



Virgin Trains breaks through 1m mark on Edinburgh-London

More people choosing train over plane following Virgin Trains' investment



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The London to Scotland operator has ended the year on a high after seeing 8% annual growth in customer numbers between the UK and Scottish capitals. It follows a string of timetable and customer service improvements introduced by Virgin Trains as part of a £140m investment programme on the east coast route.

A key driver in the growth has been an increase in the number of passengers choosing train over plane – the result of a deliberate strategy by Virgin to win market share on the UK's busiest domestic air route. Between January and September – the last month which comparable figures for airline journeys are available – the number of Virgin Trains passengers travelling between Edinburgh and London grew by 8.2% to 831,000. That represents 25% of the total air/rail market, or nearly a third once interlining passengers (those travelling via London airports on international journeys) are excluded, an increase of two percentage points.

Air traffic on the route remained broadly flat over the same period, reversing the trend seen in 2015, when growth on the Edinburgh-London corridor was driven by air*. Overall, the air/rail market grew in both 2015 and 2016.

The passenger growth has been welcomed by Scotland's Transport Minister, Humza Yousaf MSP, who said: "It is clear given the huge numbers of passengers now travelling on Virgin East Coast that cross border rail services are more popular than ever, with demand growing year on year. Virgin are also offering increased frequency and journey time improvements we will no doubt see the popularity of rail continue. More connectivity and more passengers travelling between Edinburgh and major stops en route to London can only be a major boon for business here and I look forward to Scotland feeling all of the benefits."

After taking over the east coast route in March 2015, Virgin Trains has worked to transform customer experience, with a number of key improvements being made this year.

Two timetable changes have delivered an additional 45 services per week between Edinburgh and London, giving a half-hourly service through most of the day and more services at weekends. The entire fleet has been completely overhauled, while customers have benefited from free wifi through First and Standard Class and the introduction of BEAM, Virgin

Trains' revolutionary onboard entertainment streaming service.

Meanwhile, booking horizons have been extended to six months from the industry standard of three months, giving customers more time to plan ahead and find the cheapest fares.

Virgin Trains has set out ambitious plans to gain half the air/rail market by 2023 following the introduction of the state-of-the-art Azuma fleet which will provide faster, greener, more comfortable journeys.

David Horne, Virgin Trains Managing Director on the east coast route, said: "We've set out ambitious plans to take on airlines by investing in our services and we're delighted to see that strategy bearing fruit. The growth in rail travel we're announcing today shows that the improvements we've made have been popular with customers, who are voting with their feet. That's good news for passengers, good news for the environment and good for the long-term growth of rail between Scotland and England."

Unveiling our Station of the Future



We've unveiled our vision for the station of the future at Birmingham International.

We've unveiled our vision for the station of the future at Birmingham International. The ticket office at the station has been transformed, with the traditional booking office window now a thing of the past. We've installed a welcome desk with service pods for customers purchasing tickets, more user friendly information screens, touch screen information points and improved ticket machines.

Our new open plan design allows for more staff presence on the concourse, floorwalkers to assist with travel requests, free Wi-Fi and refurbished toilets. These changes are being driven by our customers, more of whom are arriving having

already bought paperless tickets.

We were delighted to be joined by the local MP Rt Hon Dame Caroline Spelman, who was on hand to formally open the new station.

Our Christmas trains arrive in Euston and King's Cross



Festive travellers were treated to life-size replicas of our Azuma and Pendolino trains in the run up to Christmas with over 1000 presents given away by Virgin Trains. The 12m long by 2m high replica was presented to lucky passengers travelling through King's Cross, with presents including iPads, folding bikes, Virgin balloon rides and pamper days. A similar model was unveiled at Euston for customer travelling on the west coast route. We also hosted a Facebook Live event, which allowed people to tune in for the chance to win a present online.

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