**Virgin Trains wins highest ever market share against airlines between Scotland and London**

* ***New peak follows 18% growth between Edinburgh/Glasgow and London***
* ***Comes as report sheds new light on environmental benefits of switching from plane to train***
* ***CO2 savings on Glasgow-London over last decade equivalent to taking 140,000 cars off the road for a year***

Virgin Trains has hailed an “historic shift” in travel patterns as more Scotland-London passengers choose train over plane than at any time in more than 20 years.

New figures reveal an 18% year-on-year growth in Virgin Trains passengers travelling between Glasgow/Edinburgh and London in June. This left Virgin with a 33% share of the air/rail market on the UK’s busiest domestic air routes, beating a previous record set in 2014.

The shift coincides with a new report which explores the environmental benefits of train over plane travel.

The research, undertaken by sustainable transport charity Transform Scotland, found that:

* Overall air and rail travel between Scotland’s Central Belt and London is increasing – but carbon emissions are falling as more people choose train
* Virgin Trains’ growth on the west coast route between Glasgow and London over the last decade has saved enough CO2 (332,208tCO2) to take 145,000 cars off the road for a year
* Further passenger growth on the east coast route between Edinburgh and London can be accommodated whilst still cutting carbon, thanks to ambitions plans by Virgin Trains to win a 50% market share against airlines

The full report, A Green Journey to Growth, can be found here: <http://transformscotland.org.uk/>.

Virgin Trains has enjoyed strong growth on its two routes connecting Scotland to London thanks to a string of customer service improvements introduced over the last two years.

On the east coast route, Virgin has completely refurbished its train interiors and introduced 25 additional direct London-Edinburgh services per week, while the west coast route has seen punctuality improve to its best level in more than a decade.

Both business have lowered fares to compete more aggressively with airlines and introduced BEAM, the industry-leading onboard entertainment app that allows customers to stream hundreds of hours of leading films and TV to their devices. Virgin Trains was named Public Transport Operator of the Year in Transport Times’ Scottish Transport Awards earlier this year.

In June, a total of 180,000 customers travelled on Virgin Trains services between Edinburgh and London and the east coast and Glasgow and London on the west coast, up from 152,000 a year earlier.

This represented 33% of the total air/rail market (not including Sleeper services), up from 32% in June 2014, according to figures for direct air journeys provided by the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA).

On the east coast route between Edinburgh and London, Virgin Trains’ market share against airlines was as high as 37%, up two percentage points on its previous peak in 2014. On west coast, Virgin Trains’ market share between Glasgow and London was 27%.

Virgin has seen similarly strong growth in July and August and expects to retain its record-breaking market share, though comparable CAA figures for airlines are not yet available for these months.

The increase in market share for rail journeys comes against an increase in the overall travel market, with air and rail travel between Glasgow/Edinburgh and London increasing from 6 million in 2014 to 6.7 million last year.

Virgin Trains has set out bold ambitions to win 50% of the air/rail market share between Edinburgh and London by 2023 after the introduction of its Azuma fleet, which will allow regular journeys to be reduced to just four hours.

The shift has been welcomed by Scotland’s Transport Minister, Humza Yousaf MSP, who said: “The Scottish Government has set some of the toughest climate change targets for the people of Scotland.  I am therefore delighted to hear of the increase in the use of our railway, as it is a fundamental part of achieving our greener transport aspirations. I welcome the publication of this Transform Scotland report which showcases the environmental benefits of rail, and underlines the importance of having high speed rail connectivity between Scotland and London.”

David Horne, Virgin Trains Managing Director on the east coast route, said: “When we took over the east coast route, we set out ambitious plans to gain a 50% market share between Edinburgh and London by 2023. These figures show an encouraging start to that journey and confirm an historic shift in travel patterns towards train. Our customers have responded positively to the improvements in customer service and investment in new train interiors and additional services.”

Sarah Copley, Commercial Director for Virgin Trains on the west coast route, said: “In the 20 years that Virgin has operated services between London and Glasgow, we’ve seen spectacular growth as customers have welcomed the step change in services we’ve delivered. We’re delighted to see that growth continue – which is good for customer choice and the environment.”

**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 the interiors and £16m towards improving the engines of our trains. Customers can now benefit from 42 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 2016. 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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