

Transport secretary hopes for “sensible conversation” with the RMT

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In an interview with Sky News’ Sophy Ridge, Transport Secretary Mark Harper admitted that he was hoping for a “sensible conversation” with the RMT in their meeting today.

He told the interviewer how he was not into “throwing accusations”, and wasn’t planning to negotiate with general secretary Mick Lynch, adding that “that’s very clearly for the trade unions and the employers – Network Rail and the train operating companies.”

Hopefully though, he will build some bridges between the government and the unhappy RMT. He seems to be positive about the meeting, saying: “I do think in this case it’s important to meet with the unions. These strikes are not just about pay, this is about long-running talks that are actually about delivering rail reform.”

Passengers, industry and well, just about everyone will be pleased to hear that Mr Harper is planning to do his level best to convince Mr Lynch to call off the planned strikes in favour of further negotiation. He pledged that he would urge the RMT leader to “get back round the table with the employers” and encourage him to “try to hammer out some of those reforms”.

Quite how his plans will be taken is anyone's guess though. In an interview with ITV's Robert Peston, Mick Lynch was less than complimentary about the senior echelons of government, although seemed open to give Harper a fair crack at the whip.

He said: "The only people above these chief executives, the chief executives of the train operating companies, is Mark Harper."

"Now he may not personally (have) done it, but he's got very senior officials in the DfT who will be at this meeting tomorrow.

"I'll be questioning him about that and what his role is, if he says 'those days are gone, and I'm going to be a facilitator, a person of good will, good offices or whatever you want to call it', great. Let's get on with it."

We shall wait with bated breath to see how this one pans out. Oh, to be a fly on the wall in that meeting...