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Stagecoach Group has launched its new, low cost intercity train travel service portal, megatrain.com.

This latest venture follows the huge success of megabus.com, which now has a national network covering 35 UK cities and carries around 1.5 million passengers a year. The megabus website, which celebrated its second anniversary in August, has seen weekly passenger numbers shoot up by nearly 25% in just six months.

More than three million passengers have now travelled with megabus.com since the first trial route was launched in August 2003 and a national network went live in March 2004. This summer saw the introduction of a £6.5 million fleet of new state-of-the-art double-decker coaches with air-conditioning, toilets and more comfortable seats.

The new megatrain venture offers more than 3000 seats per week via the megatrain.com website on a number of off-peak services Monday to Saturday. The concept is being piloted at South West Trains, the UK's biggest rail franchise, on the Portsmouth-London and Southampton-London Routes. The first megatrain.com services will run from 14 November and bookings will be accepted from 31/10/05 when the new website goes live.

Both the megabus and the new megatrain services are ticket-less and can only be purchased from the website or from a telephone booking centre. When a reservation is made through megatrain.com or megabus.com, a reservation number is issued. This needs to be presented to the guard/driver before boarding a megatrain or megabus. To offer complete convenience, megatrain customers are able to choose to receive their booking confirmation number via mobile text message or e-mail. Not surprisingly, many customers choose the convenient option of receiving an SMS text message.

The SMS text message system is powered by aql.com, the award winning SMS solutions portal. Their track record and direct connections with network providers such as O₂ help to ensure fast and auditable SMS message delivery.

aql provided support to Stagecoach and advice on how their systems could be linked to aql's messaging platforms in a secure manner, providing automated, reliable text messaging 24/7. George Connell, Projects Manager, says "The great thing about the aql service is that once everything is set up, it simply works, allowing us to focus on what we do well – delivering quality transport services".

Dr Adam Beaumont, Managing Director of aql commented : "We're pleased to be part of the Megabus success story – we're dedicated to supporting Stagecoach and we're sure that megatrain.com will mirror the success of the megabus project".