

Low-cost rail firm launches in UK to take on CO2-belching airlines

Words by Gavin Haines

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Lumo promises to provide a greener, cheaper, more comfortable alternative to flying on the UK's busiest domestic route.

The steep cost of train tickets in the UK means many travellers take to the skies instead, where low-cost carriers undercut rail firms on some domestic routes.



Given the unfolding climate crisis and aviation's stubbornly high emissions, environmentalists warn that such a scenario isn't sustainable.

Enter Lumo, a low-cost, low-carbon rail firm that has launched to provide an alternative to flying on the UK's busiest domestic route (pre pandemic): London to Edinburgh.

Its all-electric trains are scheduled to start running on 25 October, with one-way tickets starting from £14.90. Lumo said that 60 per cent of all fares would cost £30 or less.

Once airport dwell time, flight time and time spent travelling to and from airports is factored in, the firm reckons its services (journey time: four hours, 17 minutes) will be about as quick as flying. There will be one train per day in both directions to begin with, rising to 10 by "early next year". Trains will run on the East Coast Mainline, and will call at Newcastle and Stevenage.

Lumo's launch comes as demand for green travel surges across Europe, and UK rail operators – including FirstGroup, which owns Lumo – face criticism for the ballooning cost of fares.

"Travelling in the UK should not cost a fortune and it certainly shouldn't be the planet that pays," said Helen Wylde, Lumo's managing director. "Whatever your preferred mode of transport, we are likely to be more affordable and kinder to the planet."

Lumo said that 60 per cent of all fares would cost £30 or less. Image: Lumo

Lumo has no immediate plans to serve other routes. However, the firm said that its trains provide "a blueprint for low-carbon, affordable long-distance travel in the UK", with their free wifi, at-seat catering and ergonomic chairs. More than half of the onboard catering menu, it added, is plant-based.

"People are now considering their impact on the environment very carefully," said Wylde. "Travelling by rail is already the greenest form of long-distance travel in the UK. Lumo will take this further, being the 'greenest in class' with state-of-the-art electric trains and a service to match."