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**VIRGIN TRAINS INTRODUCES JAM CARD FOR CUSTOMERS WITH COMMUNICATION BARRIERS**

* **Virgin Trains is now “JAM Card Friendly” for anyone in possession of the distinctive card**
* **JAM stands for “Just A Minute” used by those with a communication barrier including autism**
* **Ground breaking initiative pioneered in Northern Ireland with thousands of subscribers**

Virgin Trains has become the first travel company outside of Northern Ireland to introduce a ground-breaking initiative for people with communication barriers.

Standing for “Just a Minute”, anyone with a JAM card can present it to Virgin Trains staff to let them know they have a communication barrier which could be a result of number of factors including autism or a learning difficulty.

The JAM card scheme has been introduced across Virgin Trains routes from this month (MARCH) and follows Virgin Trains’ recent industry-first initiative with Amazon which allows customers with disabilities to book JourneyCare through Alexa. In the style of a credit card, it will help customers discreetly make staff aware of their condition.

Frontline teams at Virgin Trains have been trained to recognise the distinctive card and that customers presenting it may have difficulty with communication and require additional time.

During training staff have gained valuable knowledge about different types of disabilities and have learned how to engage with a customer with a communication barrier.

Customers apply for a JAM card by filling in a form on their website or by downloading the app and the card is available in either a physical copy or digital format.

JAM cards have been extremely successful in Northern Ireland with over 20,000 cards in circulation and 2,000 app users.

The scheme was brought to the attention of Virgin Trains when customer Abby Cappleman attended one of the regular inclusion panels held by the train operator.

Abby, who has Autism spectrum disorder, said: “The JAM card lets other people - like checkout staff in a supermarket or a bus driver - discretely know that I have an invisible disability.

“Due to my condition, I am chronically dis-organised so I am that person who doesn't have their money or bus pass ready. I end up faffing to find it and then it holds others up.

“I find this card helps others be more understanding. I am really happy that my suggestion is being adopted to help passengers across the country.”

Maeve Monaghan, CEO for the NOW group who are behind the JAM card, scheme said: “We are delighted that Virgin Trains have partnered with NOW Group to become JAM Card Friendly and recognise the value of investing in training their staff to provide great customer service for people with communication difficulties such as learning difficulties, autism and dementia.  This collaboration and investment is the first of its kind in the UK and will see Virgin Trains help raise awareness of JAM card in Britain and encourage the use of our card throughout the Virgin Trains network.”

Minister for Disabled People, Sarah Newton, said:“Travelling by train can be a stressful experience for people with communication barriers, but initiatives like the JAM card go to show that making small changes can have a massive impact.

“With one in five people in the UK living with a disability or long-term health condition, it’s more important than ever to ensure that frontline staff receive the right training.

“I want to encourage other British train providers to follow Virgin Trains’ lead and ensure they are providing excellent customer service for all their passengers.”

Inclusion lead for Virgin Trains, Vic Whitehouse, said: “We are pleased to introduce the JAM card across our network and proud to be ‘JAM Card Friendly’. All our customers are equally important, and we want to make sure everyone travelling with us has a great experience. Similarly, the feedback from our people has been extremely positive.”

**NOTES FOR EDITORS**

The NOW group are a social enterprise based in Northern Ireland supporting people with learning difficulties and autism into jobs with a future.

For more information about the JAM Card visit: https://jamcard.org/

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**About Virgin Trains**

Stagecoach and Virgin are working in partnership to operate the West Coast inter-city route under the Virgin Trains brand, revolutionising travel on one of the UK’s key rail arteries.

The network connects some of the nation’s most iconic destinations including Glasgow, Liverpool, Birmingham, Manchester and London.

Virgin Trains is committed to delivering a high speed, high frequency service, offering shorter journey times, more comfortable travel and excellent customer service. Customers consistently rate Virgin Trains ahead of other long-distance rail franchise operators in the National Rail Passenger Survey (NRPS) commissioned by industry watchdog, Transport Focus.

Virgin Trains has a proud record of challenging the status quo - from introducing tilting Pendolino trains, to a pioneering automated delay repay scheme, introducing the industry-leading onboard entertainment streaming service, BEAM, and becoming the first franchised rail operator to offer m-Tickets for all ticket types.

Virgin Trains operated the East Coast route between March 1, 2015 and June 24, 2018. In that time, we invested £75m to create a more personalised travel experience, including over £40m in the existing fleet. Customers have benefitted from 48 additional services between Edinburgh and London every week, and an extra 22 Saturday services between Leeds and London – a total of 1.74 million additional seats since May 2015.

Working together, the partnership railway of the public and private sectors has published a long-term plan, called *In Partnership for Britain’s Prosperity,* to change and improve Britain’s railway. The plan will secure almost £85bn of additional economic benefits to the country whilst enabling further investment and improvement, and contains four commitments which will see rail companies: strengthen our economic contribution to the country; improve customers’ satisfaction; boost the communities we serve; and, create more and better jobs in rail. For more information go to [Britain Runs on Rail](http://www.britainrunsonrail.co.uk/?gclid=CjwKCAiAr_TQBRB5EiwAC_QCq9OA-y_Al1Voo4ZvYjMvSBs86kuvjZLD8MfFvnOUU9UeVZ1T5CObLRoCasIQAvD_BwE).

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