

Irate union rails against Caledonian Sleeper job losses in Inverness

By Simon Warburton

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TSSA union is lobbying to keep Inverness jobs in the city
Furious union bosses have slammed the owners of the Caledonian Sleeper as re-enacting “Highland Clearances” with its intention to make three Inverness positions redundant and not locate up to 10 potential jobs in the regional capital.

The Transport Salaried Staffs’ Association (TSSA) says its efforts to keep three service delivery manager posts in Inverness have been rebuffed by Caledonian Sleeper owners Serco while a raft of other positions is being set up in Glasgow.

TSSA maintains five new guest ambassador posts, essentially in call centres, are being created in Scotland’s second city even though these roles are normally based in Inverness.



Caledonian Sleeper train in Inverness.

Two new coordinator roles working with the control room are equally being established in Glasgow, although Caledonian Sleeper was remaining tightlipped as to TSSA's claims.

TSSA argues these posts could have been based in Inverness or carried out remotely, potentially saving two of the service delivery managers from redundancy.

Coming up against a brick wall

“We are coming up against a brick wall,” TSSA organiser Gary Kelly told the Press and Journal.

“Rupert Soames (Serco chief executive and grandson of Winston Churchill) said the Caledonian Sleeper would be headquartered in Inverness – they would bring good work to Inverness.

Consultations with Serco rejected

“They seem to be rolling back on that. Alongside the three jobs which are being moved to Glasgow, new positions which should be in Inverness are being opened up in Glasgow and they could amount to 10 jobs.

“We have had two consultations with Serco so far and they rejected our counter-proposals to try

and save these jobs. We also suggested they put enhanced terms on the table – they have not responded.”

Caledonian Sleeper confirmed it would be making three Inverness posts redundant as well as one in Glasgow.

However, the rail company insisted the “restructuring” of its overnight operations team would benefit from co-location with its traction provider, GB Railfreight (GBRf) and Network Rail within the Scottish Network Rail control centre.

“This change would increase our overall headcount in Scotland but also mean three positions based in Inverness and one position in Glasgow would be made redundant,” said Caledonian Sleeper managing director, Kathryn Darbandi.

“We are committed to ensuring we support the affected members of our team.”



Caledonian Sleeper train crosses some of the most scenic places in the Highlands.

In echoes of the wider situation which has already paralysed thousands of rail services up and down the country in the bitter dispute between unions, the UK government and train operators,

TSSA is also firmly putting Transport Scotland in its crosshairs.

“What I would ask Transport Scotland to do first is the Caledonian Sleeper should be in public ownership,” added Mr Kelly.

“I am calling on the Transport Scotland Minister to intervene to protect these jobs and ensure Serco lives up to their commitments with the Highlands.

No merit in industrial action

“Since 2015, the Scottish government has overseen private operators move more than 200 jobs out of the Highlands into Glasgow – that needs to stop.

“TSSA will continue to lobby MSPs, MPs, as well as the Minister for Transport and stop the jobs being moved (although) I don’t think there is merit in going to industrial action at this time.

Transport Scotland nonetheless batted back TSSA’s comments, insisting Caledonian Sleeper’s moves were “an operational decision” and that the company would be creating “additional roles” in Glasgow where it could co-locate in a control centre with industry partners.

This would, maintains the Ministry, “improve train management function,” as well as the service and communication offered to passengers.



Transport Minister Jenny Gilruth.

TSSA general secretary Manuel Cortes noted Serco was “unnecessarily” making Inverness workers unemployed and could choose to keep the service delivery manager jobs in Inverness or to base the new roles in the Highland capital.

“But let’s be real, the Scottish government must take a full share of the blame here,” he said.

“Transport Minister Jenny Gilruth must step in right now to save these jobs from Serco’s latter-day Highland Clearances.”