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**Virgin Trains teams trained in conflict resolution techniques to improve customer experience on match days**

*• New Event Hosts will assist tens of thousands of customers using the Virgin Trains network*

*• Initiative is aimed at improving the experience for all customers on busy match days*

*• Dedicated carriages for supporters have also been introduced*

In the first initiative of its kind, Virgin Trains is deploying staff with specialist training - including conflict resolution techniques - to improve the travelling experience of football supporters and all customers across its network on busy match days.

New Event Hosts are assisting the tens of thousands of supporters and other customers travelling on the West Coast network up and down the country on weekends through the football season. They will concentrate on busy periods before kick-off but also have a focus on supporters travelling home after the match.

The hosts will work with frontline colleagues to engage with football supporters and provide additional assistance to all Virgin Trains customers passing through stations or travelling on board during football weekends.

Event hosts are specially marked out in pink, high visibility vests – a colour which is known to have a calming effect on crowds.

All hosts have received further training in customer service and conflict resolution by leading expert in the field, Louisa Weinstein, of the Conflict Resolution Centre and the author of The 7 Principles of Conflict Resolution.

She said: “Conflict arises where we think we might not get what we want or need. It is understandable therefore that it arises on busy match days where tensions and spirits are high.

“Key to the resolution of any conflict is a high standard of communication and negotiation skills. We concentrated on these aspects with Virgin Trains who adopted a creative approach to this issue where the focus was on understanding the customer as opposed to judging their behaviours.

“The staff we trained were amazing. They welcomed the opportunity to learn quite complex conflict resolution skills to empower them in their role.”

These approaches include maintaining eye contact, coaching in non-verbal listening (not interrupting and being fully engaged) and how to avoid being judgemental in situations that could escalate. They have also been advised on how best to demonstrate empathy during potentially challenging interactions.

Once trained, the hosts are then assessed while working in their role at the stations.

The aim is to make sure all customers to enjoy their journey, but if a situation gets out of hand or behaviour becomes aggressive, the Event Hosts will take a zero tolerance policy and alert the British Transport Police immediately.

Virgin Trains is the first train operator to adopt such a comprehensive approach this season after listening to feedback from supporters and customers, and has since been working with the British Transport Police, footballing bodies and clubs to tailor the initiative.

New measures introduced include the creation of dedicated carriages for supporters, delivering bespoke catering packages and keeping carriages and stations free from clutter.

The largest trains are also prioritised for these matches to meet demand which is a key part of process and improving the environment.

In addition any customer booking online who is not travelling to a match will be alerted via a pop-up message that these services are likely to busy because of the football.

Gary Steele, Event Coordination Manager at Virgin Trains, said: “Stations and services can get extremely busy with many football supporters using our network to get to and from fixtures.

“Providing a better environment and engaging with them and other customers on busy days will help remove any points of potential conflict, and offer everyone a better customer experience and a smooth, safe and enjoyable journey.”

Chief Superintendent Allan Gregory from British Transport Police said: “This is an important step forward in helping to improve the experience of football supporters and other rail passengers alike. We know that on match days trains can quickly become busy places and we want everyone travelling to have a safe journey.

“These new Event Hosts are an interesting and creative new idea which we hope will help all passengers to have a better journey and hopefully a good day out too.”

ENDS

**NOTES TO EDITORS:**

Supporters travelling for football fixtures affects 42 Weekends of the year

There are multiple kick offs times that have an impact on services from Friday evening until Monday night

Supporters rom 32 of the top 40 clubs in the Premiership and Championship regularly use the VT network to get to and from matches.

An average of four different sets of supporters supporting teams from the Premier League travel with VT every Saturday during the season.

Last season we provided 39 additional relief services and, together with the prioritisation of our 11-carriage fleet, creating over 36,000 additional seats for football supporters.

This season Virgin Trains is likely to surpass previous numbers having already provided 21 additional relief services and just under 19,000 additional seats.

When Liverpool play at home, around 1,000 home supporters usually travel to Anfield from the south of England.

When Manchester United play at Old Trafford, it is estimated over 1,500 United supporters will travel to the ground from the south of England.

**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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