**Virgin Train invites independent Preston companies to Pop Up**

**at Preston Station**

* *Local entrepreneurs selected to take part in Virgin Trains’ £100,000 independent business investment scheme*
* *The Virgin Trains’ POP-UP initiative aims to support local businesses as part of a wider business initiative*
* *Virgin Trains is hosting POP-UPs on Small Business Saturday, a nationwide campaign supported by the Federation of Small Businesses which encourages people to show their support for independent businesses*

Virgin Trains is delighted to announce that local Preston entrepreneurs have been invited to take part in its nationwide POP-UP scheme on 6th December at Preston Station. The scheme, which will see Virgin Trains invest over £100,000 worth of support into the independent businesses taking part, is offering 90 different local stores the chance to set up shop at 17 different stations along its West Coast line.

Taking to the platform from 9am to 3pm to sell its unique array of products will be All About Cheese, Heritage Kitchen Preserves, Crossmoor Honey Farm and Made In Preston who will join 90 different companies popping up between London Euston and Carlisle, as part of Virgin Trains’ largest POP-UP event to date.

Launched in 2008, Heritage Kitchen Preserves is a Preston-based company managed by Derek Jones, dedicated to creating speciality chutneys, relishes and marmalades. The local Made In Lancashire scheme brought Derek and Virgin Trains together, now he has been able to expand his customer base outside of Lancashire.

The Virgin Trains’ POP-UP initiative aims to support local businesses by offering them the chance to gain extra exposure, increased interest and larger footfall and is part of a wider business initiative. As part of this, Virgin Trains has decided to host a POP-UP event on Small Business Saturday, a nationwide campaign supported by the Federation of Small Businesses (FSB), which encourages people to show their support for independent businesses by choosing to visit local stores year round.

As part of their pledge to back local businesses Virgin Trains are investing £100,000 in the POP-UP scheme. Each trader invited to take part in this weekend’s POP-UP event will also be offered access to the Virgin Trains Talent Academy, for networking groups and management skills building classes plus they are invited on board Virgin Trains carriages to showcase their wares along the network.

On the same day, Virgin Trains will be supporting an on-board First Class networking event between Preston and Carlisle for 40 members of the FSB. This is the first FSB networking event of its kind on a train, and the service is being offered to entrepreneurs by Virgin Trains complete with afternoon tea provided by The Sharrow Bay hotel.

Derek Jones, founder of Preston-based business Heritage Kitchen Preserves, commented: “We’re absolutely thrilled to be working with Virgin Trains and can’t wait to pop up at Preston this Saturday. The support we’ve been offered by the Virgin Trains team has had an immeasurable positive impact on the growth of our business.”

Nicola Griffiths, POP-UP Business Manager at Virgin Trains, commented: “We’re delighted to be inviting Heritage Kitchen Preserves to not only take part in our latest POP-UP scheme, but also reap the benefits of the £100,000 worth of investment we’ll be using to offer ongoing support for local businesses across the nation. We’re committed to supporting the local business communities in all the areas we operate in and being able to run these events on Small Business Saturday is a great way for us to encourage consumers to support their local stores.”

Gary Lovett, FSB spokesperson, added: “The FSB is very pleased to cement its growing relationship with Virgin Trains by supporting their endeavours around Small Business Saturday. The POP-UPs that are being held across the West Coast Mainline are a tremendous opportunity for small retailers and we have been delighted to support Virgin in developing these opportunities for small businesses.

“Networking ‘on the move’ aboard a First Class train is a fantastic opportunity and our members have grasped the opportunity with both hands. The clear synergy between both parties in supporting small businesses to develop and grow means this project is only the first step in what we hope will be a long and successful relationship.”

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Notes to Editors

About Virgin Trains

Virgin Trains is the brand name of Virgin Rail Group (VRG), which is owned by Virgin Group (51%) and Stagecoach (49%). Virgin Trains has operated the West Coast passenger train franchise since 1997, serving key UK cities including London, Birmingham, Manchester, Liverpool and Glasgow. In June 2014 the Department for Transport (DfT) awarded VRG a new franchise until at least April 2017.

Virgin Trains is committed to delivering a high speed, high frequency service, offering shorter journey times, more comfortable travel and excellent customer service. We provide the most frequent long-distance rail service in Europe (London - Manchester and London – Birmingham, both every 20 minutes).

Since 1997, Virgin Trains has introduced over 70 new trains at a cost of £1.5 billion. The service carries more than 32 million passengers a year and Virgin Trains employs approximately 3,290 staff.

Virgin Trains customers consistently rate the company as one of the top long-distance rail franchise operators in the National Passenger Survey (NPS) commissioned by industry watchdog “Passenger Focus”.

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