Jon Trickett MP, Labour’s Shadow Minister for the Cabinet Office, said it was “very likely that Cheryl Gillan has breached the Ministerial Code”.

He said: “I have written to the Prime Minister, asking him to take immediate action and investigate the very serious allegations with which Ms Gillan is charged.”

However, the source close to Ms Gillan insists she has complied with the ministerial code at all times and disclosed her private interests to the permanent secretary at the Ministry of Justice and the independent adviser on ministers' interests.

References

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