



Business news

National Rail Passenger Survey finds Virgin Trains customer satisfaction to be higher than country average

90%

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Transport Focus' latest National Rail Passenger Survey, which captures the journey satisfaction of more than 25,000 passengers, has found Virgin Trains customer satisfaction to be much higher than the country average.

Virgin Trains passengers' overall satisfaction with their journey is at 90 per cent while the survey found passenger satisfaction across all rail services in the UK has fallen to a 10-year low to 79 per cent, the lowest level since 2008.

The percentage of Virgin Trains journeys rated as satisfactory overall for punctuality/reliability was 84 per cent, while nationally this figure was 71 per cent.

The proportion of journeys rated by passengers as satisfactory in terms of value for money for the price of their ticket scored nationally at 46 per cent, however amongst Virgin Trains customers it is much higher at 63 per cent.

Passenger satisfaction with how train operators dealt with delays scored 37 per cent in the latest survey, but Virgin Trains scored 60 per cent.

Update on Easter Engineering

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Full details can be found here:

<https://www.networkrailmediacentre.co.uk/news/check-before-you-travel-on-the-west-coast-main-line-over-easter-and-early-may-bank-holidays>

Whilst the agreed industry message is to avoid travel, we wanted to share with you some of the steps we have taken to manage customer expectations and ensure the best possible travel experience over the weekend.

London Euston will be closed for four days

The most significant impact is at London Euston which will be from Maundy Thursday until Easter Monday. It is due to reopen in time for the return to work on Tuesday 23 April. This information has been shared with customers since early February, both online and at stations. Where possible we are trying to encourage those who can, to travel either side of the weekend.

On Good Friday and Easter Monday we are able to run a limited service to and from Harrow & Wealdstone. This will provide connections into the Transport for London services on the Bakerloo line and Overground services.

With just three trains per hour, we can only run a small number of our normal services which is why we are making customers aware of both alternative routes and the option to travel either side. Journey times will be longer, and our services will be busier than usual.

On Easter Saturday and Sunday our services will be starting and finishing at Milton Keynes.

We are also able for the first time to take advantage of the newly-electrified route via Bolton. A number of our services will therefore divert via Manchester to and from Preston, thus removing the need for rail replacement services for a significant number of customers over the weekend.

We have taken the following steps to mitigate the impact both for customers travelling to and from London:

- We have relaxed afternoon peak ticket restrictions from Euston on Thursday 18th April (Maundy Thursday). This is typically our busiest day and will allow people to start their weekend early and save money in the process
- We have agreed ticket acceptance with Transport for London, to offer connections to the London Underground (Bakerloo Line) and Overground services on Good Friday and Easter Monday as far as Paddington
- Additional Standard Class capacity has been created on our Liverpool and Manchester routes on Good Friday and Easter Monday by de-classifying our First Class carriages on selected services
- Working with CrossCountry we will be running one service per hour between Manchester Piccadilly and Birmingham International on Saturday and Easter Sunday with our Pendolino trains. This will provide additional capacity between Manchester and the West Midlands; and allow CrossCountry to strengthen their services between Birmingham and Reading

Alternative routes to and from London are available for those who unable to travel at other times. More details are available on the Virgin Trains website here -

<https://www.virgintrains.co.uk/travelling-at-easter>

For any further information about this issue, please contact richard.stanton@virgintrains.co.uk

Virgin Trains customers can now book travel assistance with Amazon Alexa



Customers who require travel assistance on Virgin Trains are set to benefit from a new feature on the Virgin Trains skill for Alexa, which allows them to request it using basic voice commands.

Research shows new service saves time and is easier to use for customers with disabilities

New service comes after Virgin Trains achieved a global first by selling tickets on Alexa

Customers who require travel assistance on Virgin Trains are set to benefit from a new feature on the Virgin Trains skill for

Alexa, which allows them to request it using basic voice commands.

After achieving a global first last year by selling train tickets through Alexa, the new development in collaboration with Amazon means that Virgin Trains customers can now book JourneyCare via Alexa-enabled devices, including the Amazon Echo.

Following trials, the new JourneyCare feature is now live for anyone requiring assisted travel (for example those with visual impairment or mobility issues).

Normally customers who need to book JourneyCare complete a form online or call the helpline after booking.

The new technology means customers can book assisted travel immediately after purchasing tickets using simple voice commands.

Chris Tomson took part in the initial testing of the Alexa skill. He has Osteogenesis imperfecta (brittle bones) and uses a wheelchair on a daily basis.

He said: "Using JourneyCare on the Virgin Trains skill for Alexa is a fantastic asset. It does a great job of combining the two processes, making the whole experience much easier. It also comes in handy if I have any pain in my arms and I am unable to use a computer, phone or tablet to book my journey."

The traditional system meant customers had to input the same information again to request JourneyCare after booking a ticket, but the Virgin Trains skill for Alexa will remember the details, so they do not have to repeat the process.

On average the new service takes just two minutes, halving the time needed to complete an online form or call the helpline.

Stephen Brookes, Rail Sector Champion for the Minister for Disabled People, said: "I welcome the new initiative by Virgin Trains, which will give disabled people a better booking experience.

"By utilising Alexa in this way, Virgin Trains recognises the importance of disabled people as being a key part of rail industry business, because those who are comfortable with and can access technology will find the system quick and efficient.

"But it doesn't mean that those who cannot access or use new technology will miss out, as the staff involved in phone booking will be more freed up to help those who need more help or time in booking their journey."

Toby Radcliffe, Customer Proposition Director, at Virgin Trains, said: "We are always looking at ways to improve the travelling experience for customers with disabilities and we are really pleased to be introducing this new update to our existing Alexa skill for customers needing to book extra assistance on their journey with us. We want to ensure train travel is accessible to as many people as possible and this is a further innovation in that direction."

Virgin Trains to hold West Coast Stakeholder Conference in Birmingham on 25 April

Attendees will be able to share their views on the West Coast Main Line, innovation in the railways and how we create further positive change for the communities we serve. Joining instructions enclosed.

Virgin Trains will hold an interactive day of discussion on the West Coast Main Line at the Malmaison Birmingham on Thursday 25th April 2019.

Two decades since Virgin Trains took over the West Coast Main Line and 10 years since the introduction of our ground-breaking high-frequency services, Virgin Trains continues to be at the forefront of change in UK rail.

Attendees will be able to share their views on the West Coast Main Line, innovation in the railways and how we create further positive change for the communities we serve.

A wide range of partners – from regional transport bodies and community rail partnerships, to digital giants and social enterprises like anti-homelessness initiative Change Please – will be on hand to present about the vast activity going on along the West Coast Main Line.

With the Williams Rail Review underway, we will also be discussing the future of our railways. We want to hear your ideas about how we can develop a rail industry that works in the best interests of passengers.

Virgin Trains introduces JAM card for customers with communications barriers



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Standing for "Just a Minute", anyone with a JAM card can present it to Virgin Trains staff to let them know they have a communication barrier which could be a result of number of factors including autism or a learning difficulty.

The JAM card scheme has been introduced across Virgin Trains routes from March and follows Virgin Trains' recent industry-first initiative with Amazon which allows customers with disabilities to book JourneyCare through Alexa. In the style of a credit card, it will help customers discreetly make staff aware of their condition.

Frontline teams at Virgin Trains have been trained to recognise the distinctive card and that customers presenting it may have difficulty with communication and require additional time. During training staff have gained valuable knowledge about different types of disabilities and have learned how to engage with a customer with a communication barrier.

Customers apply for a JAM card by filling in a form on their website or by downloading the app and the card is available in either a physical copy or digital format.

Virgin Trains offers tickets for a tenner on London to Birmingham route



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Tens of thousands are set to benefit from the new flat rate for all advance single tickets on selected services which will be available up to one hour before the train's

departure.

Now customers can take advantage of an even longer weekend with restriction free Fridays and cheaper Monday fares as a result of this new trial.

The ten-week trial of the new simplified fare started on 10th February and is available on all services departing London Euston and Birmingham New Street on Mondays between 11:00 and 13:00, and after 20:00.

The removal of the Friday afternoon peak was initially piloted over the summer holidays and the results of this new trial will be examined to see if it should also be made permanent or extended to other days of the week and other routes.

Virgin Trains awarded Social Mobility Employer status



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The train operator has signed up to the Social Mobility Pledge, which encourages businesses to play a role in tackling social mobility by providing training and employment opportunities to local people from disadvantaged communities.

The Social Mobility Pledge commits employers and businesses to play their part in ensuring that everyone has the opportunity to reach their full potential – irrespective of background. In its 2017 ‘State of Social Mobility in Britain’ report, the Sutton Trust found that the UK ranks near the bottom for income mobility across OECD nations.

The campaign was launched in Parliament in March 2018 by former Secretary of State for Education, Justine Greening MP and now covers more than 1.8 million employees. It is a commitment from businesses large and small across Britain to become a Social Mobility Pledge accredited employer, by taking three simple steps:

1. Partnership - with schools or colleges to provide coaching through quality careers advice, enrichment experience and/or mentoring to people from disadvantaged backgrounds or circumstances.
2. Access - providing structured work experience and/or apprenticeship opportunities to people from disadvantaged backgrounds or circumstances
3. Recruitment - adopting open employee recruitment practices which promote a level playing field for people from disadvantaged backgrounds or circumstances, such as name blind recruitment or contextual recruitment.

The pledge is backed by major employers such as BT, Aviva, Adidas, ITV, True Potential, KPMG and others.

New Accreditation Scheme for Community Rail Partnerships launched



The Department for Transport (DfT), in conjunction with the Welsh Government and the Association of Community Rail Partnerships (ACoRP), have launched a new accreditation scheme for community rail partnerships (CRPs). This replaces the previous designation scheme and is relevant to CRPs, rather than individual lines.

To apply for accreditation, CRPs are advised to book a planning session with their ACoRP regional operations team representative. A guide is available, setting out the benefits and requirements of accreditation and how the process will work. To

download the guide, visit <http://bit.ly/accred2019>.

Crewe to Manchester CRP



At the Cheshire Kept Best Stations Awards, Stockport station won the 'Association of Community Rail Partnerships Community Award' for the Community Station Open Day that commemorated 175 years of the station, the centenary of the end of the First World War, and 50 years since the end of steam.

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Over 2,500 people visited the station for the Open Day to see the only surviving Stockport tramcar, vintage Stockport corporation buses, modern diesel locomotives, and railway themed exhibitions.

Crewe station was also highly commended for the 'World War I Centenary Award' at the Cheshire Best Kept Stations Awards 2019 for an event which commemorated 100 years since the Naval train, Jellicoe Express, served the station during WWI. The event, which was organised by the Crewe to Manchester CRP, North Staffordshire CRP and Virgin Trains involved the unveiling of a commemorative plaque on Platform 12 and a small display of photographs of Crewe station during the First World War.

Heart of England CRP

New CRP to be launched.

In spring 1969, the railway between Stratford upon Avon and Birmingham was destined to close. A remarkable effort at the eleventh hour by a handful of people and local authorities staved off the loss of trains to and from William Shakespeare's birthplace. It's a testament of how far things have progressed between railways and the communities they serve that fifty years on and with over one million rail passenger journeys a year now being at Stratford upon Avon, the 'Heart of England Community Rail Partnership' which will link Stratford, Warwick, Coventry, Solihull, Birmingham and Nuneaton is due to be launched.