**FOR IMMEADIATE RELEASE**

 **Virgin Trains comments on news that West Coast franchise will partner with HS2**

Virgin Trains acknowledges the Department for Transport’s announcement this morning that the new West Coast franchise will partner with HS2. The DfT has said that the new franchise will run from April 2019, and include the initial operation of high speed services. The current West Coast franchise ends in March 2018.

Virgin, in partnership with Stagecoach, has run the West Coast line for almost 20 years. In that time passenger numbers have almost tripled, thanks to a relentless focus on customer service and satisfaction.

When Virgin took over the franchise, the West Coast was a struggling rail service which many doubted could be turned into a success – some dubbed it ‘mission impossible’. Virgin Trains brought in a new fleet of rolling stock – the iconic Pendolinos, a new ethos centred around the customer and high frequency timetables which saw trains between London and Birmingham / Manchester every twenty minutes.

Over the years Virgin Trains has consistently outperformed competitors and innovated continuously for the benefit of customers. The train operator has led the industry with initiatives such as the introduction of automatic compensation for delayed passengers, m-tickets across all routes and BEAM, a revolutionary on-board content system that allows passengers to watch TV and films for free on their own devices.

Patrick McCall, co-chairman of Virgin Trains, said: “We’re immensely proud of what Virgin Trains has achieved over the last two decades and the unique and unrivalled focus on the customer we’ve brought to communities along the line. There are clearly huge advantages in having continuity of service during HS2’s critical enabling works – both up to the start of the new franchise in 2019 and beyond.

“We firmly believe the franchise system has brought unparalleled success to the UK rail industry, with public-private partnerships between Government and franchisees like Virgin Trains delivering success, innovation and growth that would simply never have happened under public ownership.”

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**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 £21m to completely revamp our existing fleet and customers can now benefit from 42 additional services (22,000 extra seats) per week between Edinburgh and London. 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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