



# VIRGINIA RAILWAY EXPRESS

## Update



703-684-1001

[www.vre.org](http://www.vre.org)

October 18, 2007

### Editor's Note:

Safety has always been our top priority. After the power outage at Union Station last month, we received a number of comments asking how prepared is VRE for a full scale evacuation. In response to those concerns, we have included information on VRE's plans should we need to help during a major event. On page 3, you can learn what you can do to help through our CAST program.

Parking at Fredericksburg. This issue is full of good news and bad news for Fredericksburg station riders. The owners of Lot D are reducing the number of spaces that are available for VRE riders (see page 5). As parking options dwindle, the options for getting to the station are increasing. FRED is providing service from Route 3 and areas within the City. The week, we highlight once again the GRTC service from Richmond on page 1.

## Let GRTC Do the Driving with the Richmond-Fredericksburg Express

Tired of the making the long commute between Richmond and Fredericksburg every day? If so, then sit back and let GRTC do the driving! In partnership with Martz National Coach Works, GRTC Transit System introduced their Express Service between Richmond and Fredericksburg in May 2007. The Route 96 Richmond-Fredericksburg Express operates Monday through Friday between Richmond and the VRE station in Fredericksburg to provide riders with an easy and stress-free commute. The service offers two morning trips and two afternoon trips, aboard a 55-seat motor coach bus equipped with Wi-Fi technology, convenient overhead storage, and luxurious seating.



"Our Express service is our fastest growing demographic," said John Lewis, GRTC Transit System's CEO. "We have seen a 14% increase from 2006 to 2007. With this increase in demand, GRTC is very excited about our new Express service between Richmond and the VRE in Fredericksburg. There are a growing number of individuals who commute between these two cities every day, and we are pleased

to be able to provide a more convenient transportation option to them."

For additional information on this exciting new service, please call the GRTC Customer Service Center at (804) 358-GRTC or log onto [www.ridegrtc.com](http://www.ridegrtc.com) for the complete route schedule and information.

## VRE's Evacuation Plans Take Step Forward

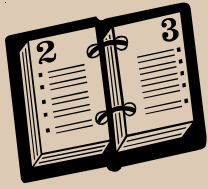
Code Red, Code Orange, Code Yellow ... ever since September 11, Americans have been living with the possibility that terrorists may strike again. And in the Washington metropolitan area, that leads to questions on how well equipped the city is to handle a major evacuation. Certainly, mass transit plays a vital role in moving large numbers of people out of the central city, and VRE has over the years continued to focus its resources on devising an emergency preparedness plan that would get people out of the L'Enfant and Crystal City areas and further into the Northern Virginia suburbs.

the tunnels may be closed down, which means that trains cannot evacuate people from Union Station. On any given day, we typically have 11 train sets stored in Washington, so once the tunnels are closed, we can't use them. This has obviously posed the biggest challenge to our evacuation plan."

That obstacle has now been mitigated by the construction of a storage track on the east side of the L'Enfant station, which runs about 1,400 feet alongside the main track and is long enough to store two train sets that could be called into service immediately should the city need to conduct a mass evacuation.

"In times of emergency," explained Dave Snyder, VRE's superintendent of operations, safety and security, "our biggest issue is that

Continued on page 4



### Upcoming Dates

Mon., October 22  
Changes to  
Fredericksburg  
Parking Lot D

Wed., October 31  
Halloween

Wed., November 7  
On-Line Forum  
12 noon

Mon., November 12  
Veterans' Day  
Observed  
No VRE Service

Thu., November 22  
Thanksgiving  
No VRE Service

Fri., November 23  
Day After  
Thanksgiving  
No VRE Service



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.

# Master Agreement Survey Determines Funding Levels – Not Service Levels

Earlier this month, VRE riders were given an eight-question survey that for many seemed to be full of rather unimportant and innocuous questions, such as “What is your destination station today?”, “What is the zip code of your home address?” and “How will you get from VRE to your destination this morning?”

Where, some of you asked, were the *important* questions ... such as how riders feel about VRE’s response to delays, their thoughts about future improvements or increased rider comfort, or their overall satisfaction with current service levels?

Without question, rider satisfaction surveys are extremely important, but the survey completed last week serves a very different purpose. When VRE was first formed, all of the participating jurisdictions developed a master agreement that dictated how VRE should be operated and how each of the participating jurisdictions would participate in its operation. Part of that agreement is the aptly named “Master Agreement Survey,” which is the survey we just asked riders to complete. Conducted every October, the survey’s goal is to determine how many riders come from each jurisdiction, and where those riders are headed. Those numbers are then crunched with other ridership statistics to determine how much each county should pay toward VRE’s funding. The survey has nothing to do with our service levels—it only determines each jurisdiction’s subsidy.

Not surprisingly, on-board surveys are not the only way VRE captures the data; depending solely on the surveys would mean that we would need a 100 percent return rate in order for them to be statistically valid. So, we also post “station counters” at every station—

essentially people who hand-count how many people board the trains at those stations—and use our own ridership numbers from the previous few weeks. By comparing our numbers through the station counters, the past weeks’ statistics and the rider surveys, we are able to get solid numbers that can then be used to determine funding.

For those of you thinking this all sounds very well and good but you’d still really love to share some opinions, then please keep in mind that there are several opportunities for doing that! Perhaps the most “formal” way is via our

Customer Opinion Survey, conducted every spring and covering a wide range of customer service issues. Last year’s survey posed 35 multiple-choice questions and nearly as many options to “grade” VRE service. The results always go a long way in helping us develop our future plans, and we really do count on our riders to give us the straight scoop on a huge number of issues.



Of course, there’s no need to wait until spring if you have something on your mind now. Please contact VRE at [gotrains@vre.org](mailto:gotrains@vre.org) or call us at (703) 684-1001 if you would like to ask a question, share an idea or log a complaint. Or, plan to participate in our next online chat with CEO Dale Zehner at noon on November 7. As usual, he’ll answer as many rider questions as possible during the hour-long chat, and participating is easy: simply visit our Web site at [www.vre.org/chatterbox](http://www.vre.org/chatterbox). You can click the “Ask” button to submit a question, or you can just sit back and watch the conversation flow. If you can’t join us, you can submit your question early and check back later to see if it was answered. Transcripts are available on our Web site at [www.vre.org/feedback/forums/archives.htm](http://www.vre.org/feedback/forums/archives.htm).

# VRE Posts RFP for New Locomotives

Anyone who has ridden VRE for longer than a few months has surely heard and/or read about our 2005 purchase of 11 new railcars, followed up with a summer 2006 decision to move forward on our option to buy 50 more new railcars. The first 11 cars have been arriving over the past year, and we'll start taking delivery of the 50 additional cars in December ... much to the delight of our amenity- and comfort-loving passengers!

But the power of our fleet, of course, depends on our locomotives, and the 20 locomotives we have right now are aging and will ultimately not have the power capacity we need to meet our strategic long-range plan if we expect to improve and increase service levels.

As a result, VRE recently posted a request for proposals (RFP) for two new locomotives with the option to buy 18 more. Proposals are due November 30.



*Requests for Proposals for new locomotives has been issued. The first locomotives will probably arrive in late 2009.*

The first two locomotives will be purchased with funds resulting from the Commonwealth of Virginia's recent allocation of \$18.75 million to VRE for locomotives. Because the allocation is not sufficient to cover the cost of replacing the entire fleet, the procurement is being structured in the same fashion as the railcar purchase, with a base order dependant on available funding and a larger option order to be exercised as additional funding becomes available.

"As our locomotives have aged, we were faced several years ago with the decision to rebuild

or replace them," explained Dennis Larson, VRE's director of rail equipment and services. "When we realized that it would cost three-quarters of a million dollars to rebuild something that still wouldn't have enough power to meet our strategic plan, we knew that the best answer was to keep them running until we could buy new ones. This plan, therefore, is one that will replace all 20 of our locomotives over the course of several years."

The lead-time for a new locomotive is, unfortunately, rather long; from the moment VRE orders a new locomotive, it will be

delivered two years hence. That means that the first two locomotives will not arrive until late 2009 at the earliest. Should VRE be able to exercise its option to buy the additional 18 locomotives over the course of the next six years (options run for a maximum of six years), the same time period would apply, regardless of whether VRE ordered one at a time or six at a time.

"Every time we press the 'option' button," Larson added, "we face another two years. The good news is that the pricing for those options is locked when the agreement is made, so the cost will only increase by an indexed reference table as time passes."

According to the RFP, the new locomotives will be built specifically for VRE, based on performance-based criteria laid out in the RFP. Needless to say, we'll keep you posted!

## Safety Sense

Passengers play a crucial role as 'early warning systems' by being aware of their surroundings and notifying conductors of suspicious activities or unattended bags. This is where "Commuter Awareness for Safe Travel," or CAST, plays a part. Five themes are promoted by CAST.

**Be safe:** If something makes you uncomfortable, move away from the area, alert the conductor, or dial 911.

**Be smart:** Stay calm, think clearly, listen for announcements.

**Be informed:** Read VRE's safety information. Learn emergency procedures. Introduce yourself to your conductor. Remember their name.

**Be aware:** Watch for the unusual (unattended packages, vehicles left near station entrances, or persons acting in a suspicious manner). Then, notify a conductor, or call 911.

**Be prepared:** Develop an alternate commute. Establish an emergency plan with others. Wear a medical alert bracelet if necessary.

# Evacuation Plans

Continued from page 1

## Courtesy Corner

We realize that commuting isn't always the highlight of your life, but at least in doing so you should be able to sit, relax and rest. However, don't lounge around or curl up pretending to sleep while occupying several seats to expand your personal space. If you do this, expect to be woken up or asked to move aside.

Likewise, don't take up two or three seats by placing your belongings (purses, papers, bags, briefcases, or your feet) next to or on the seats in front of you. If you bring things with you, please keep them *with* you, under your seat, or in the overhead racks - not on the seats around you.

We all work hard and we all deserve to sit and rest, whenever we can get it.

“By moving at least two of those 11 train sets to a storage area ‘outside the box,’ or outside of the tunnel,” Snyder said, “our ability to evacuate by rail is obviously much easier. Still, should a mass evacuation ever be called, commuters should not expect door-to-door service.”

“Given the distance between DC and some of our stations, it makes more sense to run a series of short turnarounds instead of a few long runs if we expect to get large numbers of people out



of harm's way,” he added. “Our current plan is to stage ‘shuttle’ trains serving L’Enfant, Crystal City and Alexandria and move people far enough out so that they’re safe but not so far out that it takes us too long to get back into the city for the next load of passengers. Franconia/Springfield or Backlick Road, for example, could be reasonable locations to bring people before turning back toward the city.”

But even with this improvement at L’Enfant, VRE still urges its riders to have two emergency plans in place: one that involves public transportation and one that does not. No matter how much we plan and no matter how many train sets we have “outside the box,” it’s a real possibility that train service across the area could be disrupted or stopped entirely, and in those situations it’s critical that passengers think about alternate ways to get home and talk about those plans with their families and friends.

Should train service become your best option, however, below is a quick tutorial on VRE’s plan:

In the best-case scenario—all tracks, bridges and tunnels are open—VRE will begin service southbound within an hour. Schedules, if possible, will be posted on the VRE Web site, sent via Train Talk and downloaded to the message boards at the stations. If train shuttle service is possible from the L’Enfant, Crystal City or Alexandria stations, passengers should go to one of those three stations and anticipate that service will be initiated at the earliest possible time. These trains would turn back at Springfield, in all probability. Again, if possible, schedules will be posted on the VRE Web site, sent via Train Talk and downloaded to the message boards at the stations.

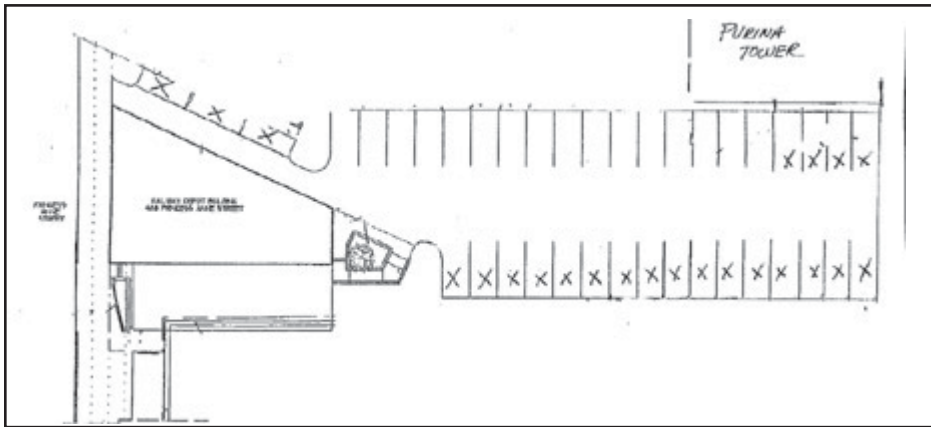
For “standard” service disruptions, VRE has agreements with local bus agencies to provide emergency bus service. But since bus service alone could never handle the number of passengers a mass evacuation would create, VRE is advising that upon notice of an emergency situation, passengers should first check the VRE Web site ([www.vre.org](http://www.vre.org)) for emergency updates and for information about the steps VRE is taking to get its customers home. Subscribers to the “Train Talk” e-mail newsletter will also receive updates without requiring them to visit the Web site (to subscribe, visit <http://traintalk.vre.org>).

“We know that should an emergency ever occur, the stress of trying to get home is of paramount concern to our passengers,” said VRE’s chief executive officer, Dale Zehner. “We’ve done everything we can to prepare and make plans to ensure that our trains, assuming governing officials allow them to run, can serve as a fast and efficient means of taking people out of harm’s way. But it would be a disservice to tell our customers to depend on us no matter what; we urge everyone to talk about your personal plan with others and devise a way of getting in touch with family and friends.”

# Changes Coming To Fredericksburg Lot D

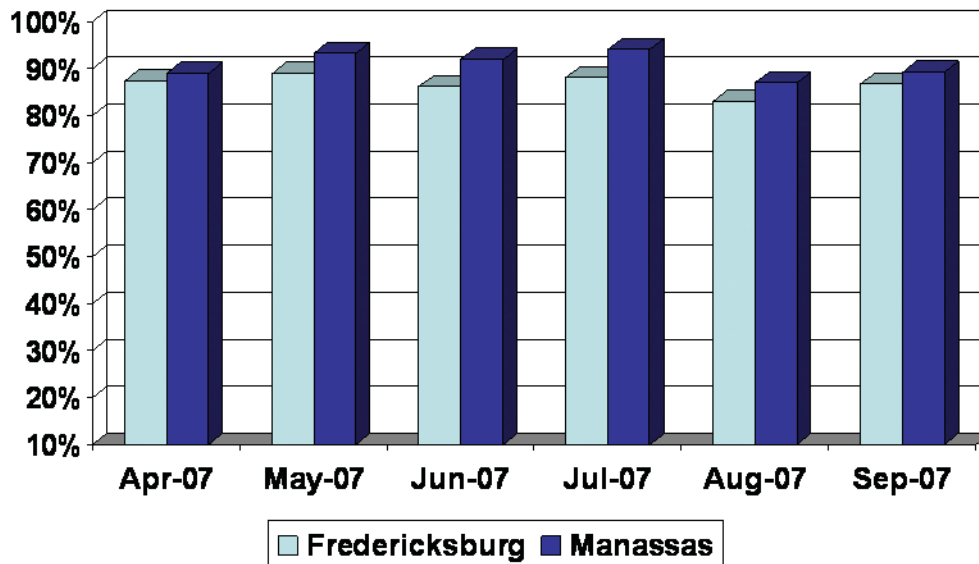
Effective Monday, October 22, the owner of Fredericksburg parking Lot D, which is located across the street from the train station at 406-408 Princess Anne Street, will be reducing the parking available from 39 spaces to 23 spaces.

The image below represents Lot D, and the spaces marked with an "X" are the spaces that VRE riders are permitted to park in. The train station and the Rappahannock River would be off to the left of this map, with the large VRE lot (and gravel lot) located off to the right of the image.



*Spaces marked with an "X" will be the only spaces in Lot D that will be available for VRE riders beginning Monday, October 22.*

## On-Time Performance



### On-Time Performance by Train for the month of September 2007

#### Fredericksburg Line

300 – 79%  
 302 – 95%  
 304 – 95%  
 306 – 95%  
 308 – 84%  
 310 – 95%

301 – 79%  
 303 – 84%  
 305 – 89%  
 307 – 63%  
 309 – 89%  
 311 – 84%  
 313 – 95%

Overall – 87%

#### Manassas Line

322 – 95%  
 324 – 89%  
 326 – 89%  
 328 – 89%  
 330 – 89%  
 332 – 95%

325 – 89%  
 327 – 89%  
 329 – 89%  
 331 – 89%  
 333 – 89%  
 335 – 89%  
 337 – 84%

Overall – 89%

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



## When A Town Grows Up Right, Its Children Do Too.

Stroll along any block in Ladysmith Village and you'll sense a town that's good for all inhabitants. Especially children. The rural setting provides a safe haven from



outside pressures. The lay of the land encourages interaction. Lighted sidewalks lead to tot lots and parks where children are free to play and explore. The new library awaits their inquisitive minds and a planned elementary school will soon follow.

The town is on the right path because those who live here care deeply about the place they call home. Which means Ladysmith Village will not only grow, it will blossom. And so will its children.



New Homes From The \$200's To Mid \$400's • Visitors Center & Model Homes Open Daily  
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