

# Accounting for the top position in transport?

One might be forgiven for wondering quite how a Masters in accountancy and a career, until 2005, as accountant and then finance manager – for, among others, PriceWaterhouseCoopers, GlaxoSmithKline and Centrica (which owns British Gas) – qualifies someone for the top government job in transport.

Yes, Justine Greening's rise to stardom as Economic Secretary to the Treasury in May 2010, just five years after being elected Conservative MP for Putney, may have made perfect sense. But her promotion to Secretary of State for Transport – following last month's promotion of Philip Hammond to Secretary of State for Defence in the cabinet reshuffle precipitated by Dr Liam Fox's resignation – will be causing some raised eyebrows.

Dig a little deeper, though, and her new appointment may not be quite as strange as it seems. Greening is known to be an illustrious high-flyer, as her parliamentary term to date bears witness. As the then youngest female Tory MP, within a few short months of her election success she was fast-tracked into vice chairmanship of the Conservative Party, with responsibility for youth. Then, just two years later, she was promoted to junior Shadow Minister for the Treasury.

In 2009, and still in opposition, she was promoted again to Shadow Minister for London, in the Department for Communities and Local Government, with responsibility for finance. In this role, Greening did look after transport for the community, campaigning for improvements to the tube, and in particular the District line, which runs through her constituency, as well as opposing Labour's plans at the time for a third runway at Heathrow.

That stint can hardly have equipped her with anything like the breadth of knowledge one might expect for the principal transport post, but she might argue it's a start. Also, without wishing to appear patronising, she is on record as being staunchly pro-environment – so transport would doubtless have figured in her lobbying. However, even the latter doesn't withstand intense scrutiny, given her reported support for the proposed 80 mph speed limit on motorways, which, it is widely accepted, will have an adverse effect on carbon emissions.

In truth, 'staunch' may turn out to be her major qualifying attribute. Not so much in terms of an adherence to the detail of any particular concern, but in her defence of Conservative policies and specifically as an ally of David Cameron. It is not, perhaps, for nothing that in the corridors of power she is fondly referred to as one of Cameron's pack of attack dogs.

Unflattering, maybe. Either way, Greening, in partnership with Roads Minister Mike Penning, is now responsible for overseeing transport policies and programmes, including the trial of stretched semi-trailers (news, page 6), running at 2.05 metres longer than the current legal limit. Wincanton and Stobart are among those ready to roll, and the industry is virtually unanimous in promoting their cost-saving and green credentials – and the fact that, even stretched, they remain shorter than existing drawbar (rigid and trailer) combinations, so pose no greater risk to safety.

Let's see if our new Secretary of State is as staunch in her defence of the environment and business as she says. Given today's steering and stability technologies, surely this is a no brainer?



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