

Mark Harper and RMT meeting goes 'positively', according to Mick Lynch

November 24, 2022



Ok, so the handshake image may be a tad premature. But things are decidedly more positive today that they were at the beginning of the week.

We can tentatively report that, general secretary of the RMT, Mick Lynch has confirmed that his meeting with Transport Secretary Mark Harper was “positive”.

In his interview given to BBC News upon immediately leaving the meeting Mr Lynch was initially fairly upbeat about the minister and spoke about an agreement they have reached for Harper to provide some clarification around ministerial authority, as well as a written plan outlining how a resolution will be reached.

He was fairly disparaging about the Rail Delivery Group (RDG) and noted that he has called on Harper to clarify their negotiating position. He also made a firm statement about the government’s responsibility to take a firmer hold of the contracts they have control of with TOCs.

On a positive note, he did say that he wanted to pick up the pace of the process, admitting that he

understands the frustrations of passengers, industry and the wider business world. He confirms that further meetings with Network Rail are due to take place on Friday, and that they are awaiting confirmation from the RDG to meet again.

Mick Lynch said:

A positive meeting. We've got rid of the bellicose nonsense that we used to have with Grant Shapps and his cohort in his era and were now starting to get a dialogue.

"So what we're hoping for and what Mr Harper has committed to is giving us an outcome from this meeting which will be a letter to me saying how he sees us taking forward steps towards a resolution. We laid out to him what we thought he should do, and he's acknowledged some of that, and what we're chiefly asking him to do – you've heard him say that he's going to be a facilitator towards a settlement or resolution of the discourse.

"We've said to him that it's no good having these odds, we've heard them from his predecessor Ann-Marie Trevelyan, but nothing happened, so we want him to set down in writing what he's actually going to do, a plan of how a resolution is going to be facilitated.

"At the moment we've got doubt about the authority of the people we're speaking to. The Rail Delivery Group (RDG) are telling us that they have no authority to negotiate. They have a mandate, and they have put a legal challenge to us over whether they can negotiate at all so we've got a situation where 14 TOCS are telling that they can't negotiate and so is the RDG. So, I've asked him to set out in writing and clarify their authority and create a liaison brief at ministerial level so the trade unions can go and see them and work out how a settlement can come about."

"I've also said we need pace in these negotiations. I'm sure the public, and the business and economy want to see this settled in the proper way. We need pace. Six months we've been in negotiations with TOCs and we've not have one document put across the table. That has to change.

"I outlined to him his responsibility as we see them, and his responsibilities legally in the contracts they have with the TOCs. They have a legal responsibility and a responsibility to set their mandate, what they can say, offer and negotiate at that table. So, I'm hoping he's going to do that today and we can get back to the table as he's been demanding in the media from me and my union. He needs to clarify in writing where he stands, and where the industry stands when they are transacting with us in those discussions.

"So, they need a new position they need a new mandate and hopefully we can get on with it. We want to do that immediately. We'll be speaking with Network Rail in the morning and as soon as the RDG invite us over we'll be getting on with that. So that's where we are at the moment, it's up to him now to give us some documentation to carry this forward."

When asked if considering the positive meeting, there was any chance he would look at calling off the upcoming strikes, he was clear. He said:

"We called the strikes off two weeks ago, gave a two week period and it's gone past that now. It's nearly

2.5 weeks. We were told we'd get a tangible outcome and we got none of that. So once bitten, twice shy.

"We've not had any strikes since the beginning of October there has been ample time for this lot to get their act together along with their industry partners, people they contract to run the railways and they've done nothing. We think the problem is that the Treasury is pulling their chain, now they've got to assert themselves as an independent department and get to grips with this crisis."

He finished by saying:

"Not just on strike day. Every day is a crisis in our railway because of the organisational problems created since privatisation."