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Virgin Trains Midlands Stakeholder Newsletter Issue 2 2018 . 03 July 2018



## Record year for Virgin Trains on the West Midlands to London route



*Virgin Trains has broken new records for passengers travelling between the West Midlands and London. As we celebrate 21 years of operating the west coast route, new figures show we carried just under 6m customers between the West Midlands and London between April 2017 and March 2018, an increase of 4.6% compared to the same period the previous year.*

The growing availability of advance fares, including the ability to buy tickets on the day for as little as £33 between Birmingham and London, has also played a big part in encouraging more customers to leave the car at home and travel by train, both for business and staycation trips. The average fare paid by customers on the journeys to and from London fell by 2.0%.

The increase in numbers was warmly received by Paul Faulkner, CEO of Greater Birmingham Chambers of Commerce: "As our region continues to go from strength to strength, it's essential we have first class rail links to support this growth. It's great to see Virgin Trains investing heavily in improving services between the West Midlands and London.

"Not only are Virgin Trains putting the needs of the customer at the heart of the travel experience, they are playing a massive part in enriching regional connectivity – all of which will help unlock the economic potential of the Midlands and bring prosperity to the country as a whole."

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### Business news

## Virgin Trains welcomes Birmingham born Natasha Grice to the board as People Director



*Natasha Grice has been appointed as the new People Executive Director for Virgin Trains. Natasha joined Virgin Trains as a Customer Service Assistant 16 years ago from Virgin Atlantic where she was part of the cabin crew. She has worked in a number of functions across the business since then. "Working as part of the front-line team meeting customers every day was a great way to get under the skin of the railway," commented Natasha.*

Stepping up from her previous role as General Manager for the West Midlands route, Natasha who was born in Birmingham, has spent time as a Duty Manager in Customer Relations, Station Manager and On-Board Manager and was instrumental in delivering the Virgin Trains 2012 Olympic customer experience offer.

Natasha said: "I feel honoured to be moving into the role of People Executive Director. I am passionate about Virgin Trains, our brand values and our people and it's been a dream of mine to become People Director. I love seeing people progress and identifying paths for them. We've no problem attracting people to the business and are very good at retaining them – there are plenty of opportunities for them to try different roles."

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## Booking tickets through Amazon Alexa

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

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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.

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## 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](http://nationalrail.co.uk/westcoast) or [virgintrains.co.uk/spanner](http://virgintrains.co.uk/spanner).

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

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## Coventry station masterplan



*Virgin Trains is committed to working closely with Coventry City Council and other stakeholders to deliver a step change in facilities at Coventry station.*

Work is due to commence later this year on a programme of works that will transform the experience of customers using Coventry station. In the past five years, footfall has increased by 36% to just under 7.4m journeys in 2017/18.

The station masterplan has been developed to improve the station which will provide Coventry with a station that will support the wider Coventry economy as well as accommodating the major growth predicted in passenger numbers.

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## A cool run for the Wolverhampton Bobsled team with Virgin Trains



*The mother of inspirational teenage cancer sufferer Stephen Sutton MBE travelled to London with Virgin Trains to continue his fundraising efforts to fight the disease. Jane Sutton made the journey after Virgin Trains named one of its Pendolino trains after her son in 2015 in a bid to support the family.*

She was joined by fellow Wolverhampton Bobsled team members Andy Newman and Neil Hendy, along with their new 15ft replica bobsled, ahead of the London Marathon on Sunday, 22 April.

Jane and the team, on an unseasonably hot day, got round the course in just over 7 hours and raised over £10k in the process.

Amanda Hines, General Manager for Virgin Trains in the West Midlands enthused: "Jane is an inspiration to us all, as was her son Stephen Sutton MBE and we jumped at the chance to help her and the Wolverhampton Bobsled Team get down to London for the Marathon. Over 12 million journeys were made on our services to and from the West Midlands last year, and I can honestly say this will be the first one carrying a bobsled!"



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## 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 14<sup>th</sup> July.

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## Launching new Blackpool - London services with additional stops at Rugby



*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 including Rugby.*

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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

## 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.*

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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>