\*\*\* Embargoed until 00.01, 26 February 2018 \*\*\*

**Virgin Trains customers can now book travel assistance with Amazon Alexa**

* *Research shows new service saves time and is easier to use for customers with disabilities*
* *New service comes after Virgin Trains achieved a global first by selling tickets on Alexa*

Customers who require travel assistance on Virgin Trains are set to benefit from a new feature on the Virgin Trains skill for Alexa, which allows them to request it using basic voice commands.

After achieving a global first last year by selling train tickets through Alexa, the new development in collaboration with Amazon means that Virgin Trains customers can now book JourneyCare via Alexa-enabled devices, including the Amazon Echo.

Following trials, the new JourneyCare feature is now live for anyone requiring assisted travel (for example those with visual impairment or mobility issues).

Normally customers who need to book JourneyCare complete a form online or call the helpline after booking.

The new technology means customers can book assisted travel immediately after purchasing tickets using simple voice commands.

Chris Tomson took part in the initial testing of the Alexa skill. He has Osteogenesis imperfecta (brittle bones) and uses a wheelchair on a daily basis.

He said: “Using JourneyCare on the Virgin Trains skill for Alexa is a fantastic asset. It does a great job of combining the two processes, making the whole experience much easier. It also comes in handy if I have any pain in my arms and I am unable to use a computer, phone or tablet to book my journey.”

The traditional system meant customers had to input the same information again to request JourneyCare after booking a ticket, but the Virgin Trains skill for Alexa will remember the details, so they do not have to repeat the process.

On average the new service takes just two minutes, halving the time needed to complete an online form or call the helpline.

Stephen Brookes, Rail Sector Champion for the Minister for Disabled People, said: “I welcome the new initiative by Virgin Trains, which will give disabled people a better booking experience.

“By utilising Alexa in this way, Virgin Trains recognises the importance of disabled people as being a key part of rail industry business, because those who are comfortable with and can access technology will find the system quick and efficient.

“But it doesn't mean that those who cannot access or use new technology will miss out, as the staff involved in phone booking will be more freed up to help those who need more help or time in booking their journey.”

Toby Radcliffe, Customer Proposition Director, at Virgin Trains, said: “We are always looking at ways to improve the travelling experience for customers with disabilities and we are really pleased to be introducing this new update to our existing Alexa skill for customers needing to book extra assistance on their journey with us. We want to ensure train travel is accessible to as many people as possible and this is a further innovation in that direction.”

**NOTES FOR EDITORS**

In May last year, Virgin Trains became the first travel company in the world to sell train tickets through Alexa.

The functionality enables users to book tickets with Alexa using Amazon Pay in one simple voice-based transaction.

This launch followed the unveiling of the Virgin Trains skill for Alexa in November last year, which allows customers to enquire about rail information by asking Alexa.

More info can be found here: <https://www.virgintrains.co.uk/about/media-room/#/pressreleases/virgin-trains-becomes-the-first-travel-company-in-the-world-to-sell-tickets-through-amazon-alexa-2496162>

Images of Alexa enabled devices can be found here:

<http://phx.corporate-ir.net/phoenix.zhtml?c=251199&p=irol-imagesVideos>

**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).

Visit the Virgin Trains Media Room - [virgintrains.co.uk/about/media-room](http://mediaroom.virgintrains.co.uk/) - for the latest news, images and videos. Subscribe [here](http://www.mynewsdesk.com/follow/47939) for regular news from Virgin Trains.

Press Office: 0845 000 3333.