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## **HS2 is a 'boy's toy', says senior Conservative**

**Former Wales secretary Cheryl Gillan has labelled the High Speed 2 rail project a "boy's toy" that will "saddle future governments with huge debt".**

"There are some very basic juvenile instincts attached to it," Mrs Gillan told *The House* magazine.

The longest-serving female Conservative MP was secretary of state for Wales until September 2012, when she was reshuffled out of her job.

Her opposition to HS2 was known when she was on the front bench.

"Everybody knew where my cards lay. I almost used to think the transport secretaries used to move in the opposite direction if they saw me coming down the corridor," she said.

Legislation set out in the Queen's Speech will make it possible for the government to acquire the land needed for construction and free up the money required to start the project.

### **'Fractious'**

In her interview Mrs Gillan also spoke of the "fractious nature" of the coalition, which "will become more apparent as we move towards the general election".

She supports an in-out referendum on EU membership before the next general election but believes "the Lib Dems will not allow the coalition to legislate for that".

Mrs Gillan also expressed frustration at "this preoccupation with the women and whether they were treated differently".

### **'Poorly treated'**

But her former colleague, ex-MP Louise Mensch, called for a higher profile for the Women and Equalities ministry.

"[It] has been poorly treated and should be taken seriously," Mrs Mensch argued. "It shouldn't be an afterthought... There should be a separate minister for women and equalities."

She refused to blame the media for focusing on the appearance of female MPs.

"We should look ourselves before we blame the press as an amorphous body. They give the public what they want and the public are interested in looks," she said.

### **MP job shares**

In the same issue of *The House*, the Lib Dem peer Baroness Shirley Williams claimed the treatment of women in Parliament had improved dramatically.

Speaking about allegations of sexual harassment against Lord Rennard, she said: "That kind of thing is demeaning and unpleasant, but boy if you compare it with what it used to be like, it's a different ball game."

"The general view taken was that if you were a young woman in politics, well what did you expect if you were trying to get to somewhere near the top?"

Interviewed alongside Lady Williams, Business Minister Jo Swinson said she would like to see job shares for MPs, despite admitting it would be difficult.

"In so many walks of life, job-shares work very well and it's very helpful in being able to retain really talented women at senior levels in senior organisations," she argued.

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