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APCOA TO INTRODUCE STRESS-RELIEVING TELEPHONE PAYMENT SYSTEM FOR CAR PARKING AT 63 FIRST GREAT WESTERN RAIL STATIONS FROM HAYES TO PENZANCE

UK's Biggest Telephone Parking Project another Innovation First for APCOA and its Technology Suppliers Cobalt and Spur

Following a successful and popular trial at First Great Western's Bristol Parkway station last year, APCOA and the rail operator have agreed to introduce telephone payment technology to 63 station car parks across the network between London and Penzance. The 63 stations are in fact the only stations on the line where pay & display parking is the responsibility of First Group and its parking contractor APCOA. The project will commence by the end of May this year, and most of the selected stations will have the system installed, up and running within six months. Benefits to rail passengers will be tremendous, and are outlined in the notes below.

APCOA has selected Cobalt Telephone Technologies and Spur Information Solutions as its systems suppliers for this project. Cobalt's "RingGo" system was at the heart of the Bristol Parkway trial, and it will be the system in place at the 63 First Great Western stations, as an alternative to the current pay & display arrangements which will remain in the car parks. Spur Solutions will be supplying the handheld equipment which APCOA's Parking Attendants will be using to monitor and enforce parking on the line, and which will integrate with Cobalt's RingGo technology.

Commenting, APCOA's managing director Paul Bird said: "This project takes APCOA's culture of innovation to a new level, because it represents real joined-up thinking, management and teamwork between ourselves and our technology suppliers. More important than that, it will really improve parking for First Great Western customers at those stations where it is installed."

Echoing those thoughts, Spur Information Solutions' Technology Director Adrian Farrell had this to say: "I couldn't agree more. The parking industry is very competitive with all of us – contractors and technology suppliers – striving continually to find new and better ways to ease the parking pressures on customers. Joined-up thinking is a very apt description for what APCOA has achieved with ourselves and Cobalt, and we will work very hard to ensure that it delivers everything which it promises."

Perhaps the last word should go to Harry Clarke, Commercial Director of Cobalt Telephone Technologies, the company behind RingGo, who said: "We are delighted that APCOA has chosen the RingGo phone parking solution in support of First Great Western. The first phase of the rollout, to over 12,000 parking bays, stretches from London to Penzance. The sheer scale makes this by far the most significant deployment of phone-based parking ever undertaken in England. As the recent British Parking Awards made clear APCOA is both bold and innovative. That's clearly what First Great Western liked about APCOA when awarding them the extended parking contract back in January. That's what we like about them too, and we thoroughly look forward to delivering to their promise to First Great Western and their passengers."

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Note: How the new system works:

Customers register their credit card details and vehicle registration numbers with the system. Then, when they arrive at the station car park, all they have to do is find a space and park. No need to buy a permit, just make their way to their trains and take care of that side of their journeys first. When they have a moment, they can then use their mobile phones to purchase their parking for the day. Payment is entirely secure, and the system can even send out VAT receipts online.

Suppose some customers then find that they will be returning on a later train, and therefore their cars will be parked for longer than planned? No need to worry about getting a parking ticket, because they can use the new system remotely, to top up their parking from wherever they happen to be.

The cost of using the new system is 20p per transaction, on top of the standard parking charges. If the customer has paid for five days parking, then the cost is 20p on top of the parking charge; if the customer uses the system to extend parking by a few hours, an additional 20p will be charged. It is not expensive, and from the perspective of relieving stress, it represents outstanding value-for-money.

From the viewpoint of those APCOA Parking Attendants who patrol the station car parks, using the system to check that parking has been paid-for could not be easier. Using either specially enabled mobile phones, or Spur handheld computers – all they have to do is enter a car's registration number and then press one button. The system then allows them to see instantly on their screen, that vehicle's parking "history" including whether or not its driver has paid for today's parking via the RingGo system, and also appropriate information about previous parking warnings and parking tickets.

This new "cashless" parking payment system represents a tremendous step, and it takes a lot of the stress out of parking.

The bottom line is that this new system will improve the rail experience for a significant number of First Great Western customers which, in a competitive world, is exactly what everybody needs.

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