

MPs vote on motion expressing regret at government's rail plans

December 8, 2021



Labour pushed for a vote on an “opposition day” motion in the House of Commons yesterday evening, the wording of which expressed regret at the Integrated Rail Plan.

Secretary of State for Transport, Grant Shapps, faced off against his newly appointed Labour Party counterpart, Louise Haigh, in an opposition day debate centred on the Integrated Rail Plan’s (IRP’s) effects on the North.

The opposition day motion on which MPs voted on from Labour regretted what it called “the government’s decision not to deliver on new high-speed rail investment.”

Opposition day motions are meant to represent the will of Parliament but are not legally binding.

After some delay, caused by the announcement of new COVID-19 restrictions, the debate continued, and at about 20:40 the result was read.

Ayes for the motion were 139, noes zero.

After the vote, Haigh criticised Conservatives for not voting for the motion.

There was anger from many last month when the IRP changed the details of Northern Powerhouse Rail – in a move Labour calls a downgrade – and HS2’s Eastern Leg was scrapped in favour of infrastructure upgrades.

In the debate leading up to the vote, Haigh said: “The economic case for delivering the original plans as was promised could hardly be stronger. Both schemes would have created 150,000 new jobs connecting 13 million people in major towns and cities in our industrial heartlands.

“But without that eastern leg of HS2, the business case barely makes sense. And in the middle of a climate emergency, when we know we need to double rail capacity in order for the government to meet its own net-zero target, the decision makes even less sense.”

She added: “The Integrated Rail Plan was the government’s chance to build a railway fit for the century to come which would help us tackle the climate crisis. But when the North came to cash its cheque, it bounced.”

Shapps argued that the North would be linked up locally, regionally and nationally through the IRP, and that this revised approach benefitted more constituencies than earlier plans would have.

He also argued that Labour had no clear line on the issue and that this clashed with Haigh’s consistent support for HS2 and Northern Powerhouse Rail.

“In reality, the Integrated Rail Plan is the single biggest government investment in a rail network in history,” he said. “It is five times more than was spent on Crossrail, it’s ten times more than was spent on the Olympic Games, and I can’t help but detect a hand of politics in the party opposite’s reaction.

“Whilst they criticise and they politicise, their constituents will be starting to see the benefits. They’ll ride on faster trains; they’ll sit in more comfortable carriages; they won’t have to fight for seats.”