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Rutnam outlines West Coast prompted DfT changes

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Rutnam: culture of open exchange must be fundamental to way department does business

Department for Transport Permanent Secretary Philip Rutnam has given details of staffing changes within the DfT which have been made in response to the botched West Coast franchise competition.

Speaking in front of the House of Commons Transport Committee on Monday (7 January), Rutnam confirmed the appointment of Clare Moriarty, previously director general corporate, to take charge of all rail work at the DfT. But he said the appointment was "very much a first step", outlined plans to appoint other director generals later this year, and said discussions were taking place about bringing senior civil servants from other departments to the DfT following the appointment last year of the DCLG's David Prout to head up high speed rail (TB 8928).

Rutnam told MPs that since the suspension of the three DfT officials suspended when flaws in the West Coast competition emerged had been lifted in December 2012 (TB 8943), all three officials had returned to work. The Permanent Secretary added that following his announcement that Clare Moriarty would head up rail, major projects chief Peter Strachan had taken the decision to leave the department.

Disciplinary action is being taken against "a number of individuals", Rutnam told the Transport Committee, but refused to give the exact number on the grounds that this could fuel speculation which would be damaging to anyone named whether correctly or in error. The disciplinary action has been taken following the recommendations of the human resources report carried out for Rutnam by Bill Stow, in parallel with the investigation by Sam Laidlaw.

Asked by the panel how the public could have confidence in future civil service appointments, the Permanent Secretary said that, aside from the West Coast fiasco, the DfT had handled many major procurements and cited the High Speed One concession sale and Intercity Express Programme as examples of success. "Criticism shouldn't be applied to the department as a whole," he said. Transport Committee chair Louise Ellman asked for an update on the Thameslink rolling stock procurement and was told financial close was expected early in 2013.

Rutnam was also asked what could be done to encourage civil servants to refer their concerns upwards after it emerged last year that both he and transport ministers were not told about problems with the West Coast procurement. The Permanent Secretary revealed that when the Laidlaw report was published in December 2012 he sent a personal message to DfT staff in which the main point was: "We must have a culture of honest and open exchange by staff at all levels with senior managers and ministers and this is fundamental to the way our department should do business."



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