

Engineering work in March 2005

Engineering work normally takes place at weekends and the following West Coast services will be affected in March.

London Euston – Northampton

Sundays 6, 13, 20, 27 March

Trains will not be able to run south of Northampton until 1200.

- Replacement coaches will run between Northampton and Milton Keynes, Watford Junction and London Euston.

Rugby – Stafford

Saturdays and Sundays 5/6, 12/13, 19/20, Sunday 27, Monday 28 March

Trains will not be able to call at Nuneaton, Tamworth and Lichfield Trent Valley and will follow an alternative route through the West Midlands.

- Replacement coaches will run between Nuneaton and Coventry and between Tamworth, Lichfield and Birmingham International
- On Saturdays, London Euston to Holyhead and Llandudno services will start from Crewe.

Macclesfield – Stockport – Manchester Piccadilly

Sundays 6, 13, 20, 27 March

Trains will not be able to call at Stockport.

- Trains between London Euston and Manchester Piccadilly will be diverted via Stafford, Wilmslow and the line through Styal.
- Replacement coaches will run between Macclesfield and Manchester via Stockport, also between Macclesfield and Wilmslow.
- Additional trains will run between London Euston and Macclesfield via Stoke-on-Trent.

Crewe – Liverpool

Saturdays and Sundays 5/6, 12/13, 19/20, 26/27 March

From 1200 Saturday and all day Sunday trains from London Euston to Liverpool will follow an alternative route after Crewe and will not be able to call at Runcorn.

- Replacement coaches will run from Crewe to Liverpool Lime Street via Runcorn

Crewe – Glasgow Central

Saturdays and Sundays 5/6, 12/13, 19/20, 26/27 March

Most of the West Coast Main Line will be closed between Crewe and Glasgow.

- Trains from London Euston will follow an alternative route after leaving Crewe and terminate at Preston.
- Replacement coaches will run between Crewe and Preston to serve **Warrington** and **Wigan**.
- Replacement coaches will run between Preston and Carlisle to serve **Lancaster**, **Oxenholme** and **Penrith**.
- Replacement coaches will run between Carlisle and Glasgow/Edinburgh to serve **Lockerbie** and **Motherwell**.
- We advise customers travelling from London to Scotland to use the GNER service from Kings Cross to Glasgow.
- Some services from Birmingham and Manchester to Carlisle and Glasgow will run via alternative routes.

We strongly advise that you check your journey details nearer the date of travel by

- visiting nationalrail.co.uk
- calling National Rail Enquiries on 08457 48 49 50

If you have any comments about Virgin Trains, please let us know by writing or calling:

Customer Relations
Virgin Trains
PO Box 713
Birmingham B5 4HH

Tel: 0870 789 1234
(national call rates apply)
Textphone: 0121 654 7528
customer.relations@virgintrains.co.uk

West Coast Update

Issue 15, February 2005

Dear Customer

When I'm out and about, one of the main topics of conversations is inevitably the Pendolino fleet. People want to know how it is coping with the challenge of growing up in public. The honest answer is that although they are not yet doing as well as we would like in terms of reliability, there's still plenty to be encouraged by.

Every new type of train goes through a difficult initial period when it first accumulates mileage in customer service. But this time is when you learn the most about the true capability of your fleet. We now know the niggling problems that have held back the Pendolinos and realise where we need to focus our maintenance efforts.

The good news is that none of the flaws that we have found are fundamental. The tilt technology is working really well, which is great news for customers and the industry as a whole.

The rail industry is unlike any other in its willingness to pump out scores of statistics that are shared readily and reported widely. You may have seen some of the reliability statistics for Pendolinos. The references to miles between failures and casualties sound horribly dramatic. Please don't be alarmed by this language. These are just railway industry terms for faults that have an impact of five minutes or more on an individual journey, nothing more. They do not mean that a train has failed to complete a journey.

One of the many great things about the Pendolino is its resilience. These are tough trains that have been designed and built to last long into the future. If a driver detects a fault, more often than not he is able to reset the onboard computer and clear the problem, just as you would with your PC at home, in the office or indeed on one of our trains.

In fact, the Pendolino is proving to be extremely effective at getting our customers from the beginning of a journey to its end, which is more than we could say about some of its predecessors.

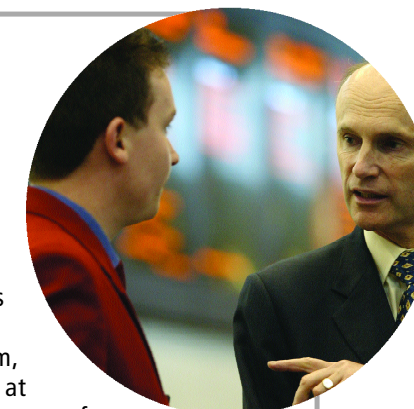
The challenge now is to increase reliability. If we can manage this, greater customer confidence will follow.

Yours sincerely



Charles Belcher
Managing Director, West Coast

North Wing Offices
Euston Station
London, NW1 2DS
charles@virgintrains.co.uk



Royal honour for our Elsa

One of the most appealing aspects of the current honours system is that it offers recognition of the efforts of ordinary people who work behind the scenes, alongside more recognisable people from public life. So we were delighted that our own Elsa Redpath was awarded an MBE in the Queen's 2004 New Year Honours List for her services to the rail industry.



Chairman Chris Green as his secretary. She also is known and respected throughout the rail industry for her charity work.

Elsa's response to her award was characteristic. She said: "I am delighted, but very surprised, to receive the award. I've thoroughly enjoyed my rail industry career, but would never have thought it would attract such attention. I really appreciate the many colleagues with whom I've been privileged to work, and their splendid teamwork which makes this achievement possible."





Helping hand for brave children from MD

Charles Belcher, Managing Director for West Coast is seen helping the Parry family to board the Holyhead to Euston train at Bangor as they start their journey to London to receive Children of Courage awards.

In December 2002, Wendy Parry and her four children were involved in a car crash in which Jade, 12, was killed instantly and the other three children, Connor, 10, Paige, 9, and Chelsea, 6, all received life threatening injuries. Many families might have given into despair but the fact that the Parry's didn't, say Wendy and husband John, was a testimony to the incredible courage and optimism of the surviving children.

During the journey, Charles presented each of the children with a specially framed certificate signed by Richard Branson.

You can Chip and PIN at all our stations

All West Coast managed stations now have the new Chip and PIN system in place for credit card transactions, and customers are now able to use this much more secure method to purchase their tickets.

Instead of having to sign a sales voucher the credit card holder simply enters their PIN number thereby considerably reducing the risk of any security breach. Next time you're buying a ticket at a Virgin Trains West Coast station why not give the new technology a try. You'll be surprised how easy it is.

Chip and PIN Safety in numbers
www.chipandpin.co.uk



The West Coast franchise

On 14 January, Stagecoach Group plc (which owns 49% of Virgin Rail Group) issued an update on the progress of our bid to run the West Coast franchise. It explained that we agreed with the Strategic Rail Authority (SRA) a further period was needed to assess further revenue, passenger and operational data as part of the franchise negotiations.

The negotiations will now include an assessment of the impact of the new 125mph West Coast timetable over a 12 month period to September 2005. Both we and the SRA believe that this sensible and constructive approach will help to produce a more sustainable new franchise agreement that will benefit customers, shareholders and taxpayers in the long term.

New reservations system benefits customers

Over the Christmas period, the rail industry made the transition to a new National Reservations System (NRS). The NRS enables customers to buy tickets further in advance as it streamlines the process for train companies to confirm train times and open services for reservations.

Although weekday reservations are available several weeks in advance, weekend availability is still limited. We are doing everything we can to improve the situation. The complexity and scale of engineering works on the network makes it difficult for our Network Rail colleagues to release final timetable information as early as we, and our customers, would like. Improving this situation is at the top of our list of priorities.

Winning dish for the Caledonian

Diners on our prestigious Caledonian train will soon be tucking in to two distinctive dishes that won the approval of eight judges in a national competition.

Louise Ellard, one of our sister company's CrossCountry customer service team at Edinburgh Waverley station, gained the prize for best recipe in the Food Masters' Signature Awards.

Louise's uisge beatha creac – Gaelic for "whisky chicken" – won the accolade for best suggestion for a new menu for evening meals on The Caledonian, one of our Pendolino train services on the West Coast Main Line.

Her recipe for chicken breast stuffed with haggis, accompanied by whisky sauce, will be served in the spring on The Caledonian train.

Jane Hemsworth of our London Euston station team was also awarded a special prize for her recipe for Vegetarian Red Dragon Pie, including aduki beans, onions, carrots, cheese and tomatoes.

Since introducing the Caledonian in September, passengers on the fast new 17:15 from London Euston to Glasgow have given the thumbs up to a range of other meals including Cullen Skink Pie, Beef Bourguignon, Lamb Pie and Coq au Vin.

The Caledonian has a unique menu to emphasise the distinctive nature of this flagship train. For First Class customers, these meals with wine are complimentary, served at seat with savoury nibbles to start, cakes and fresh fruit to follow.

The main course is served with vegetables and a choice of mashed potatoes or chips, and can also be ordered from the on-train shop by holders of Standard Class tickets on payment of £12.50.



FastTicket machines a hit with customers

2004 saw a huge rise in the number of tickets sold online, via call centres and the growing number of FastTicket machines introduced at stations on the West Coast Mainline.

Customers' growing confidence in using alternative ways of buying tickets has meant that more than one third of sales on the West Coast Mainline is now through electronic and telephone purchasing. Around 16 million passengers use Virgin Trains West Coast services per annum.



Virgin Trains has pioneered the use of new forms of ticket purchasing to make it easier and cheaper for customers to book ahead of travel and to avoid ticket office queues. The biggest rise has been through use of FastTicket machines – which have shown a 68 per cent increase over the last year and now account for 12 per cent of revenue on West Coast. At Stoke-on-Trent station 24 percent of sales revenue is through its FastTicket machines, Crewe 20 percent and Oxenholme and Penrith 17 percent each.

Virgin Trains' £1.5 million investment in the 75 machines at West Coast stations is paying dividends as they rapidly gain in popularity. They are also all being converted to accept Chip and PIN credit cards to improve security.

Assaults on staff

The vast majority of our customers are law-abiding people who conduct themselves while on railway property in a sensible and responsible manner. A very small minority, however, believe that on occasions to suit themselves its acceptable to assault rail staff who are going about their lawful business.

Because of this, Virgin Trains have joined other rail companies in a yearlong campaign to bring attention to this problem and many of you will have seen the series of eye-catching posters at stations. In 2003 there were 350 cases of staff assault on our services to/from London Euston alone.

An increase in assaults involving spitting has led to the issue of DNA swab testing kits to our front line staff. These kits are used by British transport Police to identify and prosecute offenders.

If you see anyone assaulting staff or passengers please contact the British Transport Police on 0800 40 50 40 giving details of date, time and location.

Carlisle – city of recovery

Many of you will have seen the dramatic pictures of the flooding of Carlisle over the weekend of 8/9 January. The station is right at the heart of the city and our staff have been rightly praised for the way in which they helped customers and local people in very difficult circumstances.

The elements began to turn on the Friday, when high winds caused structural damage to the station. The following day saw the worst flooding of the city since the 1800s. As the waters rose, manager Ann Turner and her team closed the station. Soon after, the power went off.

With road and rail routes in the surrounding areas also shut down, our staff had to be highly inventive to get customers to their destinations, including one elderly lady who had bravely come to Carlisle on a shopping trip that morning.

Some staff literally waded into work to help customers. The Lakes Court hotel next door to the station also provided tremendous aid and support, not least through a continuous supply of strong coffee.

Over the next few days, life gradually got back to normal: Carlisle is once more open for business. You would never know that anything unusual had happened.

The news coverage certainly put Carlisle on the map. We hear the city has been getting top hits on www.citybreaks.org.uk, which promotes visits to great English 'renaissance' cities.

Performance update – a better time for business customers

Our performance in the four weeks to 8 January 2005 did not match our targets. Punctuality decreased slightly to 66.5%. Our 23 key business trains performed better: they scored 77.3% for arrivals into Euston within 10 minutes of the advertised arrival time.

The period was punctuated by infrastructure-related incidents that limited the efficiency of our services. The severe weather of 8 January had a massive impact on performance. This was exacerbated by a power failure at Tring the day before, which resulted in over 4,000 minutes of delay to our services. There were also multiple track circuit failures at Polesworth on 20 December and overhead line problems at Kilsby Tunnel on 15 December.

