

## A THOUSAND MILES A DAY EMPTY

When the Voyagers were created in 2001, a depot was built to maintain them - a 'mother ship'. A number of sites were considered including the old Bilston steelworks site [too small]. Land to the west of the Birmingham to Derby line, four miles south of Burton on Trent was chosen and given the name Central Rivers [or Barton-under-Needwood CMD].



Inevitably, this location involves some empty running to Central Rivers in the late evening and from the depot in the early morning, but how much? Every day is different but for a randomly chosen night, it totalled 1,190 miles! Most empty running is to and from Birmingham New Street. Four routes are used for most workings, the shortest not being the main line via Tamworth but through Lichfield and Sutton Coldfield [64 chains shorter]. The other two are via Coleshill Parkway and via the Camp Hill line to Lifford curve. Such is the intensity that two 'empties' leave New Street at the same time [21.51] in opposite directions. Some of the workings are for more than one service. For instance, the 06.56 arrival into Platform 9 at New Street splits to become the 07.30 to Newcastle and the 07.31 to Manchester.

There are some long distance empty runs, particularly of Virgin Voyagers. The first in the morning, before 04.00, goes 139 miles to Euston to form the 07.10 to Chester. Then two Voyagers set off for Shrewsbury, one being detached at Wolverhampton. It lays over at Oxley and the two sets couple up again at 07.17 to work to Euston. The last to leave the depot is at 09.30 to Chester, which uses the single line chord from High Level to Low Level at Lichfield Trent Valley. This chord is also used by the 19.50 from Blackpool North during its three hour empty journey, and by Voyagers taking a fifth route from New Street - via Stafford, reverse. One of these is as early as 17.52, having come in as the 16.23 from Euston.

*Words and photo: Keith Flinders*