



Welcome!

Welcome to The Red Letter

by Tony Collins



Virgin Trains' Chief Executive Tony Collins welcomes you to the first edition of The Red Letter.

Welcome to the first edition of The Red Letter from Virgin Trains.

With confirmation that we will be running services on the West Coast through to April 2017 we're launching The Red Letter to keep you up to date with our activities.

For the last six months the words many people associated with 'Virgin Trains' were 'government' or 'franchise'. It's now time to ensure the return of the words 'quality' and 'customer service' which people associate with our name. We must not allow the line to stagnate - that would be a disservice to our customers and the economies of the destinations we serve. Happily, a four-year period creates fresh opportunities for us to invest, innovate, and improve services.

The headlines are the improvements to our Anglo-Scots services from December. But we will also be bringing a range of improvements to trains and stations. To keep up to date make sure to sign up to receive future editions of **The Red Letter**!

Tony Collins, Chief Executive

Sign up to receive further Red Letters

Receiving future copies is easy - just go to 'Useful Links' in the left hand column and click on 'Sign Up'.

Your journeys

Customers love our trains and staff - now it's Euston's turn for a makeover

The Spring 2013 National Passenger Survey once again shows Virgin Trains outperforming other long-distance franchises, with an overall satisfaction score of 92%. But the detailed figures also reveal how Euston station, in desperate need of an upgrade, is dragging down customer satisfaction.





The independent watchdog Passenger Focus has carried out a survey of rail passenger satisfaction every six months since 1999.

The Spring 2013 results show that customers have given Virgin Trains an overall satisfaction score of 92%. Passenger Focus also looks at 32 specific aspects of customer satisfaction. Of these, it highlights five as particularly important. Virgin Trains is ahead of the average score for long distance operators on four of those key factors: value for money; punctuality/reliability; sufficient room on the train; how well delays were handled. On one key factor – overall satisfaction with the station – we lag behind the long distance average.

Looking at the detail, Virgin Trains scores above the long-distance average on every single factor relating to our train services. But we only score above the average on one factor relating to stations. We find this disappointing. We've made improvements to the stations we operate. But we don't own or operate Euston, and a huge proportion – over 60% - of our customers pass through this station at the start or end of their journeys with us.

St Pancras is probably the most spectacular refurbishment of a London station, but others such as Paddington have also seen significant improvements. Recently, we've seen the impact that the completion of the Kings Cross has had on satisfaction scores. We are in discussion with Network Rail, HS2 (which will use Euston in future) and the Department for Transport about making significant changes at Euston to improve our customers' experience when using the station.

[Click here to view the full results in the National Passenger Survey](#)

Major track improvements to affect services through NW England in July



An £18m improvement scheme will be completed over nine days from Saturday 13 July to Sunday 21 July. Trains will be unable to use the Warrington – Preston section of the route.

Work on the West Coast Main Line will be carried out this summer to increase the speed at which trains can travel. Four major rail junctions will also be replaced and enhanced. The work will improve the reliability of the infrastructure and the punctuality of train services on Britain's busiest mixed-use railway line. Virgin Trains, along with other train operators will be making alternative arrangements to help passengers complete their journeys during the line closure.

Usually, Network Rail would have carried out work of this kind over a number of bank holiday weekends requiring train services to be replaced repeatedly by alternative transport. By carrying out the work in a nine-day continuous spell this summer, engineers expect to be able to complete the replacement of the four junctions around 16 months earlier and to

avoid disrupting rail travel plans for many weekends and nine bank holidays over the next two years.

[Click here to visit the travel update pages of our website](#)

More seats, more journey options between West Midlands and Scotland



An overhaul of the Virgin Trains timetable from December this year will see the extension of services through the West Midlands, offering new services from Sandwell & Dudley, Birmingham International, Coventry and Milton Keynes. Improved use of our fleet will also boost capacity on the route.

The Scotland - West Midlands route has been one of our fastest growing sectors. Between 2008 and 2013, growth in passenger numbers between Birmingham and Edinburgh has been 235%, and between Birmingham and Glasgow an even more impressive 261%.

From December, 24 of the 28 services that currently start or terminate in Birmingham will be extended through to London Euston. This will offer new direct journey options connecting the major regional centres of Milton Keynes and Coventry with the North West of England and Scotland's main cities.

Further changes will see five-car Super Voyagers mostly replaced by two Super Voyagers joined together and running as a single service, or by nine or 11 car electric Pendolinos. This will boost weekday seats from 9,656 to 12,967 - an increase of 3,300 a day.

[Click here to read our press release](#)

Virgin Trains to contest Network Rail's denial of new services to Blackpool and Shrewsbury



We will be making a formal appeal against Network Rail's refusal of our application to run new daily services to Blackpool and to Shrewsbury.



With the stability offered by a franchise running to 2017, we have been keen to offer services to Blackpool and Shrewsbury. Our proposal was recently endorsed by the Department for Transport, but Network Rail has rejected it. We do not accept Network Rail's rationale that the addition of services to Blackpool and Shrewsbury would have 'a significant negative impact on performance for the thousands of other passenger and freight services that rely on this route every day.' We believe Network Rail's decision is unreasonable and based on poor evidence and we will be

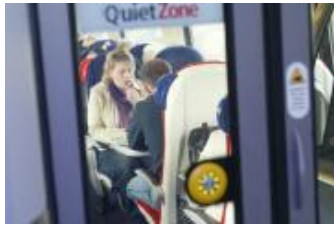
objecting through the Office of Rail Regulation.

While there are genuine issues around the reliability of infrastructure on the West Coast, we look to Network Rail to pursue positive and pro-active solutions to address its own performance and improve network reliability, not to restrict the development of new services.

Network Rail's decision has attracted parliamentary attention, including a question to the Prime Minister.

Our Trains

We're spending on spending a penny (and other things too!)



Our hard-working Super Voyagers are due for a spa treatment....

The full fleet of our diesel Super Voyager trains will receive an internal refresh at a rate of one train a week over the next five months. Improvements will include:

- Replacement of floor coverings
- Renewal of seat covers in First Class (following Standard class renewal in 2010)
- Redecoration and other improvements to toilet areas.

Refreshment of the Super Voyager interiors is timed to coincide with a series of routine engineering overhauls for a cost-effective solution.

Our destinations

Birmingham butterfly



The first half of the Birmingham New Street station re-build opened in April.

The busiest station outside London, Birmingham New Street is used by over 140,000 passengers every day, more than double the number it was designed to cater for.

At the end of April the first half of the new station was opened, with work switching to the other half of the station. The new half alone is one-and-a-half times bigger than the old concourse and provides lifts and additional escalators to all platforms. The second half of the station will be unveiled in 2015, and will include an impressive atrium flooding the concourse with light.

A new ticket office staffed by Virgin Trains retains the number of ticket desks and doubles the number of self-service machines to 18. The fresh new facility has proved popular with customers - demonstrated by rising ticket sales.

Click below to watch Network Rail's fast-track video of the re-build



Our people

New driver recruitment



Maintaining a properly qualified cohort of drivers is essential to our business.

With good driver retention rates, our need for new drivers has been relatively limited. A low demand for new drivers has meant that we have recruited fully-qualified drivers from other operators as we haven't needed the critical mass of drivers necessary to establish a full driver training course.

Our plans for new services and driver retirements have combined to open up new opportunities for recruitment. In line with the Virgin philosophy of encouraging staff development we are recruiting trainee drivers from our wider workforce. It takes around 18 months from answering a job advert to driving unaccompanied so we've started in good time to ensure we have the right number of drivers to deliver our services.

Virgin Trains recognised for excellence

Virgin Trains recognised for excellence



After a week-long formal assessment by the British Quality Foundation Virgin Trains has been awarded an internationally-recognised five star quality award.

The British Quality Foundation (BQF) looked at all aspects of our business including how we do things, the role and effectiveness of leaders, staff engagement and empowerment, customer satisfaction and how we work with our partners, suppliers and stakeholders. These activities were judged against the criteria of the European Foundation for Quality Management's Excellence Model - the most commonly used management framework in Europe.

BQF awards three, four or five stars, and Virgin Trains was awarded the top rating of five stars.

[Click here to visit the British Quality Foundation's website](#)

Railway world

Tackling West Coast punctuality



Punctuality on our routes is not as good as it should be. We want Network Rail to deliver its performance commitments.

Despite travelling on our modern trains, customers are too often subject to delays.

The Office of Rail Regulation has strongly criticised Network Rail for failing to meet punctuality targets. For performance failures on long-distance routes Network Rail is facing fines of up to £75 million. We are keen that fines of this kind should be spent on initiatives that bring direct benefit to customers rather than being removed from the rail

environment by being paid to the Treasury.

In addition, Virgin Rail Group (the owning group of Virgin Trains) is preparing enforcement action specific to the West Coast Mainline. This action is a result of the sustained poor performance by Network Rail on the West Coast, which VRG believes is a breach of contract and has deterred some customers from travelling, and damaged our business.

Punctuality in context

Network Rail has missed targets agreed with Virgin Trains over the last two years, and punctuality stands at 85.7 percent in the most recent four-weekly period ending 25 May, against a target of 88 percent. More than 70 percent of delays are a result of Network Rail infrastructure issues, with fewer than 15 percent caused by Virgin Trains problems. The remaining delays are caused by other freight and passenger operators.

Future franchises announced



There will be major re-franchising activity affecting the North West of England. Three franchises - Northern, TransPennine and West Coast will be re-let in a period of just over a year from early 2016 to early 2017. The Department for Transport is likely to seek stakeholder input on the Northern and TransPennine franchises from February 2014 and on West Coast from April 2015.

Copyright © 2013 West Coast trains Ltd, subsidiary of the Virgin Rail group Ltd. Registered in England No. 3007940. Registered Office: The Battleship Building, 179 Harrow Rd, London, W2 6NB.

[Email Newsletter Software](#) by Newsweaver