



## Welcome to the Red Letter

### A message from David



*Over the past three months at Virgin Trains East Coast we've been making more improvements to our facilities and are planning for the introduction of the Azuma.*

Over the past three months at Virgin Trains East Coast we've been making more improvements to our facilities and are planning for the introduction of the Azuma. The testing programme for Azuma continues, and we saw it take its first journey over into Scotland in August before the scheduled roll out begins at the end of next year. We're turning our attention to making improvements at our stations, including improving Newark car park - the first car park along our route we're refurbishing to provide better facilities for passengers and we will continue to keep you informed of the work we're doing. And we're continuing our work with Network Rail to reduce disruption on our services, including reviewing footage from our pantograph cameras to prevent delays due to overhead wire damage.

We've also had new starters join our Customer Solutions Centre team in Gosforth, who celebrated their first birthday in August and our Web Support has also been brought back in-house. Finally, we were also pleased to retain our excellent score of 91% in the latest National Rail Passenger Survey, which was published in July. This shows an increase in passengers satisfied with our on-board train facilities and upkeep, following the completion of our fleet refurbishment earlier this year. I look forward to meeting with some of you at our next stakeholder summit and continuing to work with you.

### Azuma debuts in Scotland on East Coast test run

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Our new Azuma train visited Scotland for the first time in August as part of our plan to transform journeys between Edinburgh and London.

The inaugural run was made as part of a testing programme by manufacturer Hitachi, in preparation for the roll out of our 65-strong fleet on the East Coast next year.

The Azuma is set to be one of the most advanced passenger trains on the UK rail network, bringing down journey times between the two capitals to just four hours and boosting capacity out of King's Cross by 28% at peak times.

The Azuma tested travelled over the Royal Border Bridge in Berwick-upon-Tweed up to Dunbar, before returning south to Doncaster. The entire fleet will undergo a rigorous testing programme ahead of entering passenger service.

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## Winning market share against the airlines between Scotland and London



*More passengers travelling between Scotland and London have chosen the train over plane than at any time in more than 20 years.*

More passengers travelling between Scotland and London have chosen the train over plane than at any time in more than 20 years.

New figures reveal an 18% year-on-year growth in Virgin Trains passengers travelling between Glasgow/Edinburgh and London in June 2017. This means that Virgin Trains now holds a 33% share of the air/rail market on the UK's busiest domestic air routes,

beating a previous record set in 2014. Our aim is to win a 50% market share by 2023.

The figures coincide with a report released by sustainable charity Transform Scotland, which finds that whilst overall air and rail travel between Scotland's Central Belt and London is increasing, carbon emissions are falling as more people choose to take the train. The report can be found here: <http://transformscotland.org.uk/>

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## Book onto our next stakeholder summit



*We're hosting our next annual stakeholder summit at the Principal Hotel in York on the 7<sup>th</sup> November from 09:30 - 14:00.*

We're hosting our next annual stakeholder summit at the Principal Hotel in York on the 7<sup>th</sup> November from 09:30 - 14:00.

This will be an opportunity to hear about our Innovation Fund, and how we've been using this to develop innovations new to UK rail to improve the customer experience.

Representatives from the Consortium of East Coast Main Line Authorities (ECMA) and Hitachi Rail Europe will also present on the campaign for securing investment in the ECML and Azuma construction at Hitachi's factory in Newton Aycliffe. To book your place or for any queries, please contact Sophie Mew at [sophie.mew@virgintrains.co.uk](mailto:sophie.mew@virgintrains.co.uk).

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## Unveiling our partnership with the Great Exhibition of the North



*We're delighted to be announced as the first major sponsor for next year's Great Exhibition of the North, which will take place in Newcastle Gateshead.*

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The Government backed Exhibition celebrates art and culture, design and innovation and will take place between 22 June - 9 September 2018.

Our sponsorship was announced at an event at Newcastle station, with Karen Bradley MP, Secretary of State for Culture, and Sir Gary Verity, the Chair of the Great Exhibition of the North Project Board.

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## New secure bike hubs across our network



*We've installed secure bike hubs across our network at Peterborough, Newark, Doncaster, Darlington, and Durham stations.*

We've installed secure bike hubs across our network at Peterborough, Newark, Doncaster, Darlington, and Durham stations. These installations have meant we've provided over 250 additional secure cycle spaces across our network, with the existing hubs at Darlington and Durham being made secure through installing a gate. The secure compounds require fob access for a small annual fee and benefit from CCTV coverage and lighting, helping to prevent bike theft at our stations.

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## Improving our toilets on board



*We're making changes to our on board toilets to improve their reliability.*

We're making changes to our on board toilets to improve their reliability, as we know that on board cleanliness is a priority for our passengers. We've installed new air fresheners across our fleet and renewed air valves, and we have installed new door access controls to ensure these do not break while in use. New towel dispensers and better bins have also been installed to ensure waste can be more easily disposed. We are also improving how we tank our toilets, meaning that we're able to clear out any blockages more easily and ensure our Inverness services do not run out of water.

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## Improving Newark North Gate station and car park



*Works to improve Newark station began on the 25<sup>th</sup> September, with completion expected by the end of January 2018.*

Works to improve Newark station began on the 25<sup>th</sup> September, with completion expected by the end of January 2018.

To improve access to the station and reduce congestion during peak hours, there will be dedicated bus waiting facilities and electronic information, as well as a new taxi waiting area. This will involve reconfiguring the forecourt of the station. The car park will also be fully resurfaced, with 50 fewer spaces available at any one time during refurbishment. We will undertake a full car park closure on the weekends of 25-6 November and 2-3 December.

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## Helping to transform Doncaster station



*We're supporting a multi-million pound transformation of the entrance and approach to Doncaster station.*

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The transformation of the station entrance is part of the council's plans to encourage further business investment in the town. We are supporting the council by investing £500,000 to create a canopy to provide shelter for customers accessing the new taxi rank and drop off just south of the station's entrance. Doncaster Council is planning to pedestrianise the forecourt outside the station and in February this year the council secured £7 million of Sheffield City Region funding to transform the station forecourt.

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## Launching Seatfrog to allow our passengers to upgrade



*We're launching Seatfrog on the East Coast, a brand new app that allows customers to bid to upgrade their seats from Standard to First Class.*

We're launching Seatfrog on the East Coast, a brand new app that allows customers to bid to upgrade their seats from Standard to First Class. This is a world first in the rail industry, made possible by our Innovation team.

Customers will need to download the app and enter their booking reference, where a couple of hours before they travel they'll be offered the opportunity to bid for an upgrade to First Class if there are seats available on their service.