

## EARLY MORNING TRAINS TO BIRMINGHAM AIRPORT

by Roger Davis

For many years, Campaign for Rail has campaigned for overnight train services to serve Birmingham International station both for passengers catching early morning flights from Birmingham Airport and for airport employees on early shifts. Providing decent public transport links to the airport at all times when it is open is essential given that the airport charges extortionate fees for car parking, even extracting an arm and a leg for only dropping off or picking up air travellers.

Of the seven English airports with over ten million annual passengers, the largest six are all directly served by rail. The non-rail served airport is Bristol but this is served by four dedicated bus routes using electric buses with dedicated luggage racks. These services, A1 from Bristol, A2 from Portishead and Clevedon, A3 from Weston-super-Mare and A4 from Bath, operate 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, thus enabling people to get to the airport in time for early flights.

Birmingham Airport is also served by overnight bus services. The airport can be accessed throughout the night by direct route X1 from Coventry or Birmingham or circuitous route 97A from Birmingham. The first buses on services 17A and X12 also reach Birmingham Airport before 0500, also via a circuitous route from Birmingham. However, all of these services are operated with normal service buses with restricted luggage space, making them unsuitable for travellers with large suitcases. National Express also operate long distance coach services to all airports but these are a lot slower than train services.

Therefore, how do overnight rail services to the six largest airports compare?

|                                                                                 | Overnight Services or First Arrivals<br>(Origin Station) |                                                                                                                                           |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Birmingham<br>(Birmingham International)                                        | M-F<br>Sat<br>Sun                                        | 0541 (WVH), 0542 (COV), 0606 (NNP)<br>0534 (COV), 0546 (BHM), 0559 (WVH), 0601 (NNP)<br>0835 (WVH), 0852 (COV), 0921 (RUG), 0930 (SHR)    |
| Manchester<br>(Manchester Airport)                                              | M-F<br>Sat<br>Sun                                        | All night (MAN), 0359 (YRK), 0512 (CTR), 0516 (SHF)<br>All night (MAN), 0357 (YRK), 0512 (CTR), 0529 (SHF)<br>0757 (MAN)                  |
| London Gatwick<br>(Gatwick Airport)                                             | M-F<br>Sat<br>Sun                                        | All night (BDM and TBD), 0440 (BTN), 0447 (RDG)<br>All night (BDM and TBD), 0350 (RDG), 0440 (BTN)<br>All night (VIC and TBD), 0502 (BTN) |
| London Heathrow<br>(Heathrow Terminal 5)                                        | M-F<br>Sat<br>Sun                                        | 0458 (PAD)<br>0458 (PAD)<br>0518 (PAD)                                                                                                    |
| London Stansted<br>(Stansted Airport)<br>** Trial all-night service in progress | M-F<br>Sat**<br>Sun                                      | 0513 (CBG), 0539 (LST)<br>0427 (LST), 0514 (CBG)<br>0457 (LST)                                                                            |
| London Luton<br>(Luton Airport Parkway)                                         | M-F<br>Sat<br>Sun                                        | All night (BDM and TBD)<br>All night (BDM and TBD)<br>0625 (BDM), 0719 (STP)                                                              |

BDM – Bedford  
BHM – Birmingham New Street  
BTN – Brighton, CBG – Cambridge  
COV – Coventry, CTR – Chester  
LST – London Liverpool Street  
MAN – Manchester Piccadilly  
NNP – Northampton  
PAD – London Paddington  
RDG – Reading, RUG – Rugby  
SHF – Sheffield, SHR – Shrewsbury  
STP – London St Pancras International  
TBD – Three Bridges, VIC – Victoria  
WVH – Wolverhampton, YRK – York

The above table shows that Birmingham fares badly when compared to the other five airports with the first trains arriving at Birmingham International later than at the other five airport stations on all seven days of the week. Gatwick, Manchester and Luton have all-night services on Monday to Saturday mornings with Gatwick also having all-night services on Sunday mornings. Stansted is trialling an all-night service to/from Tottenham Hale on Saturday mornings until 26 September 2026. If these airports can be served by rail throughout the night, then why can't Birmingham?

The "Air-Rail" link between station and airport runs from 0330 to 0030 every day



(Roger Davis)

A reasonable argument for not providing all-night services is that the first flight of the day does not take off until around 0530 (0525 on Friday, 0535 on Thursday, 0545 on other days). However, with air passengers advised to check in two hours before departure time, trains would need to arrive at Birmingham International from about 0320 onwards to enable passengers arriving by rail to connect with the first

"Air-Rail" service at 0330 in order to catch the first flight. Surely, an hourly service between Birmingham New Street and Coventry could be provided from about 0300 onwards. At present, rail passengers have two options; either travel the previous day and book a room in one of Birmingham Airport's many hotels or catch the last train of the day to Birmingham International and spend the night at the airport. In the latter case, the final train arrivals from Birmingham New Street are at 0054 (M-F), 2341 (Sat) or 2333 (Sun), and from London Euston at 0120 (M-F), 2345 (Sat) or 0111 (Sun).

To demonstrate how inconvenient the train service is for air passengers catching an early flight, a table was collated showing every flight from Birmingham Airport for the week from Sunday 10 May to Saturday 16 May 2026. It showed that, from the Monday to the Saturday, a total of 832 flights

By 0600 in the week surveyed, Jet2 flights took off to Fuerteventura, Girona, Heraklion, Kos, Malta, Olbia, Reus, Salonica, Venice, Verona and Zante



(Ian Genge)

were scheduled, of which 651 were international flights. Assuming that it would take about 15 minutes between alighting the first train of the day and getting to the check-in desk, and that the passenger was expected to arrive at the check-in desk two hours before departure, it was found that passengers would not have been able to catch the 183 earliest flights that week (22%). On Sundays, the situation was even worse as, unlike the rail industry, the air industry does not operate a Sunday service. On the Sunday, 140 flights were scheduled to depart from Birmingham Airport (110 international) and passengers arriving by rail would have failed to catch the first 51 of these departures (36.43%).

Given these figures, Campaign for Rail believes that it is imperative that earlier train services are operated to Birmingham International, especially on Sundays where the arrival time of the first service is unacceptably late.