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**Virgin Trains sees surge in cross-border travel after timetable improvements**

* *7% increase in Virgin Trains passengers crossing border on east coast route*
* *Growth follows addition of 42 new Edinburgh-London services per week*
* *Timetable improvements accompanied by customer service investments*

Virgin Trains has seen a surge in cross-border rail travel after investing in 42 new services connecting Edinburgh to Newcastle and London.

More than 5000 additional Virgin Trains passengers are crossing the border every week on the east coast route with since the timetable change in May, new figures show.

The timetable boost has coincided with the start of a £140m investment programme which has seen refurbishment of the entire fleet interiors, launch of a new menu designed by leading chef James Martin and an overhaul of first class lounges, including at Edinburgh Waverley. Virgin Trains’ new revolutionary free onboard entertainment streaming system, BEAM, was introduced earlier this year and Wi-FI made free for First and Standard Class customers.

Between May and September, the number of passengers crossing the border in each direction grew by 7% compared to the same period last year.

The growth has been welcomed by Humza Yousaf, Minister for Transport and the Islands, who said: “Cross border rail services are an undoubted success and demand continue to grow.  The Scottish Government welcomed Virgin’s journey time and frequency improvements in the new franchise including the increase in services. Equally welcome is the connectivity between Scotland’s capital city, northern England, and London which will support businesses and the growing leisure markets along the East Coast. We look forward to the further planned improvements in quality and journey times, which will improve rail’s attractiveness in this market.”

Ross Smith, Director of Policy at the North East England Chamber of Commerce, added: “One of our members’ top priorities is for a connected North East, giving them easy access to other major markets and enabling more people to come to our great region, either to visit or to do business. It’s fantastic to see that these changes have paid dividends, demonstrating the value of extra services for the region.”

The timetable overhaul in May was the first major step in transforming east coast services between Edinburgh and London. In December, Virgin Trains is introducing a further three services on Sunday and a late-night service to Newcastle on Friday evenings. In 2018, roll out begins of the state-of-the-art Azuma train fleet begins, ushering in a new era of comfort and speed in intercity train travel.

David Horne, Virgin Trains’ managing director for the east coast route, said: “We’re delighted to see the positive response from customers to from the improvements we’ve made to Anglo-Scottish services. We now offer more trains connecting Edinburgh to Newcastle and London and have invested heavily in improving the quality of these services.”

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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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