



Welcome to the Red Letter

Record numbers travelling with Virgin Trains to and from the North West



In 2017/18 just over 38m journeys were made with Virgin Trains on the west coast route. 15.5m of these were to and from destinations in the North West, highlighting the key role Virgin Trains plays in supporting the regional economy.

Virgin Trains has broken new records for passengers travelling between the North West and London.

As we celebrate 21 years of operating the west coast route, new figures show we carried over 10.2m customers on our Manchester route in 2017/18, an increase of 2.9% compared to the same period the previous year. Our routes to Liverpool (3.7m) and Chester/North Wales (1.5m) also saw growth of 0.5% and 3.8% respectively at a time when numbers using rail elsewhere fell for the first time in over two decades.

Gaynor Stewart, Virgin Trains' General Manager for North West and Wales services, said: "The North West is an integral part of our west coast route, a region we have been proud to serve for the past 21 years. In that time journey times have been slashed and service innovations such as BEAM, improved punctuality and more availability of low fares have helped drive strong customer satisfaction ratings and attract more people to rail."

Booking tickets through Amazon Alexa



We're the first travel company in the world to sell tickets through Amazon Alexa.

We're the first travel company in the world to sell tickets through Amazon Alexa.

Customers can now book advance single Virgin Trains tickets using just their voice through Alexa-enabled Amazon devices. The new functionality uses Amazon Pay and follows the introduction of the Virgin Trains skill, which allows customers to enquire about our services using Alexa. The skill is part of a host of digital innovation projects

to increase customer satisfaction before, during and after their journeys.

Buzzing to support Manchester's Bee in the City



We've been announced as the Presenting Partner for this year's Bee in the City in Manchester.

We've been announced as the Presenting Partner for this year's Bee in the City in Manchester.

The nine-week long event will see over 80 individually designed bees go on display across Manchester, taking people on a journey through the city between July and September. Visitors will be able to follow the free trail, looking out for the two Virgin Trains bees with help from the Bee in the City app.

Following the trail, the bees will be auctioned in October, with money going to various local charitable causes via the 'We Love MCR' charity.

August and September engineering works



Over three weekends in August and September there will be no trains to, or from London Euston whilst Network Rail carries out vital improvement work at Wembley as part of Britain's Railway Upgrade Plan. This will also have an impact on other West Coast main line services across the route.

On the following weekends, there will be no trains to, or from London Euston whilst Network Rail carries out vital improvement work at Wembley as part of Britain's Railway

Upgrade Plan. This will also have an impact on other West Coast main line services across the route.

- **18-19 August**
- **25-27 August**
- **1-2 September**

During these weekends, our services will terminate at either Milton Keynes or Rugby and we strongly advise customers not to travel with us to or from Euston on these dates.

We realise this will be an inconvenience, but we are working closely with industry colleagues to communicate these closures with people as soon as possible.

For those passengers who need to complete their journey with us, we will have ticket acceptance in place with other routes and a rail replacement service between Rugby and Kettering to connect into East Midlands Trains services. More information can be found at nationalrail.co.uk/westcoast or virgintrains.co.uk/spanner.

For those able to travel the day before, off peak tickets will be available after midday on the Friday.

Launching new Blackpool - London services

We recently launched our first electric services to Blackpool, delivering an extra 35 direct services per week to the destination and others along the West Coast route.



We recently launched our first electric services to Blackpool, delivering an extra 35 direct services per week to the destination and others along the West Coast route.

The launch saw one of our Pendolinos named the 'Blackpool Belle' which was suggested by readers of the Blackpool Gazette. The launch of the new services, which will create an additional 16,400 seats a week, will strengthen connections to the capital, as well as providing a direct service between Birmingham and Blackpool for the first time in 15 years.

This follows Network Rail's work to electrify the line between Preston and Blackpool and lengthen platforms at Blackpool North to allow longer trains at the station.

Notes

The 05.30 Blackpool North – London Euston and 16.33 return will continue to serve Kirkham and Wesham and Poulton-le-Fylde. Unless stated otherwise, all services call at Rugby, Warrington Bank Quay, Wigan North Western and Preston.

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

Titanic Brewery set to dock at Stoke Station



Passengers at Stoke-on-Trent station will soon be able to enjoy a pint before catching a train after Virgin Trains and Titanic Brewery revealed plans to open a craft beer and snack bar at the city's main railway station.

The bar, which will open early for breakfast, will transform the former current First Class lounge at Stoke Station, offering a selection of beers, coffees and food.

The Burslem-based company will start work shortly on a sympathetic refurbishment of the space, working closely with Virgin Trains to improve the customer experience for both First Class and Standard ticket holders alike.

The project will create a number of new jobs and is part of Virgin Trains commitment to support local SMEs.

Unveiling our summer of Pride

In May we launched our first Pride train at Birmingham New Street station, marking the start of Pride celebrations across our route.



In May we launched our first Pride train at Birmingham New Street station, marking the start of Pride celebrations across our route.

The #ridewithpride train boldly displays the Pride colours and highlights our passion for celebrating diversity. It will also carry customers to Pride events across the West Coast route. The train made its first journey to Birmingham Pride at the end of May, transporting customers and our people to the celebrations, with a party atmosphere on board for everyone involved. Our staff then made their way over to the Pride parade that passes by our Victoria Square head office.

The train also recently made its way to Edinburgh to celebrate their Pride weekend and can also be seen at Pride events over the summer, including Glasgow Pride on 14th July and Manchester over the August Bank Holiday weekend.

Supporting the Release Scotland partnership



We've played a leading role in bringing together businesses, charities and government agencies working in Scotland to help people with convictions develop their potential in the workplace and contribute to a successful, growing economy.

We've played a leading role in bringing together businesses, charities and government agencies working in Scotland to help people with convictions develop their potential in the workplace and contribute to a successful, growing economy.

The new partnership, **Release Scotland**, was recently launched in the Scottish Parliament, with cross-party support from MSPs, and seeks to provide a one-stop shop for employers in Scotland seeking advice and help with recruiting ex-offenders.

We believe in hiring the best people, no matter what their background, and have been actively recruiting from within prisons since 2013. No one has to declare a criminal conviction on our forms, giving applicants a second chance and a fresh start to get back into work.

If you would like to learn more about our ex-offender recruitment programme, please click here:

<https://www.virgintrains.co.uk/newstart>

CRP Corner

North Cheshire Community Rail Partnership

We are pleased to announce that North Cheshire Community Rail Partnership has commenced its activities along the line of Hooton to Warrington and covers stations from Hooton to Helsby and from Chester to Warrington Bank Quay.

We are pleased to announce that North Cheshire Community Rail Partnership has commenced its activities along the line of Hooton to Warrington, covering stations from Hooton to Helsby and from Chester to Warrington Bank Quay. Our vision is to encourage community engagement, economic development, education, connectivity and inclusivity. To make the journey on the rail network fun and engaging to all who use it for business, tourism, pleasure and leisure.

We look forward to hearing from you if you have any ideas, suggestions or enquires. To contact our Community Rail Officer please email on communityrail@chester.ac.uk

