

'Profit-driven' sleeper change

Transport: MSP critical as operators of iconic train service stop strangers sharing cabins

BY ALISTAIR MUNRO

Plans to stop budget travellers sharing cabins with strangers on the Caledonian Sleeper have been condemned by a north MSP.

Highlands and Islands Green MP John Finnie has raised concerns with the Scottish Government.

However, the politician welcomed the decision by Serco, the operators of the Caledonian Sleeper Service, to put its decision on hold, although it is planned for

"They now want to run an exclusive hotel on wheels"

later in the year. The operator announced it planned to make all passengers travelling alone pay for their own cabins, a system already in place for people sitting in first class.

It would have meant fares rising by two-thirds, from a minimum of £85 to at least £140.

Serco had intended making the changes this month, but has now postponed its plans until the first of a new fleet of trains start running in October.

Mr Finnie said: "Serco have been high-handed in the manner in which they

ANGRY: John Finnie MSP is concerned after Serco announced plans to make sleeper passengers travelling alone pay for their own cabins



have sought to alter their fare structure in respect of budget travellers, not travelling together, sharing a cabin.

"Their profit-driven proposal ran contrary to previous undertakings and Serco were taken to task by campaigners for that

and right to reverse their decision.

"Sadly it seems that, contrary to their position at the time of the franchise agreement that the new sleeper would be 'an iconic Scottish journey available to all from backpackers to business travellers', Serco say

they now want to run an exclusive hotel on wheels."

He added: "I've raised a series of questions regarding the layout of the new carriages, and who if anyone was consulted about changed arrangements."

Serco also operates NorthLink Ferries serv-

ing Orkney and Shetland, where up to four people routinely share cabins.

Mr Finnie said: "I'm keen to understand the implications of their puritanical stance for those vital links which I hope they soon no longer run."

A spokesman for Serco

said: "We are modernising the Caledonian Sleeper to ensure it meets the demands and needs of travellers.

"This not only involves the introduction of new trains, due later this year on a phased basis, but also a range of new product

types including rooms with en-suites and double beds.

"As part of this process, and as agreed with Transport Scotland, 'Share with a Stranger' is being withdrawn in October with the introduction of the new trains, as it does not meet the needs of the modern traveller."