

LATEST Eurostar reports 'strong' post-Olympic growth

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## All change at Virgin as top managers move on

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VIRGIN Trains chief executive Tony Collins and chief operating officer Chris Gibb are leaving the company within a month or so. Chris Gibb will then become a non-executive director of Network Rail.

The operator is owned partly by Stagecoach, which has a 49 per cent stake in the business, and the new management team will be overseen by joint executive chairmen Patrick McCall from Virgin and Martin Griffiths from Stagecoach Group. Both have been involved in the management of the business for more than a decade and will now chair the monthly executive meeting.

Tony Collins said it was the 'right time' to hand over to a new management team, with the decision over the next longer-term West Coast Main Line franchise scheduled for 2017. He will remain as a consultant to Virgin Rail Group.

The new lead executive -- a new title -- will be the present finance director Phil Whittingham, who will assume the responsibility of continuing the negotiations with the Department for Transport over the next interim contract, which must begin no later than November next year, following the award of a 23-month 'emergency' management contract to Virgin in December 2012. This was necessary after the collapse of the West Coast franchise competition a year ago.

Phil Bearpark, who is currently Virgin Trains production director, will become director operations and customer service, and will also be the safety system duty holder. Other senior people will remain in their present posts.

Tony Collins said: "I have thoroughly enjoyed leading Virgin Trains and working with the wonderful staff to build a railway service that we can be truly proud of. We have come a long way in the last 10 years and we could not have done it without the amazing support of our people. We overcame all the odds last year and I know the team at Virgin Trains will carry on delivering the excellent customer service and innovation that we are famed for. It has been a great ride."

Chris Gibb added: "Delivering great customer service truly is a team effort, requiring not only great staff, which we have in spades at Virgin Trains, but also co-operation between the different stakeholders across the industry. I am especially proud of the part I have played in bringing these important individual parties together to deliver improved performance. That's the foundation which great service is built on and I'm confident the team at Virgin Trains will continue to deliver further improvements to the service we provide for our customers."

There was praise for their contributions over the years from Virgin's Richard Branson and Brian Souter, the chairman of Stagecoach Group.

Sir Richard Branson said: "Tony, Chris and the team at Virgin Trains have transformed the West Coast Main Line from a laughing stock into Europe's busiest long distance rail service. We have cut journey times, improved service and radically changed people's experiences. Tony is passing the baton to a hugely experienced senior management team at Virgin Trains who are focused on how we can make services even better."

Meanwhile, Network Rail chairman Richard Parry-Jones said: "Network Rail's success is a vital role to play in the delivery of our key outputs and in setting the strategic direction of the business, and we need a strong talent base from the rail industry and beyond to help us meet that challenge."

"Chris brings with him decades of invaluable experience, providing first-hand expertise of the wide range of issues facing train operators."

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#### Rob Horwood, Auckland NZ

Very Best Wishes to Tony and Chris for the future, both top railwaymen, excellent to work with.

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