

February 26, 2013 12:01 am

MPs pinpoint blame for West Coast debacle

By Mark Odell, Transport correspondent

Fundamental errors combined with a lack of leadership and common sense at the Department for Transport led to the West Coast rail fiasco, according to a report by the influential Public Accounts Committee.

The findings published on Tuesday are the latest in a series of damning reports into the debacle which have pointed the finger of blame at ministers.

Labour seized on the latest report and called on the prime minister to act.

“It’s time that David Cameron took responsibility for the rail franchising fiasco, instead of allowing ministers to hide behind their civil servants,” said Maria Eagle, the shadow transport secretary.

Downing Street and Patrick McLoughlin, the transport secretary, have previously said no minister was at fault for the cancellation of the contract to run the UK’s busiest intercity railway.

Mr McLoughlin in October scrapped the contract, which had been awarded to First Group, after “serious errors” came to light over the way the competition was run. He took his decision just a month after taking over from Justine Greening, now international development secretary.

Despite a report by the National Audit Office in December, which said that deep cuts in staffing and rushed implementation of policy changes were key factors, the government maintained that fault lay with civil servants at the Department for Transport.

Last month, a report by the transport select committee raised “serious questions” about the roles of ministers and civil servants. The committee of 11 MPs was, however, split on the findings, which were approved by a vote of five to three. The three dissenters were all Conservative MPs.

Labour has accused the government of trying to protect three serving cabinet ministers from blame. Philip Hammond, the defence secretary, Theresa Villiers, Northern Ireland secretary – both previously at the DfT – as well as Ms Greening, were all involved in key decisions that were found to have contributed to the collapse of the West Coast competition.

Three officials who were suspended over the collapse of the contract were subsequently reinstated.

You may be interested in

Murder in a cramped Parisian flat

Fraport eye's Turkey's airport hub plan

IAG: falling mainly on the plain

Pensioner subsidy cut hits National Express

IAG rises following profit projection

Spain suffers worst corporate slide of crisis

Merkel backs new EU talks for Turkey

Gulf Keystone CEO pockets £10m pay

Manila tells sultan to end Sabah stand-off

Virginia's old guard keeps on the road

Emerging Europe airlines head for hangar

Carney warns over lack of trust in banks

RBS at bottom of FTSE as provisions rise

Hot property: party pads

EU blocks Ryanair-Aer Lingus merger

Barratt sees half-year profits double

Turkey-Kurdistan oil pact imminent

Black market spirits on the rise

Turkey scraps \$5.7bn privatisation

Liverpool festival is UK global showcase

Printed from: <http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/b31e7f38-7f72-11e2-8d96-00144feabdc0.html>

Print a single copy of this article for personal use. Contact us if you wish to print more to distribute to others.

© THE FINANCIAL TIMES LTD 2013 FT and 'Financial Times' are trademarks of The Financial Times Ltd.