



VIRGINIA RAILWAY EXPRESS UPDATE

703-684-1001

www.vre.org

March 18, 2009

Editor's Note:

Spring is in the air and a lot of things are in bloom at VRE. We have a number of projects underway, and this issue is chock full of information about them, including a Gainesville-Haymarket update, news about the Cherry Hill third track, the upcoming Burke Centre platform extension, and the second platform at Woodbridge.

Spring is also a time when VRE staff and management dusts off their staff shirts for the annual "Meet the Management" series. CSX and Norfolk Southern will be joining us again this year at L'Enfant and Crystal City, respectively. We look forward to seeing you there.

Meet the Management to Resume April 1

We're not fooling ... spring really is coming! And along with spring comes our own annual spring tradition: "Meet the Management".

For new riders, "Meet the Management" is a months-long program in which VRE staff members visit all of VRE's stations during morning and afternoon rush hours so that you, our customer, have the opportunity to share an opinion, ask a question or give us an idea for making things better. We know that for many people, there's no better communication than face-to-face, and that's why Meet the Management has historically been one of our most productive and effective ways of hearing what's on your mind.

And for our experienced riders, Meet the Management has always meant "snack time", and it will continue to do so, as we'll provide granola bars and

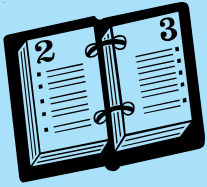
juice in the morning, and sodas, water and cookies in the afternoons.

Beginning April 1, we'll visit a different station every week with the goal of meeting as many of our riders as possible to hear any questions, complaints or comments you may have. We're easy to identify—just look for our cobalt blue "VRE Staff" shirts or our yellow staff jackets.

We'll continue the program through August, ensuring that during the summer months, when issues like summer heat restrictions are on people's minds, we'll be there to answer your questions and help you through the dog days of summer.

Want to know when we'll be at a station near you? Check out www.vre.org/feedback/mtm.htm. So, please keep an eye out for us, and please come talk to us!





Upcoming Dates

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

Wed., April 1
On-Line Forum,
1pm

Wed., April 1 Meet
the Management,
All Evening Trains
Union Station

Wed., April 8 Meet
the Management,
All Evening Trains
L'Enfant Plaza

Wed., April 15
Meet the
Management,
All Evening Trains
Crystal City

Burke Centre Platform Construction to Begin Soon

Riders using the Burke Centre station will soon have a lot more elbow room as they wait for their trains, as construction on a 200-foot long platform extension with a canopy is set to begin later this month. The platform will be located at the south end of the existing platform, behind the recently completed parking garage. It is expected that construction will last about six months.

The existing platform and parking garage will remain open and operating as usual, with minimal disruptions to accessibility. Once construction begins some of the surface parking will be closed to commuters for the duration

of the construction period. We will notify commuters ahead of time and signs will be posted, so please be warned that if you do park in these spots during the construction phase, your car will be towed. (The Burke Centre parking garage is not at capacity, so there will be plenty of parking available even with the temporary loss of the surface lot; alternative lots and shuttle service will therefore not be necessary.)



The \$995,000 platform extension is being funded by federal, state and local monies and will be constructed by Grunley Walsh U.S., LLC, out of Rockville, Md.



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@vre.org or at (703) 684-1001.

Second Platform at Woodbridge Taking Shape

Construction of the highly anticipated second platform at Woodbridge began in November, and thus far things are right on schedule, with utilities identified and the concrete foundations for the pedestrian bridge and elevator tower poured.

We will, of course, keep passengers informed the closer we get to the date so that everyone can be

prepared; please keep an eye out for information in our TrainTalk e-newsletter, on our Web site, and in *VRE Update*. The second platform is scheduled for completion by fall 2009 with a budget of \$6.7 million.

One of the more complicated aspects of the project, which will involve shifting the tracks westward in order to accommodate the new platform

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Second Platform...

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and allow for the construction of an inter-track fence, is currently being coordinated with CSX. That process, which we expect to occur in late spring or early June, will last approximately one week and will likely cause slight disruptions to service for a few days.

Once complete, the second 600-foot long platform with a canopy will run

along the west side of the station and will be connected to the existing parking garage via a 142-foot long overhead pedestrian bridge. A new stair and elevator tower will allow commuters to access the new platform directly from Route 1 via a kiss and ride entrance, which will be constructed as part of this project.

Stimulus Package Includes Mass Transit Subsidy

The recently passed stimulus package has a transit subsidy element that may be of interest to our many riders with direct transit benefits, and could be of benefit to those who have flexible spending accounts (FSAs) that allow them to use pre-tax dollars for their transit needs.

Specifically, as of March 1, 2009, through January 1, 2011, the monthly transit allowance will increase from a cap of \$120 per month to a cap of \$230 per month.

It's hard to predict exactly what kind of effect it will have, as many government agencies are likely trying to figure out how they'll incorporate this change into their benefits packages and budgets. But if you think that you should qualify for the increased coverage, please

be sure to see your benefits administrator or human resources department.



And, while this benefit is currently deemed temporary, there's always the hope that it will be made permanent and extended beyond the 2011 date. Meanwhile, VRE is very pleased to see the benefit included in the stimulus package, as it encourages the use of environmentally friendly mass transit and will hopefully get more cars off

of our jammed highways. Given that prior to the stimulus bill's passage, the pre-tax benefit for parking was more than \$200 per month while the mass transit subsidy was only \$120, we hope this will even up both options and make mass transit an equally attractive option to driving.

Banner Testing

Riders often ask about efficiency testing. One aspect of which is "banner testing". The Federal Railroad Administration requires that for locomotive operators to maintain proper certification, all engineers must be subjected to tests that ensure alertness and proper reaction to a railroad signal.

During these tests, railroad supervisors go into the field unannounced and set up tests that require the engineer to reduce speed significantly, maintaining the ability to completely stop the train within half of the range of vision and short of an obstacle on the tracks.

Railroad supervisors often set up a plastic banner.

Upon seeing this, the engineer must take action and bring the train to a stop safely without hitting the banner.

Gainesville-Haymarket Extension Project Update

Courtesy Corner

"The greater man the greater courtesy."

- Alfred Lord Tennyson

We still receive complaints about riders taking up more than one seat. Please remember that the trains are crowded and seats are meant for people to sit in, they are not a space for your personal belongings.

Also, please do not put your feet on the seats. And for those double offenders who take their shoes off and put their feet on the seats...don't! Feet belong on the floor.

We realize that you can't wait to get home to relax, but please be patient just a little while longer. You'll be home soon and in your own living room, you can then relax any way you wish.

VRE has completed the first phase of the Tier 1 Alternative Analysis for the proposed Gainesville-Haymarket extension project, which would extend service north of the current Manassas Line for approximately 11 miles to the Gainesville-Haymarket area.

We studied all modes of transportation that could potentially operate over the same travel corridor.

The results of the Tier 1 process were announced at a meeting in October of last year.

We are now nearing completion of the Tier 2 Alternatives Analysis. Alternatives being analyzed include: several VRE Gainesville-Haymarket to DC commuter rail variations; improved feeder bus service combined with expanded VRE service on the existing Manassas line from Broad Run; and new commuter bus service from the Gainesville-Haymarket area to DC via I-66. Potential environmental impacts (e.g., wetland, floodplain, noise and vibration impacts), ridership, and capital and operating costs are being evaluated for each of those alternatives.

"The benefits of this process are many," said Christine Hoeffner, VRE's manager of planning, "as they allow us to really examine the overall merits of various alternatives, and also help us comply with federal funding requirements set by the

Federal Transit Administration (FTA). An extension of this magnitude would be expensive, but in order to keep all of our funding options open and have the ability to access federal funds in the future, it's important that we take these steps to study alternatives."



The results of the Tier 2 Alternatives Analysis will be shared at the next public workshop, which at press time is planned for late April or early May. A specific date and location will be announced as soon as possible via our Train Talk e-newsletter, VRE Update, and our Web site.

If it is ultimately decided that VRE service is the best alternative to meet the transit needs of Gainesville/Haymarket commuters, then we'll continue with the current project development process to evaluate the environmental impacts of a VRE extension and begin the design process for the rail and station improvements. Actual implementation of the service is probably at least five to ten years out depending on how it is funded and the specific service plan. Ongoing information about the project is available on our Web site at www.vre.org.

Metrocheks No Longer Accepted after March 20th

Please remember that Friday, March 20, 2009, will be the LAST day VRE will accept Metrocheks as payment. After March 20, only SmartBenefits vouchers will be accepted. All mail-in reimbursement forms must be postmarked by March 20. April Monthly tickets are currently on sale at all vendor locations.



The Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (WMATA) discontinued Metrocheks and began issuing paper transit subsidies

in the form of SmartBenefits vouchers on December 1, 2008.

The vouchers should be used to purchase VRE fare just as Metrocheks were. VRE will also honor the vouchers with the ticket vending machine (TVM) reimbursement program that we have for Metrocheks. In essence, VRE will treat the paper vouchers exactly as we treat Metrocheks; they just look different.

Become a Facebook Fan!

The fastest growing demographic of the social networking site, Facebook, pretty much mirrors VRE's ridership, and we figured it was time we get ourselves a page so that we could meet and mingle with our riders online.

Launched in March, VRE's Facebook page provides info about upcoming events, such as board meetings, Meet the Management schedules and on-line chats with CEO Dale Zehner. We're hoping to host active discussion boards, and even kicked off a book review club since so many of our riders spend their time on board with their favorite book. Future plans also include



links to our TrainTalk e-newsletter and VRE Update.

"Facebook is providing a networking outlet people obviously crave," explained VRE's Manager of Operations and Customer Communications April Maguigad, "and we're hoping that by having a page of our own, we'll have another, more informal way to reach out to people in a place that they're already visiting regularly. It's a great way to keep in touch and keep our ridership up to date on issues that affect them."

Safety Sense:

We've sent out many safety requests asking riders not to stand or walk across the track.

We've sent even more reminders asking riders to not only stay behind the yellow tactile strip, but to stay well behind the yellow strip.

Lately, especially at the north end of Crystal City, we've seen passengers wandering aimlessly on to the pedestrian crossing.

Usually to "wander" on the pedestrian crossing requires one to "wander" past the yellow tactile strip, which you are supposed to stay well back from.

The reason you are not supposed to be on the crossing is, quite simple, you can get hit by a train. Even if you're not hit by a train, you are trespassing, which is illegal and could result in a fine.

For your safety, please stay off the crossings, off the tracks and behind the yellow strip.

Thank you.

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

Fredericksburg Line

- 300 – 89%
- 302 – 95%
- 304 – 95%
- 306 – 95%
- 308 – 89%
- 310 – 95%

- 301 – 79%
- 303 – 95%
- 305 – 89%
- 307 – 95%
- 309 – 95%
- 311 – 100%
- 313 – 89%

Overall – 92%

Manassas Line

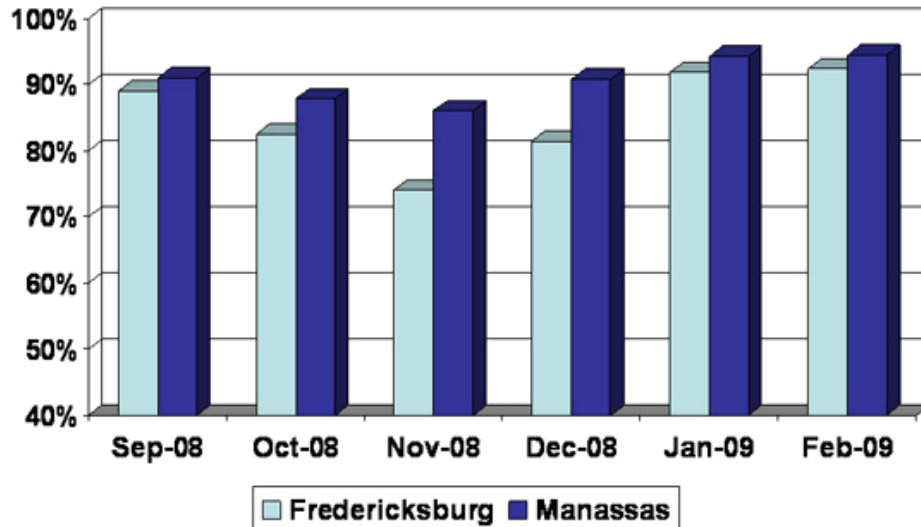
- 322 – 100%
- 324 – 95%
- 326 – 95%
- 328 – 95%
- 330 – 89%
- 332 – 95%

- 325 – 84%
- 327 – 89%
- 329 – 95%
- 331 – 100%
- 333 – 95%
- 335 – 100%
- 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.

On-Time Performance Over The Last Six Months



Environmental Study Underway for Cherry Hill Third Track

VRE has long made it a priority to expand capacity to its service, and with seven track projects already completed or underway, we've made significant strides over the last few years. Next on our list is the desire to build an 11.5-mile long third track segment that would service the proposed new station in Cherry Hill on the Fredericksburg line (between Quantico and Rippon).

The track, which would run between Powells Creek (north of Tim's Rivershore Restaurant) and Arkendale (north of Brooke), would need to be completed before the proposed Cherry Hill station could open, explained Sirel Mouchantaf, VRE's Director of Construction and Facilities. Once complete, this project will provide much needed track capacity, which would reduce delays, and add a new station with 550 parking spaces.

"VRE's agreement with CSX, states that in order for us to add more trains to the system, we need to build a third track all the way from Fredericksburg to D.C.," Mouchantaf said. "This project will serve to extend that effort, just as the Quantico Bridge project did last year. Several segments have already been completed, and this project will continue that effort."

The preliminary engineering and environmental analyses are scheduled to be completed this fall, at which time a 30-day public comment period will be scheduled. Following that process, the design would take up to a year to finalize. Construction would then take approximately two years, and could commence as early as 2011 depending on funding.