

Local protest against Virgin East Coast.

Local campaigners surprised commuters at Waverley this morning when they staged a 'fundraiser' for Richard Branson as part of a campaign to bring his train franchise into public ownership.

✘ At 8am this morning, campaigners arrived at Waverley armed with buckets and leaflets bearing the face of the entrepreneur. Their aim was not to collect money, but to illustrate what they see as wrong with Richard Branson's Virgin Trains receiving a bailout (along with Stagecoach) for their mismanagement of the Virgin Trains East Coast rail franchise.

Ken O'Neill who helped to organise the Edinburgh demonstration said : "I'm tired of seeing tax avoiding companies like Virgin and Stagecoach accept subsidies from the UK Government.

"Surely it is cheaper and better for the country to bring the railways back into public ownership and stop companies prioritising shareholders' wallets rather than passengers.

"The East Coast line was better run and more efficient when it was run in public ownership between 2009 to 2015. I've travelled using the service regularly over the last fifteen years and have seen prices go up while the service has fallen since Stagecoach and Virgin got their hands on the franchise.

"I've had enough of these companies feathering their nests from the public purse and hope others will join us in this fight."

The protest was backed by national campaign group [We Own It](#), who are running their own 'fundraiser' at Kings Cross station in London. They are calling for the East Coast line to be brought into public ownership, as it was between 2009 and

2015.

Cat Hobbs Director of We Own It said : "The East Coast line was successful under public ownership and that it was the most efficient rail franchise in the country. In 2015 it was re-privatised and handed to Virgin and Stagecoach, who they say have failed to make the profit they were expecting. They now expect to be compensated for their lack of profit by being allowed to walk out of their contract three years early, avoiding almost £2bn of franchise payments.

" Whether it's Carillion or Virgin, it's the same old story. Private companies grab profit while they can and leave the public to pick up the pieces. Richard Branson sued our NHS and is now backing out of his promises on the East Coast line. The government must stop allowing these chaotic, blood sucking private companies to run our vital public services. Privatisation has failed. The solution is clear: accountable, efficient public ownership. Chris Grayling should bring the East Coast line into public hands, which worked very well from 2009 to 2015 – before we all get ripped off again. ."