**Monday 4 February**

**Virgin Trains welcomes boost in journeys on Blackpool route**

* *Virgin Trains welcomes more people onboard Blackpool route six months after new electric Pendolino services launched*

Latest figures from Virgin Trains show that a record number of journeys have been taken on its Blackpool route six months after introducing new electric services to the seaside resort.

Local journeys have proved most popular during this time with nearly eight times the number of journeys being made between Preston and Blackpool – from over 600 journeys in 2017 to 4,800 in 2018.

The introduction of direct services between Blackpool and Rugby has helped to boost year-on-year journeys between the towns by 67% - nearly 1,800 journeys were made during the first six months of the new services (May – October 2018), in comparison to 1,000 journeys between May – October 2017.

Between May and October 2018, 60,500 journeys were taken between London and Blackpool with Virgin Trains – an increase of 8% compared to the same period last year – making the Blackpool route more popular than ever. This follows the launch of Virgin’s 35 additional services per week between Blackpool and London in May 2018, which are served by electric Pendolino trains.

The services, which have strengthened connections to and from the Capital six days a week, have spread opportunity along the West Coast Main Line. Rugby and the West Midlands have benefitted from direct links to Blackpool for the first time since Virgin Trains reintroduced direct services between the resort and London in December 2014. These links have seen Virgin encouraging growth from other destinations on the route.

The additional services generated an extra 16,900\* seats a week, as Blackpool welcomed three new major attractions – ICON (the UK’s first double launch rollercoaster); Elephant House at Blackpool Zoo; and Marvel Comics super-heroes attraction at Madame Tussauds; and work got underway to build the Winter Garden’s Conference and Events Centre.

The introduction of the electric services followed Network Rail’s work to electrify the line between Blackpool and Preston and to lengthen the platforms at Blackpool North station allowing the longer Pendolino trains to travel to and from the resort.

Zina Nomicas, General Manager at Virgin Trains, said: “We are proud to serve Lancashire and play our part in strengthening Blackpool’s connections with our direct electric Pendolino services which launched last year – serving Blackpool more frequently, six days a week. Since reintroducing direct services to the resort four years ago we’ve had a great response from the people of Blackpool and along the line and we are delighted to see our additional services are proving increasingly popular with many more people travelling on our services. We look forward to taking more customers to Blackpool in 2019, once the resort launches its tourism season.”

Paul Maynard, MP for Blackpool North and Cleveleys, said: “The increased frequencies between Blackpool and London demonstrate the clear benefits of the £255m electrification scheme.

I am pleased so many people have been able to use these trains and am sure Blackpool has benefitted from the improved connections they deliver.”

ENDS

**Notes to Editors**

\*16,400 available between the capital and Blackpool; and 500 from Birmingham.

**Additional services**

On Monday 21 May 2018, Virgin Trains introduced the following additional services:

Weekdays

* 06.46 London Euston – Blackpool North\*
* 08.53 London Euston – Blackpool North\*
* 10.36 London Euston – Blackpool North\*
* 10.53 Blackpool North – London Euston\*\*
* 13.02 Blackpool North – London Euston\*\*
* 15.00 Blackpool North – London Euston\*\*

 Saturdays

* 07.21 Birmingham New Street – Blackpool North calling at Wolverhampton, Stafford, Crewe, Warrington Bank Quay, Wigan North Western and Preston
* 08.53 London Euston – Blackpool North\*
* 10.36 London Euston – Blackpool North\*
* 10.53 Blackpool North – London Euston\*\*
* 13.02 Blackpool North – London Euston\*\*
* 15.54 Blackpool North – London Euston\*\*

\*calling at Rugby, Warrington Bank Quay, Wigan North Western and Preston

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**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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