

## David Cameron facing rail revolt in Labour vote

David Cameron is facing a revolt from his own backbenchers over plans to raise the cost of rail commuting by up to 11 per cent, in a vote planned by Labour to exploit Coalition tensions.



Growing fears of commuter backlash over fares

By David Millward, Transport Editor

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Opposition party strategists are drawing up plans to trigger the first revolt of the new Parliamentary term by tabling a Commons motion calling for the ticket price rises to be cut.

Under current Government plans, fares are due to rise by an average of 6.2 per cent – three per cent above July's Retail Price Index – in January, with the cost of some season tickets being allowed to rise by up to another five per cent.

Last year George Osborne, the Chancellor, found the money to cut the planned three per cent above RPI to one per cent.

Doing the same this year would cost about £100 million pressure is mounting on the Government to do so, especially with Network Rail having just handed the Treasury £310m thanks to cuts in its running costs.

Liberal Democrat MPs, discreetly backed by Norman Baker, the local transport minister, have been lobbying Danny Alexander, the Chief Secretary to the Treasury, to find the cash to enable the rise to be reduced.

“The Coalition is, quite rightly, investing more in our railways than any Government since the Victorian era in an effort to sort out the mess we inherited. But we can’t just pass on the cost to commuters,” said Julian Huppert, the Lib Dem MP for Cambridge.

“But people are struggling to make ends meet against a backdrop of wage freezes and rising utility bills. George Osborne has to realise that people cannot be expected to pay huge rises in rail fares on top.”

Tory MPs will hope that Justine Greening, the Transport Secretary, who lobbied hard for the fare rises to be reduced last year, will make the case for commuters again this year.

An analysis of marginal seats by the Campaign for Better Transport has highlighted the vulnerability of Tory MPs to a commuter backlash.

Gavin Barwell, who holds a majority of just under 3,000 in Croydon Central, represents a constituency where more than one person in five commutes.

Tracey Crouch, who won Chatham and Aylesford from Labour at the last election, has raised her concern publicly, warning that people who commute already feel “very aggrieved”.

Several Coalition MPs have publicly attacked the fare rises in their local papers or in statements to their constituents.

Richard Drax, Tory MP South Dorset said: “I’m very concerned at this price rise, especially as train fares have been going up successively over the last ten years. Some are the highest in Europe.

“If prices continue to rise they will inevitably force passengers off the trains and onto the roads.”

Simon Kirby, Tory MP for Brighton Kemptown and Peacehaven, also attacked the rises. “People here in Brighton rely on the rail service, whether that is for commuting to and from work or for pleasure.

“Any increase in the cost of tickets therefore has an impact on my constituents.”

Greg Mulholland, Lib Dem MP for Leeds North West, added: “We already have some of the highest rail fares in Europe and after Labour raised fares by 66 per cent between 1997 and 2010 it would be wrong to pile on costs any further.

“In particular, it's simply not on to ask passengers in West Yorkshire to pay even more than elsewhere in the country. They have, after all, already put up with inadequate rolling stock for far too long.

"This is an issue that I will be writing about to the Secretary of State for Transport as soon as possible. I also hope to raise it on the floor of the House."

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