**Monday 21 May**

**Virgin’s Pendolino train named Blackpool Belle to celebrate launch of electric services**

* *Pendolino named to celebrate launch of Virgin Trains’ 36 additional services to and from Blackpool*
* *Famous ‘Blackpool Belle’ name pays homage to resort’s first illuminated tram and 1930s Lancashire excursion service*
* *Historical occasion as Virgin Trains serve Blackpool with electric Pendolino trains for first time*

Virgin Trains has named one of its Pendolinos Blackpool Belle to celebrate the launch of its first electric services to and from the resort today (Monday 21 May).

The 390013 Pendolino carries the name made famous by the resort’s first illuminated tram and an excursion train which took people across Lancashire for a Saturday night of dancing through the 1930s to 1960s.

Blackpool Belle, which has also been remembered in a song by Lancashire folk band The Houghton Weavers, was suggested by readers of the Blackpool Gazette.

The illuminated tram was based on a Mississippi paddle steamer and was in operation from 1959 until the end of the 1978 season.

The launch of electric Pendolinos on the Blackpool route follows Virgin Trains’ reintroduction of direct services to London in 2014.

The new services will strengthen connections to and from the capital six days a week, providing eight direct services each weekday, five services on a Saturday and generating an additional 16,900 seats a week\*. A direct service from Birmingham on Saturdays will offer the West Midlands a direct service to Blackpool for the first time in 15 years – helping to spread opportunity along the West Coast Main Line

Pendolino 390013 was unveiled by Virgin Trains driver and avid rail supporter Martin Gurr, General Manager of Heritage Operations at Blackpool Transport. When he’s not driving Virgin services, Martin heads up a team of 60 volunteers that operate and crew Blackpool’s heritage trams that run along the Promenade.

The introduction of electric services follows the completion of Network Rail’s work to electrify the line between Blackpool and Preston and lengthen platforms at Blackpool North station to allow the longer Pendolino trains to travel to and from the seaside resort.

Michael Stewart, General Manager at Virgin Trains on the west coast, said: “At Virgin Trains we’re really pleased to welcome Blackpool Belle to our Pendolino fleet, as we introduce our iconic Pendolino trains to the Blackpool route for the first time. We have been proud to serve Blackpool for the last three years and are excited to reach this milestone, as we strengthen our links to and from the resort with our Pendolino trains, which have helped to transform our west coast route. The name ‘Blackpool Belle’ is pertinent to Blackpool - it provided opportunities and firsts for the resort – which is what we hope our investment to deliver additional services will bring to local communities along the route. We’re sure our new services will help bring more visitors to the seaside resort to explore what it has to offer - just as the Blackpool Belle did over 50 years ago – and we look forward to welcoming more people on-board.”

Cllr Gillian Campbell, Deputy Leader of Blackpool Council, said: “This is a truly historic day for the resort in that it represents the culmination of the biggest investment in our rail services for a century. The additional direct services to London, Birmingham and other towns and cities give visitors the perfect opportunity to jump on a train and sample for themselves the joys of our beaches, attractions and world-class events.”

Bryan Lindop, Head of Heritage and Chair of Blackpool Heritage Trust, said: “This is a fabulous example of teamwork and joined up thinking which supports a world class transport experience. With the completion of our tramway extension to North Station in the not too distant future and these wonderful new Pendolino electric train services, Blackpool is firmly back on the map and very easily accessible. ‘Blackpool Belle’ is a wonderful reminder that as well as cutting edge technology, Blackpool is steeped in rich history and with engaging heritage experiences for all ages.”

Paul Maynard, MP for Blackpool North and Cleveleys, said: “This is an exciting day for passengers in Blackpool, with the first direct Pendolino services to London Euston. I am delighted that Virgin Trains has shown confidence in the Fylde coast and is providing such a huge number of additional seats every week. Even better to see is that a train will be carrying Blackpool’s name up and down the West Coast Main Line.”

ENDS

**Notes to Editors**

\*16,400 available between the capital and Blackpool; and 500 from Birmingham.

Virgin Trains reintroduced direct services between Blackpool North and London Euston in December 2014 – with one northbound and one southbound service on weekdays. The 05.30 Blackpool North – London Euston and 16.33 London Euston – Blackpool North will continue to serve Kirkham & Wesham and Poulton-le-Fylde.

**Additional services**

From Monday 21 May 2018, Virgin Trains will introduce the following additional services:

Weekdays

* 06.46 London Euston – Blackpool North\*
* 08.53 London Euston – Blackpool North\*
* 10.36 London Euston – Blackpool North\*
* 10.53 Blackpool North – London Euston\*\*
* 13.02 Blackpool North – London Euston\*\*
* 15.00 Blackpool North – London Euston\*\*

 Saturdays

* 07.21 Birmingham New Street – Blackpool North calling at Wolverhampton, Stafford, Crewe, Warrington Bank Quay, Wigan North Western and Preston
* 08.53 London Euston – Blackpool North\*
* 10.36 London Euston – Blackpool North\*
* 10.53 Blackpool North – London Euston\*\*
* 13.02 Blackpool North – London Euston\*\*
* 15.54 Blackpool North – London Euston\*\*

\*calling at Rugby, Warrington Bank Quay, Wigan North Western and Preston

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**About Blackpool Transport**

Blackpool Transport is the successor of Blackpool Corporation Transport. It has been operating public transport for over 130 years. It operates a network of high frequency buses and trams across the Fylde Coast with 140 buses, 18 modern light rail trams and a much-loved fleet of Heritage trams. Blackpool Transport currently operates 14 bus routes, linking Fleetwood, Cleveleys, Thornton, Bispham, Poulton, Blackpool, St Anne’s and Lytham. The tramway extends 11 miles along the coast from Starr Gate to Fleetwood. A new tramway extension is currently under construction to link the tramway to Blackpool North station for the first time since 1963.

**About Virgin Trains**

Stagecoach and Virgin are working in partnership to operate the West Coast and East Coast inter-city routes under the Virgin Trains brand. Together, they are on track to revolutionise rail travel across the UK.

The combined network connects some of the nation’s most iconic destinations including Glasgow, Liverpool, Birmingham, Manchester, Edinburgh, Newcastle, Leeds, York 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 the top long-distance rail franchise operators in the National Rail Passenger Survey (NRPS) commissioned by industry watchdog, Transport Focus.

Virgin Trains is operating the East Coast route until June 24, 2018 after taking over the business in March 2015. In that time, we have invested £75m to create a more personalised travel experience, including over £40m in our existing fleet. Customers can now benefit 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.

The West Coast route has a proud record of challenging the status quo - from introducing tilting Pendolino trains, to a pioneering automated delay repay scheme and becoming the first franchised rail operator to offer m-Tickets for all ticket types.

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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