

MP'S TRAVEL EXPENSES REVEALED AFTER TWO-YEAR BATTLE FOR SECRECY

Nigel Morris, The Independent
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A former Labour minister claimed more than £16,000 for mileage and a Conservative backbencher ran up a bill of almost £6,000 on taxis, as MPs' travel claims reached £5m. The first breakdown of Westminster's travel expenses, released under the Freedom of Information (FoI) Act, has revealed wide discrepancies between claims.

MPs are reimbursed for all parliamentary travel costs, whether it be by car, taxi, rail or air, and they were paid an average of £7,700 in 2005-06. After losing a two-year battle to keep the details of the travel claims confidential, the House of Commons finally published them last night.

They disclosed that the biggest claim for car use was registered by the former tourism minister Janet Anderson, who represents Rossendale and Darwen in Lancashire. She received £16,612 for driving more than 60,000 miles during the 12-month period.

Mrs Anderson received about £4,500 more than the next highest claimant, Laurence Robertson, the Conservative MP for Tewkesbury in Gloucestershire. He was followed by Stephen O'Brien, the Conservative MP for Eddisbury in Cheshire, who was given £9,878, and Eric Joyce, the Labour MP for Falkirk, who got £9,647.

The biggest bill for taxis or vehicle hire came from Richard Bacon, the Tory MP for South Norfolk, who was paid £5,685, although he received nothing for driving his own car. He was followed by Stephen Dorrell, the former Tory health secretary and MP for Charnwood in Leicestershire, who claimed £4,933 for taxis.

MPs from central and northern Scotland put in the highest travel-expense claims. Mr Joyce headed the list, receiving £44,985 including £30,578 in air fares and £4,276 in train tickets. The only English MP in the top 10 was the Alan Milburn, the former health secretary and MP for Darlington, who was paid £21,506.

Tony Blair, who has a government car on permanent stand-by, predictably had one of the lowest claims - £202 for mileage. David Cameron claimed nothing for his well-known cycle trips to the Commons, even though MPs can claim 20p per mile if they take to two wheels. The Tory leader received £1,823 in travel expenses, more than half of which covered taxi costs.

Two Labour MPs - Jeremy Corbyn (Islington North) and Mary Creagh (Wakefield) - claimed £230 for cycling, equivalent to pedalling more than 1,100 miles over the year.

Norman Baker, the Liberal Democrat MP for Lewes in East Sussex, who obtained the figures, said he hoped that publishing the information would dissuade them from extravagance in future.

"I hope it will also make MPs think twice about the environmental impact of their journeys and how it could be lessened," he said.

"The most important thing is that MPs must be accountable for what they spend. This is a victory for accountability and secondly, this is a victory for Freedom of Information."

Mr Baker first submitted his FOI request on the issue two years ago. The Information Tribunal rejected two appeals by Commons authorities which said publication would breach data protection rules.

Figures released last October for overall expenses and allowances revealed MPs had claimed almost £86.8m in 2005-06, a rise of nearly £6m on the previous year. The payments - about £131,000 per MP - come on top of a basic salary of £59,686 and a pension.

Top five travel claims

TAXI AND CAR HIRE:

Richard Bacon (Con, South Norfolk, £5,685)
Stephen Dorrell (Con, Charnwood, £4,933)
John Thurso (Lib-Dem, Caithness, Sutherland & Easter Ross, £4,717)
John Grogan (Lab, Selby, £4,063)
Nigel Evans (Con, Ribble Valley, £3,430)

MILEAGE:

Janet Anderson (Lab, Rossendale & Darwen £16,612)
Laurence Robertson (Con, Tewkesbury, £12,015)
Stephen O'Brien (Con, Eddisbury, £9,878)
Eric Joyce (Lab, Falkirk, £9,647)
Daniel Kawczynski (Con, Shrewsbury & Atcham, £8,866)

Source: <http://news.independent.co.uk/uk/politics/article2268087.ece>