



# VIRGINIA RAILWAY EXPRESS

## Update



703-684-1001

www.vre.org

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### Editor's Note

It is truly amazing how quickly the summer is going by. It seems like just yesterday we were celebrating the 4<sup>th</sup> of July. VRE passengers have many reasons to celebrate, and we're not just talking about the 15<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebration.

On-time performance has seen a dramatic increase this summer over last summer's numbers. June posted nearly 20% better on-time performance over June 2006 (see page 4). So far, July has posted on-time performance numbers nearly 40% better than last year. We are looking forward to continuing this trend as the summer continues. Part of the reason has to do with heat restrictions. You'll see an article on how CSX is handling this touchy subject this year.

Enjoy the rest of your summer!

## Where Are the Heat Restrictions?

Anyone who has ridden VRE for longer than a year can remember the frequent delays that seemed to crop up every summer, and along with those delays, the words "heat restriction." For many, "endless delay" and "heat restriction" soon became interchangeable terms, and before long, the cast was set. Heat orders were bad, bad things.

Heat restrictions have been getting a bad rap. Time and again, unrelated delays have been blamed on heat orders. We hope that with some explanation and education, backed by better summer commutes, heat restrictions will no longer be viewed as a curse. In fact, you may have already noticed that your train isn't as delayed when heat orders have been put in place this year. There's a reason for that.

But first, what exactly is a heat restriction (aka heat order)? In short, heat restrictions are orders given to railroad engineers to reduce their speed over a given section of track between the hours of 1:00 pm and

7:00 pm when the ambient temperature is predicted to be 90 degrees. Passenger trains must operate 20 mph slower than their maximum operating speed. For all practical purposes, that usually means VRE's trains can run at 50 mph during a heat order. (Freight trains are also limited to no more than 50 mph.) By running more slowly, the track is better protected from the forces of the trains and is therefore less likely to buckle or misalign.

So now you might ask, "How can you say heat restrictions don't cause delays if we're traveling 20 mph slower than we would be otherwise?" The answer is actually quite simple: In a dense urban area like Washington, commuter trains aren't capable of maintaining their maximum speed for very long, because when stations are spaced as closely as they are in the D.C. region, trains need to speed up, slow

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## Gainesville/Haymarket Takes Another Step

Extending VRE service to Gainesville and Haymarket has been on the minds of a lot of people for a long time ... and VRE has recently taken a big step forward in seeing the dream become a reality.

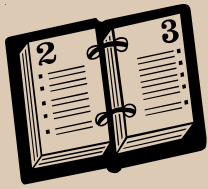
Last week, VRE posted a procurement for a consultant to help us examine our needs and put together a major investment study to determine how to best develop such an enormous project. The

planning study would essentially serve as a road map for the future, showing us step-by-step how to move forward with our plans.



Sirel Mouchantaf, VRE's director of construction and facilities, explains that searching for a consultant is just the very beginning of the huge project, with environmental studies,

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### Upcoming Dates

#### August 1

Meet the Management  
Rolling Road  
All Morning Trains

On-Line Forum  
12:00n

#### August 8

Meet the Management  
Woodbridge  
All Morning Trains

#### August 10 – 13

L'Enfant Cut-In Project

#### August 15

Meet the Management  
Backlick Road  
All Morning Trains

#### August 22

Meet the Management  
Lorton  
All Morning Trains



VRE Update is a publication of Virginia Railway Express. The newsletter is published bi-weekly 24 times per year. Stories included are for the sole use of VRE riders and its supporters. Comments and questions may be directed to VRE Customer Service at [gotrains@vre.org](mailto:gotrains@vre.org) or at (703) 684-1001.

# Heat Restrictions

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down and stop every two to three miles. There simply isn't enough distance or time between stations. Keep in mind, too, that only the afternoon commute can be affected by heat orders; the morning commute is never affected since heat orders are put in place only after 1:00 pm.

"No matter how long the delay in 2006," said CSX Assistant Vice President of Public/Private Partnerships, Jay Westbrook, "only about 10 minutes of it would have been caused by a heat order. If the delay was an hour long, 10 minutes may have been from a heat order, but 50 full minutes of it was due to something else."

And now we come to even more good news, as those "something else" are being vastly reduced this year, which has helped create a relatively delay-free summer.

On the Fredericksburg line, construction and completion of a second track on the Quantico Bridge has eliminated the most significant chokepoint between Richmond and D.C. and has resulted in a giant leap forward in capacity and performance.

"If you had only enough dollars to improve service by doing one project," said Westbrook, "the Quantico Bridge would be it. Before the new bridge, congestion from the single track prevented a quick recovery. Even a minor incident could result in serious delays. A second track now means that trains can flow right past any problems on the other track."

Even more good news will come in the coming months, as another capacity project—adding a third main line and improving signals at L'Enfant—is scheduled to open the week of August 13. The result will be that VRE, Amtrak and freight trains will all be able to move through L'Enfant without having to first dance around each other as they each seek a clear track.

A future project on the South Bank of the Potomac will vastly improve passenger train signaling on the approach to and departure from Union Station in D.C., while another project will complete the third main line from Alexandria to just south of the Potomac. Later in 2008, a third main track will be extended from Alexandria to the Franconia/Springfield station, which will allow faster passenger trains to pass slower and heavier freight trains, which get bogged down on the long incline from Alexandria to Lorton.



"We understand that it's hard to convince people, who are justifiably concerned about delays, that things are going to be a lot better," said Westbrook, "but with these kind of capacity improvements, trains are going to be more and more reliable, and we're confident that VRE's customers will see a clear connection between capacity and service and not look at safety-based heat restrictions as the basis of their problems."

"We're acutely aware of the desire and need for VRE's customers

to have a high level of reliable service," said CSXT spokesman Bob Sullivan. "We don't like it or think it's acceptable for VRE trains to be delayed, whatever the reason."

Westbrook provided one example of the effort CSXT makes to help ensure that VRE customers get to work and home on time: "We hold back most of our freight traffic so it doesn't interfere with VRE's morning or evening rush hour. We'll ask freight crews to wait outside of the commuter territories in Virginia and Maryland to ensure that traffic doesn't get overly congested during the rush hour window."

"The cure for our balancing act is the same—more capacity—so to say that we're committed to improving the entire corridor and getting all trains over the tracks safely and on time isn't just lip service," Westbrook said.

# Woodbridge is Next for Dual Platforms

When it comes to keeping train schedules running smoothly and efficiently, flexibility is the name of the game. One great way to help ensure some flexibility, VRE thinks, is to ensure that every station has dual platforms so that both tracks can be accessed and utilized rather than limiting oneself to just the one track next to the platform.



Currently, only the Alexandria, Franconia Springfield, Manassas and Fredericksburg stations boast dual platforms, but by fall 2008, Woodbridge will be added to that list.

“We’re planning to construct a second platform on the west side of the tracks,” said Sirel Mouchantaf, VRE’s director of construction and facilities, “along with an overhead pedestrian bridge so that people can easily walk to either side of the tracks. The pedestrian bridge will also feature an elevator tower that will connect the bridge to the existing parking garage—it

will really make access far easier for commuters and will allow us to use both the western and eastern tracks.”

The project is currently posted for bids, and once a contractor has been hired, construction is expected to start in the fall and last about a year.

Mouchantaf doesn’t expect the construction process to be disruptive to commuters, as contractors will only use some of the parking spaces located in the surface lot behind the garage, which isn’t anywhere near full capacity. Platform construction will be located across the tracks and therefore out of the way of the existing platform. When it’s time to build the pedestrian bridge and elevator tower, there may be some temporary obstacles but, Mouchantaf assures, nothing terribly disruptive.

The design should also improve the lives of the PRTC bus drivers, as they will be able to drop off commuters immediately after pulling off Route 1 rather than having to circle around and turn in the parking lot first.

The platform and bridge construction marks early progress in VRE’s initiative to build dual platforms system-wide, ensuring increased flexibility at all stations. The next station possibly under consideration for dual platforms is Lorton.

## *Courtesy Corner*

Courtesy Towards Vendors

We would just like to remind our passengers who use ticket vendors to exercise courtesy and patience as you purchase your tickets.

The vendors do not actually work for VRE. They are, for the most part, small businesses that have agreed to sell our tickets just as they may have agreed to sell Coke or Pepsi products.

Be sure to keep this in mind when asking them VRE questions. They may know some answers but do not expect them to have all the answers. Especially keep this in mind if you have a problem with VRE (late trains, TVMs not working).

Please yell at us (gotrains@vre.org, or (703) 684-1001) and not at them. We might be able to do something about it. Finally, please do not push your way through their lines because you showed up late for your train. Their customers deserve courtesy too.

*On-Time  
Performance by  
Train for the month  
of June 2007*

**Fredericksburg Line**

300 – 95%  
302 – 95%  
304 – 95%  
306 – 90%  
308 – 95%  
310 – 86%

301 – 81%  
303 – 57%  
305 – 81%  
307 – 71%  
309 – 86%  
311 – 95%  
313 – 90%

Overall – 86%  
(Compare with June  
2006: Overall OTP  
was 60%)

**Manassas Line**

322 – 100%  
324 – 100%  
326 – 100%  
328 – 95%  
330 – 100%  
332 – 100%

325 – 81%  
327 – 71%  
329 – 86%  
331 – 95%  
333 – 90%  
335 – 90%  
337 – 90%

Overall – 92%  
(Compare with June  
2006: Overall OTP  
was 77%)

\*A train is considered  
delayed if it is more  
than 5 minutes later  
than the posted  
schedule into its final  
destination.

# Gainseville/Haymarket

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design, right-of-way and property acquisitions, and budgeting as some of the key steps required in the future.

“It’s going to take quite a lot of effort to get it off the ground,” he added, “but having a roadmap of the different hurdles we’ll need to clear is a critical component of the project’s ultimate success.”

The study alone will cost between \$1 million and \$1.5 million and will take approximately one year to complete, with funding coming from Federal, State and local sources. VRE has been working very closely with Prince William County officials, and will also likely work with developers who have, over the years, made proffers that would aid VRE’s efforts to extend service to Gainesville and Haymarket. (Proffers often occur when developers, seeking to get their projects favorably reviewed and approved, agree to make significant contributions toward common-good amenities. A developer, therefore, might agree to build a commuter rail station in return for approval on the construction of a nearby residential neighborhood.)

Current thought on the overall project is that it will likely be split into two phases: the first phase will extend service from Manassas to Gainesville, and the second phase will extend service from Gainesville to Haymarket. The first phase is hopefully five to seven years out, while the second phase is difficult to put on a timeline, as the Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT) wants to first construct a railroad bridge over Route 29 in Gainesville to replace the regular grade crossing that exists there now. Until that bridge is completed, it will be hard to determine exactly when VRE’s second phase of expansion might occur. (The bridge is currently in the design phase, with VDOT looking for additional funding. Construction is possibly planned for 2012.)

Ultimately, VRE’s goal for the entire project will be to upgrade the existing single track between Manassas and Haymarket to a class-4 standard, which would allow passenger trains to travel up to 79 mph. (The existing single track is Norfolk Southern “B” line designed solely for freight going no faster than 45 mph.) In addition to upgrading the existing track, VRE would need to build a second track (and possibly a third), and, of course, construct two or possibly three additional commuter stations.

## Overall On-Time Performance

July numbers are through July 23, 2007

