

## **CAMPAIGN FOR RAIL BRIEFING PAPER**

### **The Case for an Overnight Sleeper Service**

#### **From Birmingham to Scotland**

**Value** The sleeper service from London to Scotland is highly valued by its users, the business community and Scotland's tourist industry, so much so that the UK Government has committed £50 million to its continuation and improvement, and this has been matched by a further £50 million from the Scottish Government.

**The service today** Two trains operate each way six nights a week [Sunday night to Friday night]. The Lowland Sleeper splits at Carstairs, the front half for Glasgow, the rear for Edinburgh. The Highland Sleeper runs to Edinburgh, where it splits with one portion to Aberdeen, one to Inverness and one to Fort William.

**The proposal** The Highland Sleeper should divert from its usual Trent Valley route to call at Birmingham New Street in each direction. If it keeps its current northbound departure time from London Euston [21.15], a pick up at Birmingham New Street would be at about the commercially attractive time of 23.00. It may be necessary to bring this time forward by a few minutes but currently calls at Crewe and Preston are lengthy [9 minutes and 10 minutes] and it may be possible to reduce these. Southbound, the set down would be at about 06.10. These times give attractive connections from a wide area, such as Bristol [20.30/08.08], Leicester [21.49/07.17] and Oxford [21.36/07.41].

**Serving Lowland Scotland** It is not suggested that the Lowland Sleeper should call at Birmingham New Street as its timings are designed to appeal to the London market [Euston 23.50/06.47]. However, the Fort William portion of the Highland Sleeper calls at two of Glasgow's suburban stations, Westerton and Dalmuir, which could be marketed from the West Midlands. Both of these stations have through trains to/from Edinburgh, so the Edinburgh market could also be addressed with doubling back permitted and still afford a good night's sleep.

**Influencing the decision** At present, the sleepers are part of the ScotRail franchise, but the Scottish Government is now looking at what should follow it from April 2015. Its proposal is to hive off the sleepers to a microfranchise for 15 years. In return for capital investment, the Scottish Government is looking for an increase in passenger numbers, so our suggestion is very relevant.

Keith Flinders

January 2013