

Tory Stephen Hammond wined and dined by rail bosses before he gets top job

He benefited from hospitality worth thousands of pounds from one of Britain's biggest transport firms

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A top Tory was wined and dined by a rail company just months before he was made a minister in the Department of Transport.

Stephen Hammond benefited from hospitality worth thousands of pounds from one of Britain's biggest transport firms, DB Schenker Rail (UK).

The company is owned by Deutsche Bahn, owner of Arriva UK Trains, which runs four rail lines across Britain's network.

Details of donations to Mr Hammond are revealed in the MPs' Register of Interests and come two weeks after it emerged that rail companies plan to hike fares by an inflation-busting 4.1 per cent from January.

It will raise fresh questions about the links between MPs and transport bosses.

Mr Hammond was a guest of the company at the Conservatives' Black and White Party in 2012, seven months before David Cameron promoted him to the Department for Transport.

He and wife Sally were entertained at previous Black and White parties by the company, which also gave them two tickets worth £700 to a Tory fundraiser in 2010.

Mr Hammond's extensive entries on the register of interests also reveal he enjoyed a four-day junket to Canada and the US funded by two rail firms. A backbencher at the time, he visited rail and bus operations during the trip in 2006.

Other MPs have also benefited from rail firms' generosity, according to the Electoral Commission.

Mr Hammond's spokesman said: "During his time as Opposition spokesman for Transport Stephen Hammond met a number of companies and journalists to discuss transport policy.

"It's nonsensical and incorrect to suggest that Stephen Hammond did anything wrong or improper. He accurately and promptly registered all meetings."

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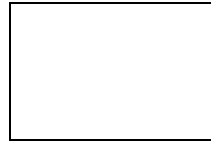
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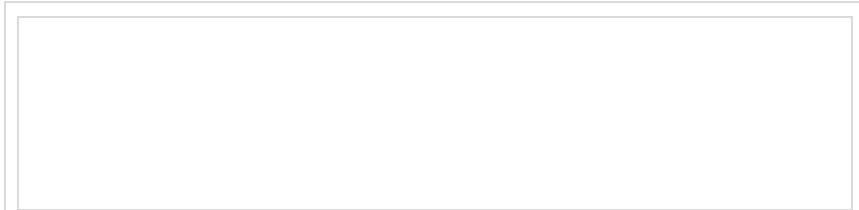
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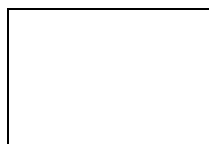
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