**Tuesday 15 May**

**Virgin Trains builds Pendolino sand sculpture ahead of train’s historic first visit to Blackpool**

* *Pendolino sand sculpture created to mark historic occasion of train’s visit to Blackpool*
* *Virgin Trains will serve Blackpool with electric Pendolino trains for first time next week*

Virgin Trains has recreated its iconic Pendolino train on Blackpool beach to celebrate its first visit to the seaside resort today.

Measuring nearly five metres in length, the intricate sand sculpture of Britain’s most celebrated train in modern times cut a striking figure in front of the iconic Blackpool Tower.

Made from two tonnes of Blackpool sand and 43 buckets of seawater, the sculpture took over six hours to build – double the journey time between Blackpool and London.

The intercity operator has also released a fascinating time-lapse footage showing the painstaking work of putting the sculpture together.

The first visit of the Pendolino trains to Blackpool was made as part of a route testing exercise in the early hours of Tuesday morning and comes ahead of launch of Virgin Trains’ 36 new services next Monday, 21st May.

The introduction of the new services follows the completion of Network Rail’s work to electrify the line between Blackpool and Preston and lengthen platforms at Blackpool North station to allow the longer Pendolino trains to travel to and from the seaside resort.

This is the first time the long-distance train operator will serve Blackpool with its electric-powered Pendolino trains, since it reintroduced direct services between the resort and London in 2014.

The new services will strengthen connections to and from the capital six days a week, providing eight direct services each weekday and five services on a Saturday. Virgin Trains is also set to operate a direct service from Birmingham on Saturdays, offering the West Midlands a direct service to Blackpool for the first time in 15 years – helping to spread opportunity along the West Coast Main Line

The boost in services will generate an additional 16,900 seats a week\* as Blackpool welcomes 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.

Michael Stewart, General Manager at Virgin Trains on the west coast, said: “At Virgin Trains we wanted to share our excitement as our Pendolino train makes its first trip to Blackpool ahead of the launch of our new electric services to and from Blackpool with a Pendolino sand sculpture. We have been proud to serve the seaside resort over the last three years and as we’re investing to deliver additional services we wanted to give a glimpse of what visitors can expect – from our iconic Pendolino trains to the famous Blackpool Tower. We look forward to welcoming people on-board the new services and playing our part to boost the local communities and spread opportunities along the route.”

Cllr Gillian Campbell, Deputy Leader of Blackpool Council, said: “The sand sculpture is a brilliant way of marking the arrival of Virgin Trains’ Pendolino trains into Blackpool. We are thrilled at the prospect of additional services linking the resort to London, Birmingham and other towns and cities on the West Coast route. These new direct services will give visitors the perfect opportunity to jump on a train and sample for themselves the joys of our beaches, attractions and world-class events.”

Paul Maynard, MP for Blackpool North and Cleveleys, said: “The first visit of one of Virgin’s Pendolino trains to Blackpool is a landmark moment and I am very much looking forward to the beginning of passenger service next week. It is good to see the £255m investment in our railway being put to good use. Virgin is offering thousands more seats every week, which will not only provide better connections for local people but will make it easier for visitors to make the journey to Blackpool.”

ENDS

**Notes to Editors**

To download the time-lapse visit: <https://virgintrains.box.com/s/o0615v5dr7nd9xh0o5cc6jomvgxmow8d>

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

Virgin Trains reintroduced direct services between Blackpool North and London Euston in December 2014 – with one northbound and one southbound service on weekdays. The 05.30 Blackpool North – London Euston and 16.33 London Euston – Blackpool North will continue to serve Kirkham & Wesham and Poulton-le-Fylde.

**Additional services**

From Monday 21 May 2018, Virgin Trains will introduce 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 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 interiors and £16m towards improving the engines of our trains. Customers can now benefit 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 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.

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 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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