

Lab 5. Let's Catch a Train



In this lab, we will design and build a chatbot to help users plan their train journeys. We will use a Transport data API to obtain information about trains, their arrival and departure timings at stations, and so on, and to serve the information, build a chatbot to interact with users in natural language. We will then explore how the chatbot can be exposed to the SMS platform. We will learn to use the services of a communications API provider called Twilio. We will also learn how to plug in toolkits such as API.AI to understand user utterances and manage the conversation in an SMS chatbot.

First, let's take a look at the Transport API and the data that it has to offer. Based on the data that is available, we will then brainstorm and design some sample conversational tasks. We will then build a simple one-way SMS bot that can send timely notifications to users. And build on that to develop a two-way chatbot that sends train information to users based on their requests in natural language. We will explore how to build and integrate API.AI agents into our chatbot to understand language and drive the conversation.

By the end of this lab, you will be able to:

- Design conversational tasks based on data
- Create backend task modules using Transport API
- Build SMS bots using Twilio
- Integrate a Dialogflow agent to understand user utterances

Lab Solution

Complete solution of this lab is present in following directory. Run "npm install" in the terminal to download node modules and run application:

```
/root/Desktop/chatbots-development/Lab05
```

Exploring Transport API

To get started, let's have a look at the data source that we are going to use in this lab. Transport API is a data service for all public transport services in the UK. If you are in a different country, you would be able to find something similar to your country. But you can still play around with this service. Transport API is a data platform for transport data providing information on live arrivals and departures, timetables, journey planning, fares, performance indicators, and commuters tweet mapping. Data is served using RESTful web services.

Creating a developer account

1. To get started, create a developer account at <https://developer.transportapi.com> and get an app key and app ID:



Get started

Welcome to the TransportAPI developer portal. Let's get you started

Sign up



Sign up to use TransportAPI

Get your API key



Use your app id & key to authenticate and report the calls you make

Create your app



Start coding and create awesome applications with TransportAPI

2. Let's try the following sample request. Replace `YOUR_APP_ID` and `YOUR_APP_KEY` with your app ID and key. Execute the following `GET` request from a web browser. At this request, we are trying to retrieve information concerning Euston train station, in London:

```
http://transportapi.com/v3/uk/places.json?query=euston&type=train_station&app_id=YOUR_APP_ID&app_key=YOUR_APP_KEY
```

The preceding request will return a JSON response with information such as the full name of the station, its latitude and longitude coordinates, and station code:

```
▼ {
  "request_time": "2017-08-05T07:06:08+01:00",
  "source": "Network Rail",
  "acknowledgements": "Contains information of Network Rail Infrastructure Limited. License
http://www.networkrail.co.uk/data-feeds/terms-and-conditions/",
  "member": [
    ▼ {
      "type": "train_station",
      "name": "Edinburgh Gateway",
      "latitude": 55.940938,
      "longitude": -3.320251,
      "accuracy": 100,
      "station_code": "EGY",
      "tiploc_code": "EDINGWY"
    },
    ▼ {
      "type": "train_station",
      "name": "Edinburgh",
      "latitude": 55.952391,
      "longitude": -3.188228,
      "accuracy": 100,
      "station_code": "EDB",
      "tiploc_code": "EDINBUR"
    },
    ▼ {
      "type": "train_station",
      "name": "Edinburgh Park",
      "latitude": 55.927549,
      "longitude": -3.307664,
      "accuracy": 100,
      "station_code": "EDP",
      "tiploc_code": "EDINPRK"
    }
  ]
}
```

Exploring the dataset

Transport API provides data regarding trains, buses, the tube (subway), and many other forms of transport. To build our chatbot, let's begin with just the trains' data. In this section, let's take a look at the different kinds of data available about trains. For all requests, the base URL is `http://transportapi.com/v3/uk/`.

Train stations near you

This endpoint provides a list of train stations near a given location. The search location should be provided as a latLon coordinate, as follows:

```
http://transportapi.com/v3/uk/train/stations/near.json?
lat=55.9485&lon=-3.2021&app_id=YOUR_APP_ID&app_key=YOUR_APP_KEY
```

Response

The response we get is a list of stations near the given latLon coordinates. For each station, we get its name, location, and station code:

```

▼ {
  "minlon": -3.4521,
  "minlat": 55.6985,
  "maxlon": -2.9521,
  "maxlat": 56.1985,
  "searchlon": -3.2021,
  "searchlat": 55.9485,
  "page": 1,
  "rpp": 25,
  "total": 54,
  "request_time": "2017-08-05T06:21:24+01:00",
  ▶ "stations": [ ... ] // 25 items
}

▼ "stations": [
  ▼ {
    "station_code": "EDB",
    "atcocode": null,
    "tiploc_code": "EDINBUR",
    "name": "Edinburgh Waverley",
    "mode": "train",
    "longitude": -3.188228,
    "latitude": 55.952391,
    "distance": 966
  },
  ▶ { ... }, // 8 items
  ▶ { ... }, // 8 items
  ▶ { ... }, // 8 items
]

```

Trains in the area

Train stations can also be searched by providing a bounding box. The top-left and bottom-right coordinates of the box need to be provided. This is particularly useful if you need a list of all stations with city limits or something similar. Let's try this using the bounding box coordinates for Edinburgh:

```

http://transportapi.com/v3/uk/train/stations/bbox.json?
minlon=-3.4521&minlat=55.6985&maxlon=-2.9521&maxlat=56.1985&app_id=YOUR_APP_ID&app_key=

```

Response

The response we get is as follows:

```

▼ {
  "minlon": -3.4521,
  "minlat": 55.6985,
  "maxlon": -2.9521,
  "maxlat": 56.1985,
  "searchlon": -3.2021,
  "searchlat": 55.9485,
  "page": 1,
  "rpp": 25,
  "total": 54,
  "request_time": "2017-08-05T06:58:20+01:00",
  ▼ "stations": [
    ▼ {
      "station_code": "EDB",
      "atcocode": null,
      "tiploc_code": "EDINBUR",
      "name": "Edinburgh Waverley",
      "mode": "train",
      "longitude": -3.188228,
      "latitude": 55.952391,
      "distance": 966
    },
    ▼ {
      "station_code": "HYM",
      "atcocode": null,
      "tiploc_code": "HAYMRKT",
      "name": "Haymarket",
      "mode": "train",
      "longitude": -3.218449,
      "latitude": 55.945806,
      "distance": 1061
    },
  ],
}

```

Live departures

The live status of trains arriving and departing a given station can be obtained using the following endpoint. Let's try it out for Edinburgh Waverley station, whose station code is `EDB` :

```

http://transportapi.com/v3/uk/train/station/EDB/live.json?
&app_id=YOUR_APP_ID&app_key=YOUR_APP_KEY

```

Response

Here is its response:

▼ {

"date": "2017-08-05",
"time_of_day": "06:00",
"request_time": "2017-08-05T06:49:44+01:00",
"station_name": "Edinburgh Waverley",
"station_code": "EDB",
"departures": {
 "all": [
 {
 "mode": "train",
 "service": "13560015",
 "train_uid": "G83644",
 "platform": "10",
 "operator": "SR",
 "operator_name": "Scotrail",
 "aimed_departure_time": "06:07",
 "aimed_arrival_time": null,
 "aimed_pass_time": null,
 "origin_name": "Edinburgh Waverley",
 "source": "ATOC",
 "destination_name": "Milngavie",
 "category": "OO",
 "service_timetable": {
 "id": "http://transportapi.com/v3/uk/train/service/train_uid:G83644/2017-08-05/timetable.json?app_id=60ce46ea&app_key=251dc61414961e8ebfe110329ffa367d"
 }
 },
 {
 "mode": "train",
 "service": "22180008",
 "train_uid": "P31962",
 "platform": "7",
 "operator": "XC",
 "operator_name": "CrossCountry",

Raw

Parsed

Station timetables

Timetables of trains arriving and departing from a given station on a given date and time can be obtained using the following endpoint. Let's get all the trains departing Edinburgh Waverley (EDB) station on 2017-08-05 at

06:00 :

```
http://transportapi.com/v3/uk/train/station/EDB/2017-08-05/06:00/timetable.json?  
app_id=YOUR_APP_ID&app_key=YOUR_APP_KEY
```

Response

And here is the response:

▼ {

Raw

Parsed

```
"date": "2017-08-05",
"time_of_day": "06:00",
"request_time": "2017-08-05T06:49:44+01:00",
"station_name": "Edinburgh Waverley",
"station_code": "EDB",
"departures": {
  "all": [
    {
      "mode": "train",
      "service": "13560015",
      "train_uid": "G83644",
      "platform": "10",
      "operator": "SR",
      "operator_name": "Scotrail",
      "aimed_departure_time": "06:07",
      "aimed_arrival_time": null,
      "aimed_pass_time": null,
      "origin_name": "Edinburgh Waverley",
      "source": "ATOC",
      "destination_name": "Milngavie",
      "category": "OO",
      "service_timetable": {
        "id": "http://transportapi.com/v3/uk/train/service/train_uid:G83644/2017-08-05/timetable.json?app_id=60ce46ea&app_key=251dc61414961e8ebfe110329ffa367d"
      }
    },
    {
      "mode": "train",
      "service": "22180008",
      "train_uid": "P31962",
      "platform": "7",
      "operator": "XC",
      "operator_name": "CrossCountry",
      "aimed_departure_time": "06:00",
      "aimed_arrival_time": null,
      "aimed_pass_time": null,
      "origin_name": "Edinburgh Waverley",
      "source": "ATOC",
      "destination_name": "London Euston",
      "category": "OO",
      "service_timetable": {
        "id": "http://transportapi.com/v3/uk/train/service/train_uid:P31962/2017-08-05/timetable.json?app_id=60ce46ea&app_key=251dc61414961e8ebfe110329ffa367d"
      }
    }
  ]
}
```

Service timetables

Timetables for each train service can also be obtained. This data lets you see the arrival and departure times of a given train service at the various stations it calls at on a given date and time. Let's try an example out with service number, 23587103, on 2017-08-05 at 06:00:

```
http://transportapi.com/v3/uk/train/service/23587103/2017-08-05/06:00/timetable.json?
app_id=YOUR_APP_ID&app_key=YOUR_APP_KEY
```

Response

The response we get for the service timetable is as follows:

```

▼ {
  "service": "23587103",
  "train_uid": "G82394",
  "headcode": "",
  ▼ "toc": {
    "atoc_code": "SR"
  },
  "train_status": "P",
  "origin_name": "Markinch",
  "destination_name": "Edinburgh Waverley",
  "stop_of_interest": null,
  "date": "2017-08-05",
  "time_of_day": "06:00",
  "mode": "train",
  "request_time": "2017-08-05T06:46:22+01:00",
  "category": "00",
  "operator": "SR",
  "operator_name": "Scotrail",
  ▼ "stops": [
    ▼ {
      "station_code": "MNC",
      "tiploc_code": "MKIN",
      "station_name": "Markinch",
      "stop_type": "LO",
      "platform": "1",
      "aimed_departure_date": "2017-08-05",
      "aimed_departure_time": "06:19",
      "aimed_arrival_date": null,
      "aimed_arrival_time": null,
      "aimed_pass_date": null,
      "aimed_pass_time": null
    },
    ▼ {
      "station_code": "GLT",
      "tiploc_code": "GLNRTHS",
      "station_name": "Glenrothes With Thornton",

```

Building a simple SMS bot

Let's now build the SMS platform interface for the chatbot. Let us build a bot to simply send SMS text messages to a mobile number. This could be a message concerning the status of a train arriving at a station or the next train to a certain destination from a given station. To do this, we will use a service called Twilio. Twilio is a developer platform for communications enabling developers to add messaging, voice, and video capabilities to their software. We will explore how we can build notification bots and chatbots using Twilio's messaging infrastructure.

Getting started

To get started with Twilio, perform the following steps:

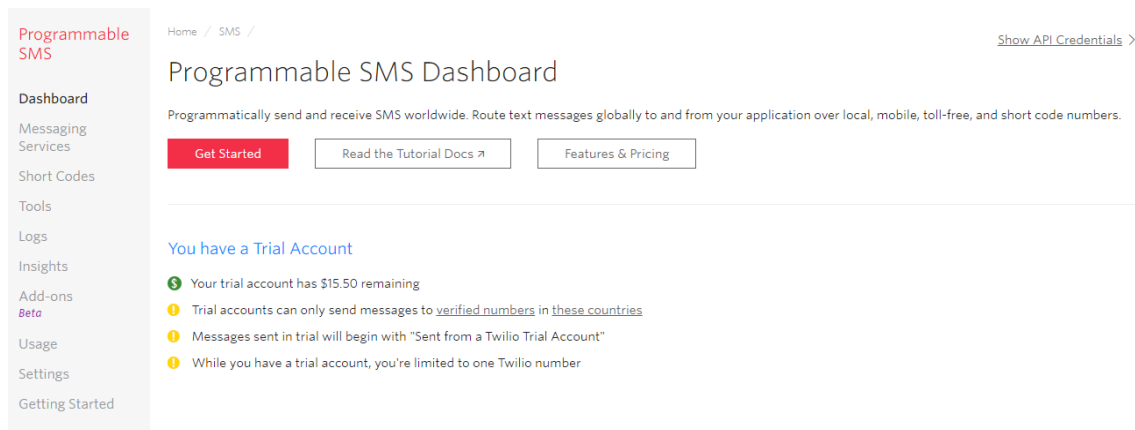
1. Go to www.twilio.com, click **Sign Up** and register yourself for a free trial account.
2. Once you have registered, go over to the console page at www.twilio.com/console.
3. Copy the **ACCOUNT SID** and **Account Key**. We will be using them for our projects.

Setting up the dashboard

Let us build a bot that sends the notification to a user's mobile number. Twilio has four main products:

Programmable Chat, **Programmable SMS**, **Programmable Voice**, and **Programmable Video**. To build a notification sender, we need to use the **Programmable SMS** service. Here are the steps:

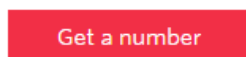
1. On the console dashboard, select **Programmable SMS**.
2. On the **Programmable SMS Dashboard**, click **Get Started**:



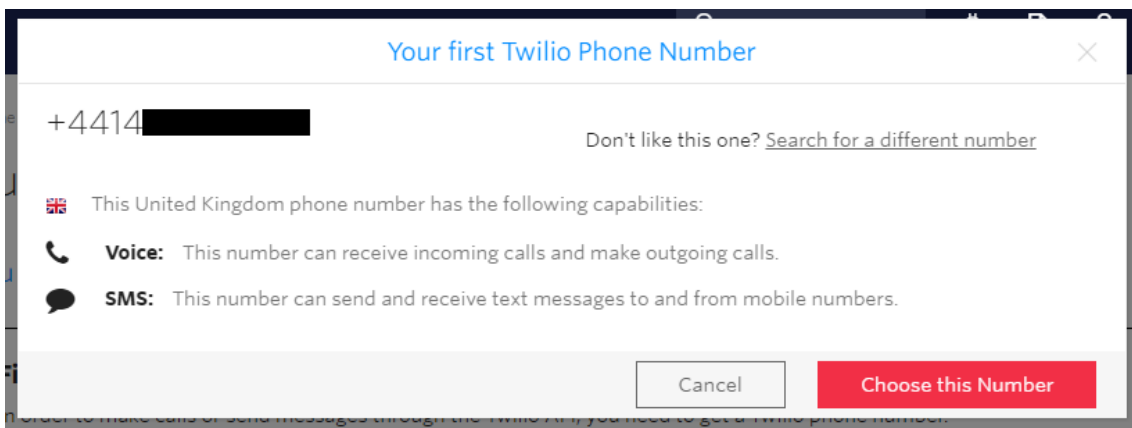
3. In order to send SMS messages, you need a phone number. Click **Get a number** to get one:

First let's get a Twilio phone number

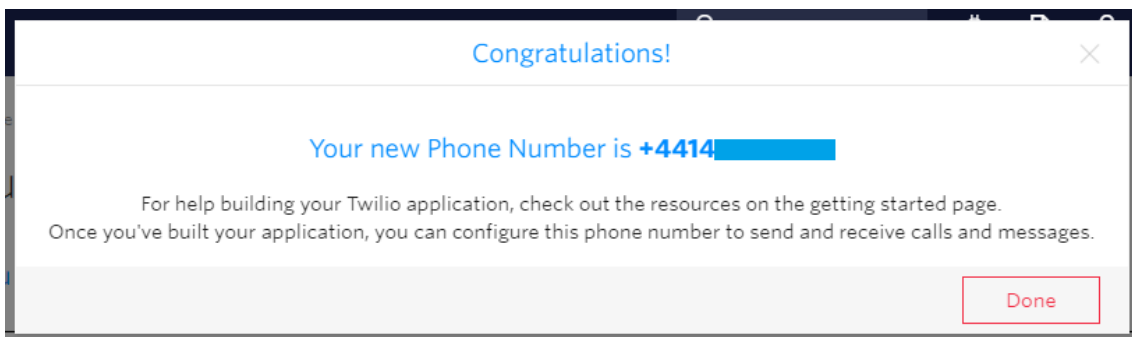
In order to make calls or send messages through the Twilio API, you need to get a Twilio phone number.



4. This will provide you with a number. You can choose to accept it by clicking **Choose this Number**. If not, pick another one. Make sure that the number has SMS capability:



5. You will receive an acknowledgment that you have been allocated the number:



Click **Done** .

6. Are you seeing the **Send a Message** window? Why don't you send yourself a message? Send a test message to your registered cellphone number (the number that you used to verify the account):

▼ Send a Message

TO

FROM

BODY

Make Request

This request may cost money. Find [pricing information here](#).

7. Check your cellphone to see whether you have received your test message. Click **Yes** to inform Twilio that you have received your message.

Simple Message Sender

Now that we have set up the account and got a phone number, let's move ahead to create a bot to send notifications. To do this, perform the following steps:

1. Open the console window and create a directory called `SMSBot`.
2. In the `SMSBot` directory, create a new Node.js project using the `npm init` command, as shown here:

```
C:\Users\Srini\Documents\workspace\SMSBot>npm init
This utility will walk you through creating a package.json file.
It only covers the most common items, and tries to guess sensible defaults.

See `npm help json` for definitive documentation on these fields
and exactly what they do.

Use `npm install <pkg> --save` afterwards to install a package and
save it as a dependency in the package.json file.

Press ^C at any time to quit.
name: (SMSBot) smsbot
version: (1.0.0)
description: A simple SMS sending bot
entry point: (index.js)
test command:
git repository:
keywords:
author: Srini Janarthanam
license: (ISC)
About to write to C:\Users\Srini\Documents\workspace\SMSBot\package.json:
{
  "name": "smsbot",
  "version": "1.0.0",
  "description": "A simple SMS sending bot",
  "main": "index.js",
  "scripts": {
    "test": "echo \"Error: no test specified\" && exit 1"
  },
  "author": "Srini Janarthanam",
  "license": "ISC"
}
```

Check the directory to see the files that have been generated. You will see a file called `package.json` with meta information concerning the project.

3. We need to install the Twilio Node.js library to build our SMS bot. On the console, execute the `npm install twilio --save` command:

```
C:\Users\Srini\Documents\workspace\SMSBot>npm install twilio
npm WARN package.json smsbot@1.0.0 No repository field.
npm WARN package.json smsbot@1.0.0 No README data
twilio@3.6.1 node_modules\twilio
├── deprecate@1.0.0
├── scmp@0.0.3
├── rootpath@0.1.2
├── xmlbuilder@9.0.1
├── q@2.0.3 (weak-map@1.0.5, pop-iterate@1.0.1, asap@2.0.6)
├── request@2.81.0 (aws-sign2@0.6.0, tunnel-agent@0.6.0, forever-agent@0.6.1, oauth-sign@0.8.2, is-type
darray@1.0.0, caseless@0.12.0, safe-buffer@5.1.1, stringstream@0.0.5, aws4@1.6.0, isstream@0.1.2, json-
stringify-safe@5.0.1, extend@3.0.1, performance-now@0.2.0, uuid@3.1.0, qs@6.4.0, combined-stream@1.0.5,
mime-types@2.1.16, tough-cookie@2.3.2, form-data@2.1.4, hawk@3.1.3, http-signature@1.1.1, har-validato
r@4.2.1)
├── moment@2.18.1
├── jsonwebtoken@7.4.2 (ms@2.0.0, lodash.once@4.1.1, xtend@4.0.1, jws@3.1.4, joi@6.10.1)
├── lodash@4.0.0
```

4. Let's create a new JS file called `index.js`. Add the following code to the file:

```
//Index.js - SMSBot

//Add your Account SID
varaccountSid='your_account_sid';
//Add your Auth Token here
varauthToken='your_auth_token';vartwilio=require('twilio');varclient=newtwilio(accountSid,authToken);

//Create a message with to and from numbers
client.messages.create({body:'Srini says
hello',to:'+44788899999',from:'+44788899990'}).then((message)=>console.log(message.sid))
```

In the preceding code, the `to` number must be a verified number of trial accounts. You cannot send messages to other numbers unless you upgrade your account. The `from` number is the Twilio number that you had obtained previously.

5. Save the file and execute it using the `node index.js` command. This should send the text message to your verified phone number.

My train notifier

Imagine a scenario where a user commutes to work every day from Edinburgh Waverley to Glasgow Queen Street. And they struggle to figure out the trains and timings as they prepare to leave every morning. Wouldn't it be great if we could provide a service that sends a list of trains from their station to their destination at some point during their morning routine?

Using the preceding Simple Message Sender module, let's build a bot that will send a list of trains from a certain station to a certain destination station. Let's add a module to get the list of trains from a given station to a certain destination:

1. Install the request library using `npm install request --save`.
2. Create a function to send SMS notifications:

```
function sendSMS(msg, userPhoneNumber){
  var twilio = require('twilio');
  var client = new twilio(accountSid, authToken);
  //Create a message with to and from numbers
```

```

client.messages.create({
  body: msg,
  to: userPhoneNumber,
  from: '+4414XXXXXXX' //YOUR_NUMBER
})
.then((message) => console.log(message.sid));
}

```

3. Create a function to get all trains departing from a given station:

```

function getTrains(sourceStation, sourceStationCode,
                  destinationStation,
                  userPhoneNumber) {
  var request = require('request');
  var url = 'http://transportapi.com/v3/uk/train/station/' +
    sourceStationCode + '/live.json?
    app_id=YOUR_APP_ID&app_key=YOUR_APP_KEY';

  request(url, function (error, response, body) {
    if (response) {
      var json = JSON.parse(body);
      if (json.departures) {
        //console.log('Departures:',
        //JSON.stringify(json.departures));

        var dep =
          getTrainsToDestination(destinationStation,
            json.departures.all);

        var summary = summarize(destinationStation,
          sourceStation, dep);

        console.log('Summary: ' + summary);
        sendSMS(summary, userPhoneNumber);

      } else {
        console.log('No Departures found!');
      }
    } else {
      console.log('error:', error); // Print the error if one
      // occurred
    }
  });
}

```

4. Create a function to retrieve all trains going to a certain destination station:

```

function getTrainsToDestination(destination, allDepartures) {
  var d = [];

  if (allDepartures) {
    for (var i=0; i < allDepartures.length; i++){

```

```

        var service = allDepartures[i];
        if (service.destination_name == destination){
            d.push(service)
        }
    }
}
return d;
}

```

5. Create a function to call the preceding functions to send the user a notification of all trains heading to a certain destination station from the user's preferred station:

```

function summarize(destinationStation, sourceStation, departures){

    var out = '';
    if (departures.length > 0){
        out = 'Here are the departures this morning to ' +
            destinationStation
                + ".\n";
        for (var i=0; i< departures.length; i++){
            var service = departures[i];
            var serviceSummary = service.operator_name
                + " at " +

            service.expected_departure_time;
            out += serviceSummary + "\n"
        }
    } else {
        out = 'There are no trains to ' + destinationStation +
            ' from ' +
            sourceStation;
    }
    return out;
}

```

6. And set the variables and call the main module:

```

//Index.js

//Add your Account SID
varaccountSid='your_account_sid';
//Add your Auth Token here
varauthToken='your_auth_token';

var destinationStation = 'Glasgow Queen Street';
var userPhoneNumber = '+447888999999';
var sourceStationCode = 'EDB';
var sourceStation = 'Edinburgh Waverley';

getTrains(sourceStation, sourceStationCode, destinationStation, userPhoneNumber);

```

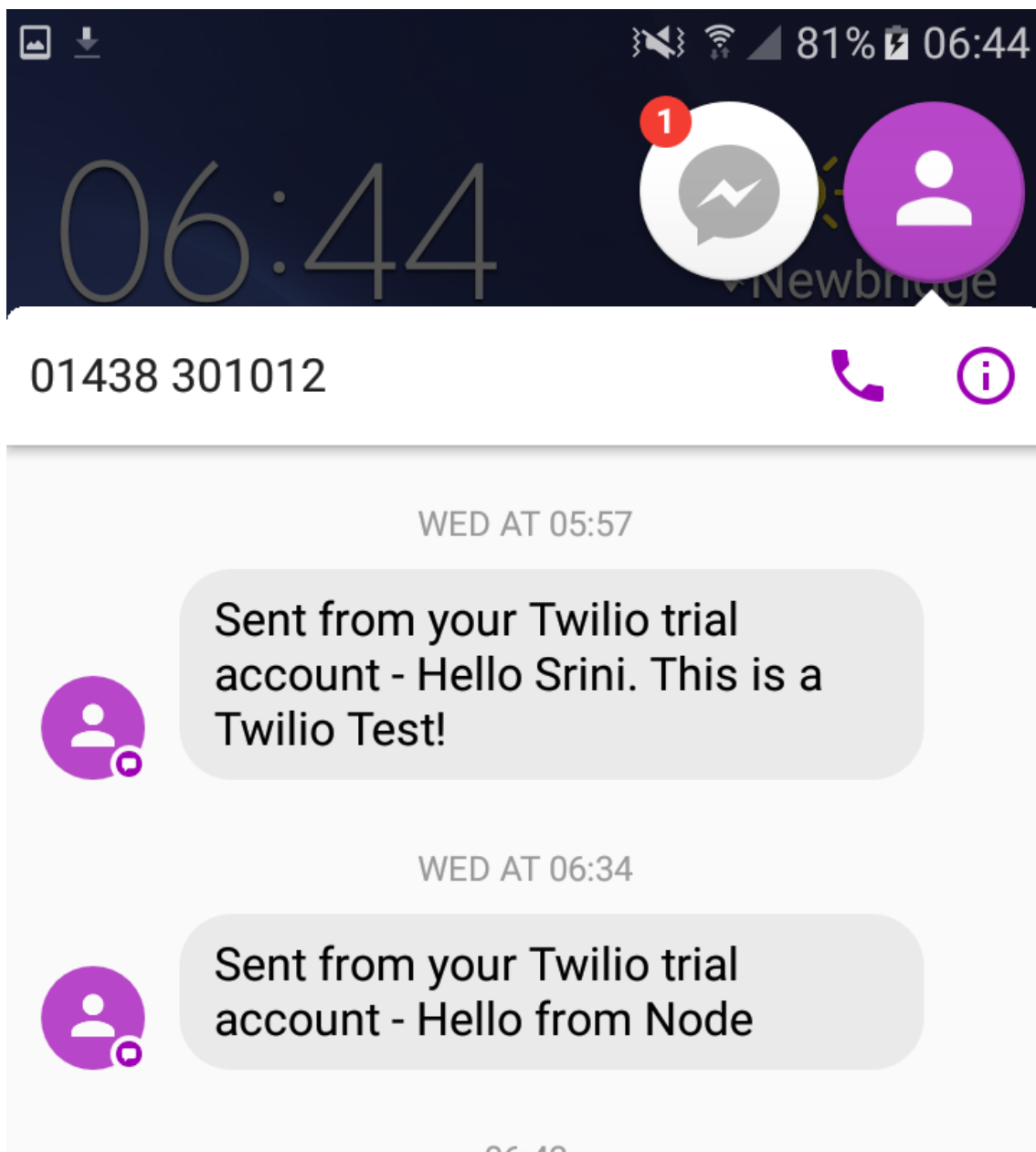
7. Run it on the `node index.js` console to see whether it works. It should print the summary of trains to the destination station on the console and also send it as an SMS notification message to you:

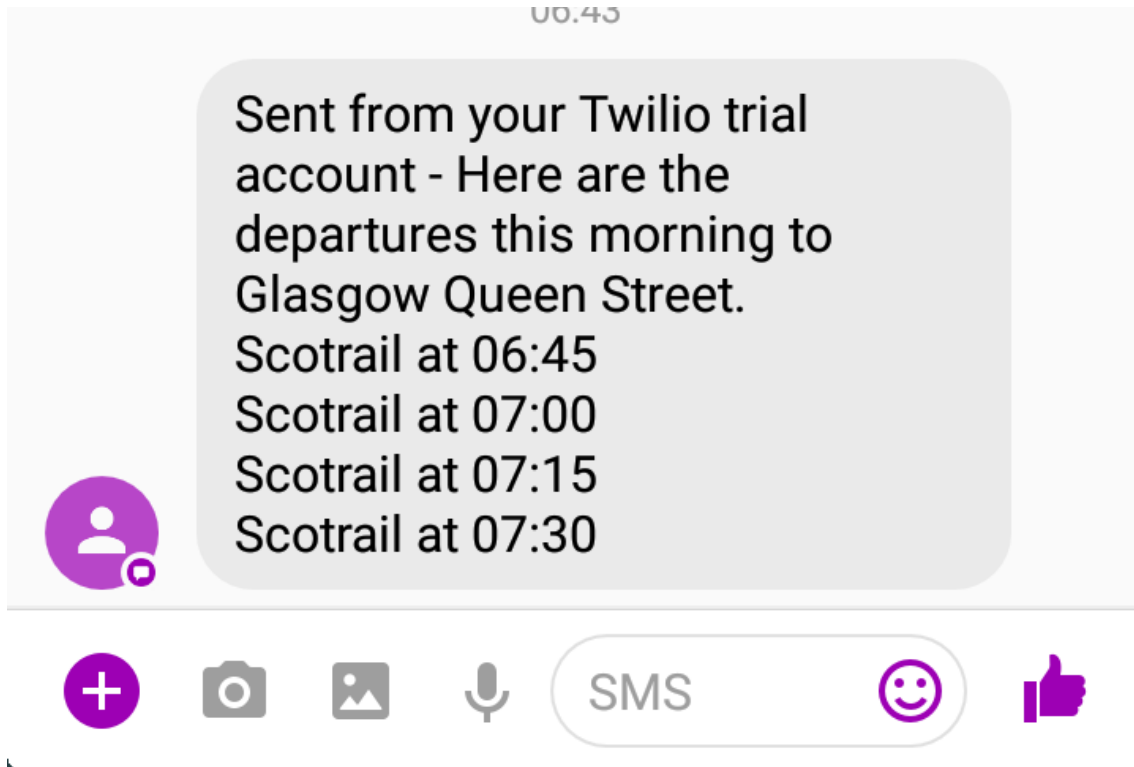
```
C:\Users\Srini\Documents\workspace\SMSBot>node index.js
Summary: Here are the departures this morning to Glasgow Queen Street.
Scotrail at 06:45
Scotrail at 07:00
Scotrail at 07:15
Scotrail at 07:30

SM79cb0e9ed7e5499f99ec35b3c2f77681

C:\Users\Srini\Documents\workspace\SMSBot>
```

8. Check your cellphone to see whether the message has arrived:





9. Congratulations! You have just created an SMS bot.

Summary

Brilliant! I hope you had a great time exploring and building a transport chatbot providing useful information on trains to users. Besides building the chatbot, we also explored the use of Twilio communication APIs to expose the chatbot over the SMS platform. I hope you tried to chat with your bot over SMS and realized how easy it is to get useful information without internet data. We did explore a few conversational tasks and also got to implement a couple. However, you could move on to more complex tasks, such as journey planning, based on the chatbot model that we built in this lab.