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## Boris Johnson faces Tory party ire over rail plans

By Kiran Stacey and Mark Odell



Boris Johnson is facing revolt among members of his own party over plans to bring parts of the London rail network under the control of City Hall.

Several senior Conservative MPs have complained to the Department for Transport about proposals by London's mayor to take over key lines between London and Kent, which they fear would penalise commuters in Tory heartlands.

The mayor and Transport for London submitted a proposal more than a year ago to take over some of the Kent services from Victoria and London Bridge, operated by Southeastern, and services between Liverpool Street and Hertford East and Chingford, part of the Greater Anglia franchise.

The proposal was part of wider plans by the government to devolve some rail franchises in England to local authority control. Many of these services had become bogged down in local politics and questions about how to finance them.

But Mr Johnson has continued to lobby hard for TfL's plan, leaving Conservative ministers caught between upsetting one of their party's most powerful figures or their own MPs.

One MP told the Financial Times that up to 12 of his parliamentary colleagues from constituencies in Kent, including government ministers, have urged Stephen Hammond, the transport minister, to reject Mr Johnson's plans. The county has 17 constituencies, which are all Tory seats.

Charlie Elphicke, MP for Dover, said: "Pretty much every single Kent MP I have spoken to is upset by this. We need to keep this for the national interest rather than letting one region have complete control."

MPs in Kent and some representing constituencies affected by services out of Liverpool Street believe TfL would try to raise prices on those routes to subsidise cheaper travel in London.

They are also concerned he would increase frequencies on inner London routes, which would lead to worse services for passengers travelling from further afield.

One railway executive with knowledge of the situation said fears over pricing were misplaced as the government regulates the fares, but admitted that TfL could try to run more inner London services and slow down services from further afield.

The backlash by MPs is an early sign of the tensions the mayor is likely to cause as he looks to expand his power base in London ahead of what many assume is an inevitable bid for the Tory leadership.

Although his willingness to speak out against government policy has irritated Number 10, Tory MPs have so far been largely supportive of Mr Johnson, seeing him as the most likely candidate to take over from David Cameron.

One senior MP told the Financial Times that many of those who have campaigned behind the scenes are afraid to speak out in public, so as not to incur the wrath of the man they believe will one day become their boss.

One backbencher said: "We all know what Boris is up to, but no one wants to speak out about it."

The other concern among the Tory MPs is that as a traditionally Labour city, London's next mayor may be even less inclined politically to help commuters from their constituencies in Kent.

A decision by ministers is expected in the next few weeks, although it could be delayed. It is understood that Mr Johnson is likely to fail in his bid for the Kent services but may still secure the Greater Anglia services.

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