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West Coast revamp adds Euston-Glasgow semi-fasts

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Virgin Trains will reconfigure West Coast Main line services from December 2013 in a move it says will provide an additional 3,300 seats a day for passengers travelling between Scotland and Birmingham.

Twenty-four of the 28 Scottish daily services that currently start or terminate in Birmingham will be extended to London Euston providing new direct rail services to Glasgow/Edinburgh from Coventry, Milton Keynes and Sandwell & Dudley.

The effect will be the introduction of 12 semi-fast Euston-Scotland trains each day, each way, in addition to the existing hourly service between Euston-Glasgow which currently provides 15 trains a day in each direction. Although the new services via Birmingham will not offer the fastest journey times, it will provide Virgin with the opportunity to market low cost fares which will be attractive to passengers who are more concerned with price than how much time they spend on a train.

Despite the new travel options between London and Glasgow/Edinburgh, the impetus for the change is the need to add capacity between Birmingham and Scotland. Virgin says New Street-Edinburgh Waverley passenger numbers have increased by 235% between 2008 and 2013 with growth of 261% for New Street-Glasgow Central trains.

To provide additional capacity the existing 5-car diesel Super Voyagers used between Birmingham and Scotland will be replaced with a mix of 10-car Super Voyager formations and 9 or 11-car Pendolinos. This will be made possible by the recently delivered 106 new Pendolino carriages and use of Super Voyagers for a limited number of other West Coast off peak services.

Virgin says the changes will deliver an 80% increase in seating capacity compared to 2008 when the current Virgin High Frequency timetable was introduced. Some 12,967 seats will be available on weekdays, up from 9,656 today.

The planned timetable follows significant increases in passenger numbers on Virgin Trains' Anglo-Scottish services since it took over the West Coast passenger franchise in 1997 and marks the first step-change in capacity since the company was awarded a temporary franchise in December 2012. Virgin Trains is now expected to continue running the West Coast passenger service until April 2017. The overall level of seats available on Virgin Trains Anglo-Scottish services will go from 17,000 in December 2008 to 30,000 in December 2013.

Reconfiguring services will also deliver the first direct trains from Scotland to Birmingham International for Birmingham Airport in six years. Virgin says this will give holidaymakers better options for travelling to Birmingham, Glasgow and Edinburgh airports to get cheaper flights during Scottish or English school holidays.

Chris Gibb, Virgin Trains chief operating officer, said: "Our plans for December represent the latest phase in our development of services on the West Coast Main Line as we strive to make the most of this iconic route by providing more trains and more seats, seven days a week. The success of

West Coast: more Pendolino services will run between Euston and Scotland from December



Picture: Bill Turvill

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recent years shows the enduring popularity of the route and the potential that remains."

In 2004 Virgin introduced its tilting electric Pendolino and diesel Super Voyager trains, cutting the fastest Glasgow Central to Euston journey from 5 hours 13 minutes to 4 hours 41 minutes. The Scotland-Birmingham service was developed as part of the Virgin Cross Country franchise before transferring to West Coast in 2007.

With the establishment of the Virgin High Frequency timetable following the £8.9bn West Coast Route Modernisation programme in December 2008, typical Glasgow-Euston journeys were cut by more than 40 minutes resulting in the current fastest 4 hour 8 minute journey.

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