**Monday 19 March 2018**

**Virgin Azuma arrives in Edinburgh in preparation for driver training programme**

* *Passengers invited to view the state-of-the-art train stationed in Edinburgh all week*
* *Driver training follows biggest recruitment drive on east coast since 1980s*

Passengers in Edinburgh will be given a chance to view the state-of-the-art Virgin Azuma train when it arrives in the Scottish capital today to prepare for a driver training programme.

The Hitachi-built intercity train, whose name means “east” in Japanese, will transform travel on the east coast route following its roll out from December this year, with the first services to Edinburgh due to start in March 2019.

The Azuma train will be stationed in Edinburgh Waverley between 12.37 and 13.17 every day of the week aside from Wednesday, giving customers plenty of opportunities to view its sleek exterior. Passengers will not be able to view the train interiors however.

Testing of the Azuma fleet is already well underway, following successful test trips to Dunbar and Inverness last year which tested both the electric and bi-mode models on Scottish routes.

The Azuma visit to Scotland this week will enable driver trainers to be put through their paces on the newly-built trains, ensuring they have the knowledge to train the rest of Virgin Trains’ drivers on the east coast route.

Aileen Jordan, Azuma Director at Virgin Trains, said: “This is another key milestone in our journey to bring the Azuma fleet into service and transform travel on the east coast route. This is an important step ahead of our driver training programme getting underway in summer and we’re delighted to see the Azuma stationed in Edinburgh Waverley for such a long period, allowing passengers the chance to get their first peek of the train.”

Azuma is part of a £5.7bn investment by the Department for Transport in new inter-city trains. Hitachi is building the Azuma fleet at its Newton Aycliffe factory in the North East of England, which is home to 1000 train builders, including 50 apprentices.

The firm has invested £18 million to modernise depots at Aberdeen, Inverness and Edinburgh to ensure they are able to service the new fleet, securing long-term engineering jobs at all three locations.

The driver training programme comes nearly two years after Virgin Trains launched the biggest driver recruitment campaign on the east coast route since the 1980s.

As well as allowing regular journeys between Edinburgh and London to be accelerated to just four hours, the Azuma is far greener than the existing fleet of east coast trains and will contribute to greater carbon savings on cross-border travel. The bi-mode trains are capable of running under electric power as far as Edinburgh but can switch to diesel power when travelling further north to Aberdeen and Inverness.

Ends

**About Virgin Trains**

Stagecoach and Virgin are working in partnership to operate the East Coast and West 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 as one of the top long-distance rail franchise operators in the National Rail Passenger Survey (NRPS) commissioned by industry watchdog, Transport Focus.

On the East Coast route, £140m is being invested to create a more personalised travel experience. We have already invested over £40m in our existing fleet, including £21m refurbishing interiors and £16m towards improving the engines of our trains. 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. 2018 will see the introduction of completely new Azuma trains being built in the UK by Hitachi.

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.

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