



# VIRGINIA RAILWAY EXPRESS UPDATE

703-684-1001

www.vre.org

February 25, 2009

## New Locomotives on Schedule!

### *Editor's Note:*

It is the best of times. It is the worst of times. No, we are not rewriting *A Tale of Two Cities*. For transit, this is the most truthful statement of the times. Following a period of high gas prices, transit ridership in general remains high. VRE is no exception.

Despite record ridership, it is also a time when funding for transit agencies is decreasing. Even so, VRE remains hopeful. With the stimulus package passed last week, there may be an opportunity for VRE to gain additional funding for our locomotive program.

Once the details are worked out, we will be happy to share them with you. Look for updates in the next few issues of the VRE Update.

In another year and 10 months, VRE's fleet will boast five brand-spankin'-new locomotives, not that VRE's Director of Rail Equipment and Services Dennis Larson is counting the months or anything ...

Having just returned from Boise, Idaho, to personally inspect the production facilities, quality control and manufacturing control measures that the manufacturing company Motive Power, Inc. utilizes, Larson returned a happy man.

"I'm very impressed with all three components of their operation," he said, "and we got to see a newly built locomotive just prior to shipment, which very closely matches what we're ordering, and I was equally impressed with it, too."

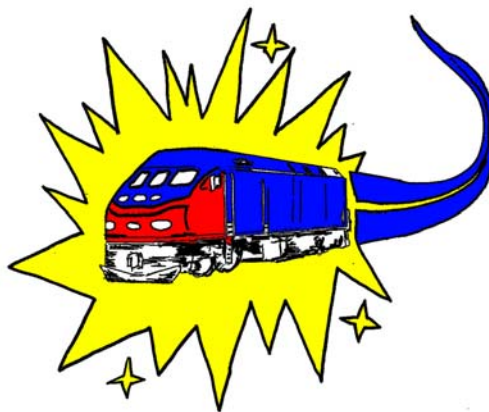
The first unit in VRE's order will begin production this July, with production on the remaining four quickly following. All five are scheduled to roll off the production line within days of each other, with delivery scheduled for October 2010. Timing on the order is currently 100 percent on time and is in full performance

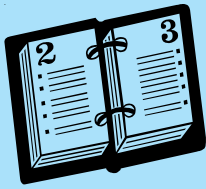
with our contract; in fact, delivery is currently running a couple of months ahead of schedule.

Upon the new locomotives' arrival, VRE will retire its five oldest locomotives, keeping our total number of locomotives at 20. In 2011, our lease will expire on three leased locomotives, bringing our fleet down to 17, but it's hoped that with having five much more reliable locomotives, we won't need quite as many for back-up.

"Due to the age and overall condition of our current fleet," Larson explained, "we use 15 of our 20 locomotives every day. Eleven are used on

our 11 train sets, but we occasionally will have a second locomotive on a train set for service testing. We also have what is called a "protect locomotive" at each train yard; that way, if there's a last-minute mechanical problem with one of our in-service locomotives, we can swap out units with the protect unit and continue on fairly seamlessly. Having these new locomotives will really help us a great deal, although we'd of course be in even better shape if we can get the financial resources to exercise our option on ordering 15 more."





# Rail-to-Bus Transfer Fares Vary Among Bus Service Providers

## Upcoming Dates

Wed., March 4  
On-Line Forum  
12:00 noon

Fri., March 20  
Last Day Metrocheks  
will be accepted by  
VRE

For those of you who depend on bus services to get you to and from VRE stations, please note that there have been a few changes with some of the local transit companies' transfer policies and fees. Highlighted below are the major bus service providers and their new-in-2009 policies:



**ART:** Arlington's bus service, which provides VRE riders with service to the Crystal City station, charges \$1.35 (or \$1.25 for those with SmarTrip cards).



**DASH:** Alexandria's local bus service is free for TLC ticket holders only. All other ticket holders must pay a \$1.00 fare.



**DC Circulator Bus:** The DC Circulator buses, which service the Union Station and L'Enfant Plaza stations, no longer accept VRE tickets. Passengers will need to pay a \$1.00 fare per trip.



**EZ Bus:** The shuttle bus providing service to the Burke Centre station will now charge 25 cents for each one-way ride.



**Fairfax Connector:** VRE riders with a valid VRE ticket can ride local Fairfax Connector buses free of charge to and from VRE stations. As of February 16, however, free rail-to-bus transfers on Fairfax Connector Express buses were eliminated. Riders will need to pay the regular Express bus fare of \$3.10 (or \$2.50 if using a SmarTrip card).



**FRED:** This feeder bus service from Spotsylvania County and the City of Fredericksburg to the Fredericksburg VRE station continues to be free.



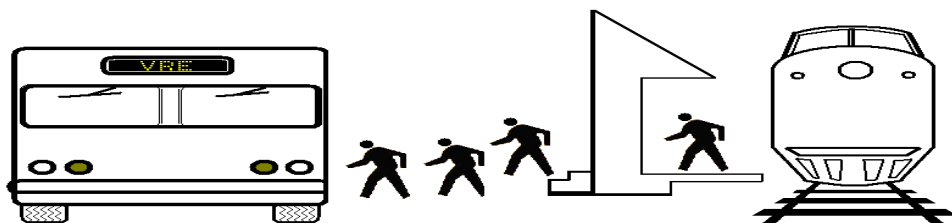
**Metro:** Metro buses are free to any rider with a valid VRE ticket, except for Express buses. If a VRE rider wishes to ride an Express bus and has a SmarTrip card, they will need to pay a \$1.75 fare—the difference between Metro's \$1.35 regular-fare route and a \$3.10 express-fare route.



**Omni Ride:** Prince William County's bus service offers free transfers to riders with a valid VRE ticket to or from VRE stations.



VRE Update is a publication of Virginia Railway Express. The newsletter is published monthly 12 times per year. Stories included are for the sole use of VRE riders. Comments and questions may be directed to VRE at [gotrains@vire.org](mailto:gotrains@vire.org) or at (703) 684-1001.



# Next Online Forum to Feature CSX Representatives

Our next online forum, during which time VRE's CEO Dale Zehner typically fields dozens of questions from riders during the hour-long chat, will also feature CSX's Assistant Vice President Public-Private Partnerships, Jay Westbrook, and CSX's Regional Vice President - State Relations, Bob Sullivan, to field any and all CSX (Fredericksburg Line) and railroad-related questions. Scheduled for Wednesday, March 4 at 12:00 sharp, all three gentlemen are looking forward to hearing what's on your minds. So, please mark it on your calendars and be sure to join in!

As always, participating is easy: simply visit [www.vre.org/chatbox](http://www.vre.org/chatbox), and click on the "ask" button to submit a question. Or, you

can just sit back and watch the conversation flow. And if you cannot join us live, you can submit your question early and check back later to see if it was answered. Transcripts are also available after the fact on our Web site at [www.vre.org/feedback/forums/archives.htm](http://www.vre.org/feedback/forums/archives.htm).

Past forums have covered every topic imaginable, with questions covering everything from parking to quarterly tickets, from signaling systems to bicycles onboard. Next month, we expect plenty of railroad questions thrown in the mix. It's a great way to find out what's on our passengers' minds, get your questions answered, and have a great time. Please plan to join the fun!

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## Railroad Signaling

Since its birth, the railroad has employed a variety of signaling methods to communicate with locomotive crews as to what course of action they must take, mile by mile, in order to safeguard themselves from possible collision.

In the early years, when railroading was in its infancy, one train might be the only one running on a specific track for a day or more. During this time, rail signaling reflected the form being used in England and parts of Western Europe. These countries were using steam power, a copper ball and a flagpole. The copper ball was raised when a train was fueled up, passengers and freight were loaded, and the track was properly switched. This "highball" was the "ready to go" signal.

As rail traffic increased, however, multiple trains began to use the same track. As a result, there became a sudden need for more stringent traffic control, and the concept of a "block" was developed.

The blocking system broke a line of track into smaller segments able to be controlled with signals. This meant that at a certain interval along a given track, these early chain and ball signals would be placed to secure a section of track along with an operator to maintain the signal. While one train cleared a section of track, another train waited at the signal for it to clear. Then when everything was cleared, the ball signal was raised and the train proceeded.

The dawning of reliable electricity led to the invention of a coded track circuit which used common principles of conductivity. A box of circuits and electromagnets called a "relay" was placed at each end of a section of track. Each rail was then electrified by a supplied current. At the

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### *Train Jargon*

**Ballast** – Selected rock material placed on the roadbed for the purpose of holding the track in line.

**Cab** – The space in the locomotive unit containing the operating controls and seats for the engine crew. Can also be located in select passenger cars, known as cab cars.

**Conductor** – Railroad employee in charge of the train.

**Dispatcher** – Employee responsible for directing and controlling the movement of trains.

**Engineer** – Operator of a locomotive.

**Rail** – A length of track, usually 39 feet long.

**Train Order** – A written mandatory directive governing the operation of trains that is issued by the train dispatcher.

# Tickets Must be Validated Before Boarding

## *Courtesy Corner*

Those simple things that you were taught as a child can apply to just about any situation including riding VRE. Imagine, the type of commute you would have if we all followed the following courtesy guidelines.

- Whenever someone treats you kindly, show your appreciation, express your gratitude, and offer your thanks.
- Respect the opinions and decisions of others, even if you disagree with them.
- Act kindly toward others without expecting anything in return.
- Respond to rudeness with kindness.
- Remember that patience is truly a virtue.
- Don't hesitate to ask to help someone who might look as though they need assistance.
- Smile!

We fear we sound like a broken record ... but with the number of summons being issued to passengers onboard VRE's trains without validated tickets up 171 percent in 2008 compared to 2007, and with an average of 24 summons issued every month last year, the message is clearly not getting through to everyone.

So, once again: in order to ride VRE's trains, you must have a ticket, and you must validate that ticket BEFORE boarding the train. If for some reason you cannot get the validating machine on the platform to work, you must speak to a conductor BEFORE boarding the train. It's that simple!

If you neglect to do either and you're caught, the conductor can issue a summons under our zero tolerance policy, which means you'll be fined \$150 (plus court costs of \$71). If a rider decides to go to court rather than pay it, the judge can drop it, decrease it, or increase it. And if the rider fails to do anything—they don't pay the fine and they ignore the court summons—then they open themselves up to the possibility of seeing their driver's license suspended after 30 days or a lien placed on their future tax refunds by the Commonwealth of Virginia.

To ensure this doesn't happen to you, please give yourself plenty of time to arrive at the station and validate your ticket before boarding. "I didn't have time" is not a valid excuse, and with the possibility of winter weather slowing down your drive or making your walk to the platform a slow-going affair, it's that much more important to please give yourself enough time to validate your ticket and avoid any possibility that you'll be cited!

Lastly, please know that we take no joy in seeing our riders get a summons. First, we don't get any money out of the deal; all fines paid by VRE riders go to the Commonwealth of Virginia, and the court costs go to the court where the case was heard. Second, the fact that a rider got a summons in the first place means that we lost their fare because we never got it in the first place. Third, we have to pay for the conductors to go to court, and then we also have to find coverage for that conductor when he/she is out for the day at court. And fourth, an unhappy rider usually tells other people about their experience and gets more riders upset. It's a lose-lose situation for VRE and for riders. So please, don't board a VRE train without a validated ticket.

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## VRE Accepts Metrocheks Through March 20

Late last year, the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (WMATA) discontinued Metrocheks and began issuing paper transit subsidies in the form of SmartBenefits vouchers. The vouchers, available in \$1, \$10 and \$30 denominations, can now be used to purchase VRE fare just as Metrocheks were.

But because many government agencies purchased large quantities of Metrocheks before WMATA discontinued them, many local employees will continue to receive Metrocheks for several more weeks. As a result, VRE will

continue to accept Metrocheks through March 20, but after that date, we will no longer accept Metrocheks and will instead only accept paper vouchers. Please also be aware that March 31 will be the last day Metrochek holders can exchange them for paper vouchers at Metro sales offices.

These paper vouchers are important right now, as many regional transit systems, including VRE, MARC, and MTA commuter buses, cannot accept SmarTrip electronic cards due to

# Railroad Signaling...

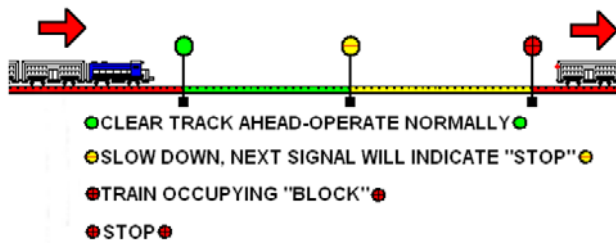
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ends of each section of track, or "block", a strip of insulation was placed between the rails so that the next block could have its own circuit and not interfere with the circuits of surrounding blocks. When a train passed into an electrified block, the circuit from one rail would travel over the steel axles of the train to the other rail and create a connection. The relays would then detect this loss of electricity and a series of electromagnets would become demagnetized. This

created a new circuit that then directed power to the railroad signal which rotated a pivot and illuminated a lens from green to the red. Thus creating electrified block territories that are still used today.

Some track territory featured more than one track, with some tracks going in all different directions, such as yards, crossings with other railroads, or high traffic regions. This was where manned signal operators remained necessary. Manned interlocking towers were used on the railroad to control these points. Each tower was given two letters to identify itself on the telegraph wire. The letters usually involved some relation to the name of the town but were ordered so they weren't confused with other letter codes used on the telegraph. For example, the tower at Alexandria

was identified as "AF", or Alexandria-Fredericksburg (currently the dividing point between Manassas and Fredericksburg lines). Each tower operator was responsible for switching the appropriate tracks by hand and telegraphing the dispatcher when a certain train had passed.



with a series of lines depicting tracks, switches and other miscellaneous track structures. At each track switch depicted on the console, there was a small light bulb and a small lever. When the light bulb was lit, that meant a train was occupying that "block" and if the train's destination required transfer to another track, the operator, miles away could simply turn the lever or push a button and instantly a signal created an impulse in a relay box that then in turn operated a motor and switched the track. With this amazing new technology, manned signal towers were no longer needed, and the railroad companies began to demolish some of these towers and installed traffic control consoles in centralized locations. With some technological advances in the signal systems themselves, this is largely how our trains are dispatched today.

## Safety Sense:

### Vestibule doors

Please be aware that the inner train doors (from the vestibule to the passenger seating areas) are set to close within 12 seconds.

If you notice that the doors are beginning to close, do not try to rush to make it through, or you might get caught in between them.

Never stand in the space where the door closes.

If there is a line to pass in or out of the car, stay behind where the door closes until you see that there is plenty of room for you to safely stand on the other side.

To open the doors simply push on the touch plates. The touch plates are located at both the hand and foot level.

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# On-Time Performance

## Over The Last Six Months

On-Time Performance  
by Train for the month  
of January 2009

### Fredericksburg Line

- 300 – 100%
- 302 – 80%
- 304 – 89%
- 306 – 95%
- 308 – 95%
- 310 – 85%
  
- 301 – 95%
- 303 – 85%
- 305 – 89%
- 307 – 95%
- 309 – 95%
- 311 – 95%
- 313 – 95%

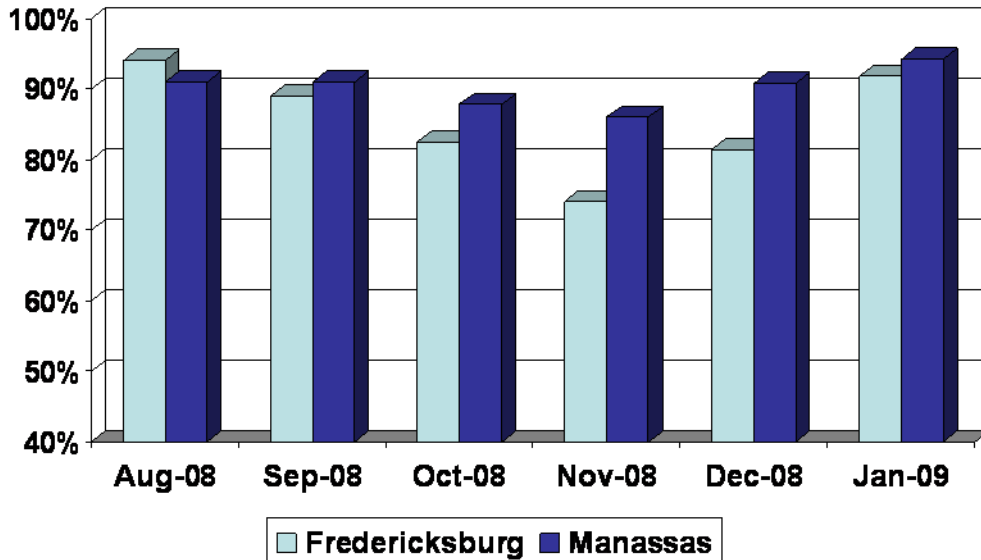
Overall – 92%

### Manassas Line

- 322 – 100%
- 324 – 90%
- 326 – 84%
- 328 – 100%
- 330 – 95%
- 332 – 95%
  
- 325 – 95%
- 327 – 85%
- 329 – 100%
- 331 – 95%
- 333 – 89%
- 335 – 95%
- 337 – 89%

Overall – 94%

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



## Metrocheks

Continued from page 4

incompatible fare collection machines. Over the long term, a regional online system is planned, which would eventually allow all commuter transit systems to share the same type of fare media, such as the SmarTrip cards. (Of course, many commuters can sign on for SmartBenefits and have their fares managed electronically, and have their tickets mailed directly to their homes or offices, which we strongly encourage!)

WMATA is currently projecting a date in 2010 before their system can be ready for the region.

In the meantime, the SmartBenefits vouchers will help eliminate the possibility of fraud—a major problem for WMATA and for employers—because the vouchers will not have magnetic strips.



*Metrocheks will no longer be accepted after March 20. After that time, only SmartBenefits vouchers will be accepted.*

For more information, please visit WMATA's Web page on Metrocheks at [www.wmata.com/bus2bus/smartbenefits/mc\\_end.html](http://www.wmata.com/bus2bus/smartbenefits/mc_end.html) or contact your employer's benefits administrator.