



# VIRGINIA RAILWAY EXPRESS UPDATE

703-684-1001

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

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## Editor's Note:

September has traditionally been the month when we dedicate our Update Newsletter to new riders.

Inside new riders will find information on Train Talk, the Daily Download, Twitter and Facebook, our Lost and Found department, information on the Guaranteed Ride Home program, as well as information on Rail Time and bringing bicycles on board the train.

All riders, both new and old, may also be interested in reading about our upcoming schedule change, the Clifton day events, as well as our regular features on safety, courtesy and on-time performance.

So we hope you enjoy this edition of the Update.

And, as always, we thank you for riding VRE.

## Welcome New Riders!



Many of our riders have been with us for years and know all the "ins and outs" of riding VRE. However, for those of you who are new to VRE or have been riding for a short time, this edition of the Update is dedicated to you. It can also be used as a reminder to some of you who may have forgotten about some of these important benefits of riding VRE.

The first thing to become familiar with is the VRE web site: [www.vre.org](http://www.vre.org). Here you

can find everything you need to know about buying a ticket, pricing options, schedule information, using our train locator, and how to obtain a "New Rider Kit" by mail.

You can also e-mail us at [gotrains@vre.org](mailto:gotrains@vre.org) with any specific questions you may have. From our website you can link to our new Facebook page as well as our Twitter page.

VRE has several programs and special services that you may or may not be aware of. Even if you are a dedicated long-time rider you may need a refresher course on some of these.

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## New Amtrak Train - Will Make VRE Station Stops on Manassas Line

On October 1, Amtrak, in conjunction with the Commonwealth of Virginia, will begin offering round-trip service between Lynchburg and Washington, D.C. This service will operate northbound in the train slot that was once used by VRE's mid-morning train and will leave southbound just before Manassas Line train 331. Like many of the other Amtrak trains that operate in the VRE service area, VRE riders holding monthly, 10-Ride, 5-Day or TLC tickets will be able to use a \$10 Step-Up to ride these trains. In addition to their stops outside of VRE territory, these trains will stop at Manassas, Burke Centre,



Alexandria, L'Enfant, and Union Station. **Please note that in order to accommodate these trains, two of VRE's trains will have a schedule change on October 1. Manassas Line train 331 will operate 5 minutes later and Fredericksburg Line train 307 will depart 5 minutes earlier.**

The round trip train between Lynchburg and Washington, D.C. occupies one of the two train slots that VRE transferred to the Commonwealth of Virginia earlier this year. The second train, a round trip between Richmond and Washington, is expected to start after the third track between Alexandria and Franconia/Springfield is completed.





### Upcoming Dates

Sun. September 13th, was the last day that VRE tickets were available for sale at the Alexandria Ticket Window. The new vendor is located at the Old Town Transit Shop across from the Metro. Tickets are expected to go on sale there on September 21st.

Thurs. October 1st, VRE Schedule Change

Wed. October 7th, On-line Forum Noon

Sun. Oct. 11th Clifton Day



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.

# Train Talk Newsletter

"Train Talk" is VRE's official e-mail newsletter. It keeps subscribers current on service disruptions, schedule changes, upcoming events and other important VRE happenings. If a train is running significantly behind schedule (at least 20 minutes), you'll know why and you will get periodic updates as to when things are moving smoothly again. We also send weekly e-newsletters with tips and information to make your commute even better.



Best of all, you can tell us exactly where you want us to send Train Talk so that you can access it wherever it's most convenient – at home, at work, by PDA or by phone – so no matter where you are, you can find out how your commute is shaping up. You can even customize the news you receive, so that if you ride the Manassas line, you won't get updates about the Fredericksburg line ... and vice versa.

To subscribe, visit <http://traintalk.vre.org>.

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*"The only way to be sure of catching a train is to miss the one before it." - G. K. Chesterton*

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## Yea! It's Clifton Day!

The annual Clifton Day Festival will be held on Sunday, October 11 from 9:00am to 5:00pm. Enjoy fine arts, crafts, and antiques in the historic town of Clifton. Kids will enjoy the music, family entertainment and the civil war re-enactment.

### Things to Do:

The Northern Virginia Therapeutic Riding Program will offer pony rides, and the children's entertainment in the park will include various activities from JumpWorks, the Unicorn Lady, Kerri the Face Painter, numerous games put on by the local Girl Scouts, and a Petting Zoo. Children of all ages love the petting zoo and it is free, and so is the Face Painting! Arts and crafts vendors will display their wares throughout the streets of the town. And crafters will give live demonstrations of woodcarving, syrup-making, basketry spinning, herbal crafting, lace, pottery-making, rug weaving and silhouette creating.

Plus, the 49th Virginia Regiment will hold a Civil War encampment, providing an accurate glimpse into the lives of some of the soldiers who fought along the railroad line from Manassas to Alexandria.

And there'll be food galore, including crab cakes from the Clifton Presbyterian Church, as well as hot dogs, hamburgers, sandwiches, hot cider and Brunswick Stew. Of course, what would a festival be without funnel cakes and kettle corn.

### Getting to Clifton Day:

VRE will run trains from the Manassas, Manassas Park, Rolling Road and Burke Stations to Clifton for free. Tickets for the return trip from Clifton may be purchased at the red caboose in Clifton for \$5. Children 2 and under ride free with a fare paying adult. VRE passengers may NOT use their VRE ticket for passage. For more information on Clifton Day call (703) 968-0740 or visit the Clifton Day website.



# Daily Download

If you've ever wondered why your train was late the day before, VRE posts delay information online daily. This information includes the total length of the delay, a brief description of the reason, and any FRC or other information that you may need. This information will be updated daily by noon the following day.

Please note: Fredericksburg line trains are highlighted in RED. Manassas line trains are highlighted in BLUE.



Delays are determined by the train's arrival time at the final destination.

Free Ride Certificates (FRCs) are handed out to passengers on the train once the train has reached 60 minutes of delay. Because trains can be delayed anywhere en route, the FRC policy will not apply to those who detrained before the delay reached the 60 minutes mark. The on-time performance for each line for the day will be posted at the end.

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*"I knew I was going to take the wrong train, so I left early." - Yogi Berra*

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## Social Networking



VRE is now a proud member of the new age of social communication. We introduced our Facebook page in April and in May we introduced our Twitter site.

Become a fan of VRE and join the other 450 friends of VRE who have already signed up on Facebook under Virginia Railway Express. Here you can read about upcoming events, schedule changes and current topics of discussion. We want to encourage riders to participate in topics in the Discussion Section of our Facebook page. Feel free to start a topic, jump into one or simply read along. We do read all comments posted on the Facebook page, and, while we cannot comment on every message, we do make comments when necessary. We also post discussion questions to riders when we are looking for specific feedback, so check back periodically for updates.

Our latest foray into the world of social networking is via [www.twitter.com](http://www.twitter.com) a free site that allows people to let friends and associates know of their status and what they are up to at just about any time of the day. The short, 140-character messages can be received via the Twitter Web site, text messages on cell phones, or personal digital assistant (PDA), and people must opt in to "follow" individuals or organizations in order to receive "tweets" from them.

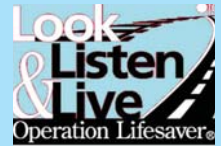
Right now, we're using Twitter to help update riders of train delays, remind them of upcoming events (such as Meet the Management or our On-line forum), or relay other important information. It's another version of the Train Talk e-news service, which many people also receive via cell phone, in that it's yet another avenue for us to communicate with our riders.

To register on Twitter, visit [www.twitter.com/VaRailXpress](http://www.twitter.com/VaRailXpress), and click on "join today" if you're not already a Twitter user.

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*"When I was a kid, I went to the store and asked the guy, Do you have any toy train schedules?" - Stephen Wright*

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### Safety Sense

Operation Lifesaver offers the following Common Sense rail safety tips:

1. Always expect a train.
2. Turn your cell phone and MP3 player off when you're near train tracks. Forget texting, as it could be a deadly distraction.
3. Trains are quieter than you think, go faster than they appear, and do not run on set schedules.
4. Look both ways and listen before crossing train tracks. Do not cross anywhere other than a public crossing, stay off and away from the tracks.
5. Tracks, trestles, rail yards and equipment are private property. If you hunt, fish or ride your ATV on the tracks, you are trespassing.

# Lost and Found

If you've ever had the unfortunate experience of leaving something behind on our train by accident, then you already know that VRE has a wonderful Lost and Found department. Over 70% of items lost on our trains are returned to their original owners.

Here's how it works: As soon as you realize you left an item (not a ticket or ID) on the train, go to VRE's web site and fill out an online Lost Item Report at [www.vre.org/feedback/lostitems.php](http://www.vre.org/feedback/lostitems.php) or call (703) 684-1001 between 7:00am and 7:00pm. Please be sure to provide as much detail as possible to help distinguish your property from similar items, especially if you lost a black umbrella.



In the meantime, VRE staff collects and tags items that are found on the trains every day. If we find an item that you have reported as missing, we will contact you. You can come to the VRE office with your photo ID to recover your item from our Lost & Found. Items are only kept for 30 days, after which they will be donated to charity. For health reasons, food items and their containers must be claimed by 6:30 p.m. on the day that they arrive at VRE. All food items left after that time will be discarded.

If you lose your ticket or an ID, the procedure is similar: first, fill out the online Lost Ticket Report at [www.vre.org/feedback/losttickets.php](http://www.vre.org/feedback/losttickets.php), or call (703) 684-1001 to report a lost ticket. If your ticket is found, we will contact

you and make arrangements to return it to you. Ten-Trip and Single-Ride tickets will be mailed to your home address, and Monthly tickets will be given to the conductor of your evening train. If you lose a Monthly ticket that is not found within 48 hours of reporting it missing, you are eligible for a replacement ticket. Simply

call us again to confirm that the ticket was not found, and we will deliver a new Monthly ticket to you. If you lose a TLC ticket that is not found within 48 hours of reporting it missing, you are eligible for a replacement for the portion of the ticket that provides travel on VRE. Please visit [www.vre.org/service/vretlc.htm](http://www.vre.org/service/vretlc.htm) for details. Proof of purchase may be required to reissue tickets, so please retain your receipt when purchasing your ticket.

To help ensure that your ticket gets returned to you: 1) Please print your name and daytime phone number on the front of your ticket, 2) Try not to keep other people's business cards in your ticket holder, especially if your name and phone number is not on the ticket, 3) Do not keep other valuables, like transit vouchers, other tickets or your Drivers License inside your ticket pouches. The higher its value, the more tempting it may be for someone to take your ticket rather than turn it in.

VRE will always do its best to recover lost items and tickets, but we are not responsible for them. You must have a valid ticket prior to boarding a VRE train, so it is your responsibility to purchase a new ticket to use until the missing ticket is found.

## What Is Rail Time?



Rail Time is VRE's real-time train tracking service. The Global Positioning Satellite (GPS) run program shows a current train's location and its status (on time or delayed). You can even zoom in to see exactly where the train is located, down to the general street level.

Just log on to [www.vre.org/vremap/app?action=ovmap](http://www.vre.org/vremap/app?action=ovmap), or click on the "Rail Time Update" button on our home page,

to check out VRE's real-time train tracking service and see where your train is.

Figuring out the exact location of your train is very easy. Once at the site, you will see a map of both the Manassas and Fredericksburg lines. During commuting hours, visitors to the site will also see green, red or gray circles that represent the trains. If the circle is green, the train is on time. If it is red, the train is late; and if it is gray, the train has temporarily lost commu-  
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# What Is Rail...

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nication with VRE. By placing your mouse over the colored circle, a pop-up box will appear with the train's number, its status, and a timestamp indicating the date and time the train last communicated. And, if you click your mouse directly on the train's icon, you can zoom in to a more detailed map of the selected train's location.

Sometimes, trains are tracked manually, mean-

ing that a conductor reports in from the train when the GPS is not functioning properly. In that case, riders will need to visit VRE's online "train status" page, located at [www.vre.org/vremap/app?action=showstat](http://www.vre.org/vremap/app?action=showstat), for service information.

Additionally, all browsers may not support the pop-up feature that Rail Time offers. In that case, users should also visit the train status Web page for an update on the status of trains scheduled to be in operation at that time.

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## Guaranteed Ride Home

One of the biggest obstacles to getting people to take public transit regularly is working around their fear that they might someday be "stranded" should an unexpected emergency come up. What if, for example, you unexpectedly had to work past your normal quitting time, and you'll miss the last train. Or a child falls ill at home and you need to get home moments after you arrived at work ... and there aren't any trains running in the direction you need.

It can be a stressful situation. Fortunately, there is an answer. Thanks to a regional, cooperative effort called Guaranteed Ride Home (GRH), there is indeed a "safety net" in place that will guarantee you a ride home in the case of an emergency.

The program is free and available to all VRE passengers. The ride is paid for in full by GRH up-front, with no reimbursement by the commuter necessary. For those passengers living more than 40 miles away, a cab or a rental car may be made available, but the mode of transportation to get you home is ultimately up to the GRH customer service representative.

There are a few things to keep in mind when using GRH:

To qualify for the GRH program, you must be pre-registered with the Council of Govern-

ments (COG). (Un-registered commuters can use GRH one time, but you must then register before you are eligible to use GRH again). You will be asked to state your normal work hours (i.e., 9-5, 7:30-4:30 etc.) on the registration form. To get a copy of the registration form mailed to you, call 800-745-RIDE. Or visit the GRH Web site at [www.mwco.org/commuter/ccindex.html](http://www.mwco.org/commuter/ccindex.html).



The GRH program does not cover gratuities paid to cab drivers.

To qualify for an emergency ride due to unscheduled overtime, your supervisor must

be available to confirm authorized overtime. As soon as you know that you will have unscheduled overtime, call Commuter Connections at 800-745-RIDE to schedule your ride. Please call as early as possible. You can call any time before, but no later than your normally scheduled quitting time. Additionally, the operator will need to speak to your supervisor to confirm authorized overtime.

The program operates from 6:00 a.m. to 10:00 p.m. on weekdays. It generally will not run in severe weather or on holidays.

For more information, please call 800-745-RIDE or visit [www.mwco.org/commuter/ccindex.html](http://www.mwco.org/commuter/ccindex.html).

The H1N1 (swine flu) virus still dominates the news. Here are a few tips that can help you to avoid it:

- Stay informed. The Centers for Disease Control website (<http://cdc.gov/h1n1flu/>) is updated regularly. Know if there is an outbreak near you.

Influenza is thought to spread mainly person-to-person through coughing or sneezing of infected people.

- Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze. Throw the tissue in the trash after you use it.

- Wash your hands often with soap and water, especially after you cough or sneeze. Alcohol-based hand cleaners are also effective.

- Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth. Germs spread that way.

- Stay home if you get sick. CDC recommends that you stay home from work or school and limit contact with others to keep from infecting them.

- Follow public health advice regarding school closures, avoiding crowds and other social distancing measures.

For our part, we are continuing to wipe down and sanitize all exposed surfaces on our trains every night.

*On-Time Performance by Train for the month of August 2009*

**Fredericksburg Line**

- 300 – 90%
- 302 – 86%
- 304 – 95%
- 306 – 100%
- 308 – 100%
- 310 – 90%
- 301 – 81%
- 303 – 57%
- 305 – 76%
- 307 – 81%
- 309 – 76%
- 311 – 95%
- 313 – 90%

Overall – 86%

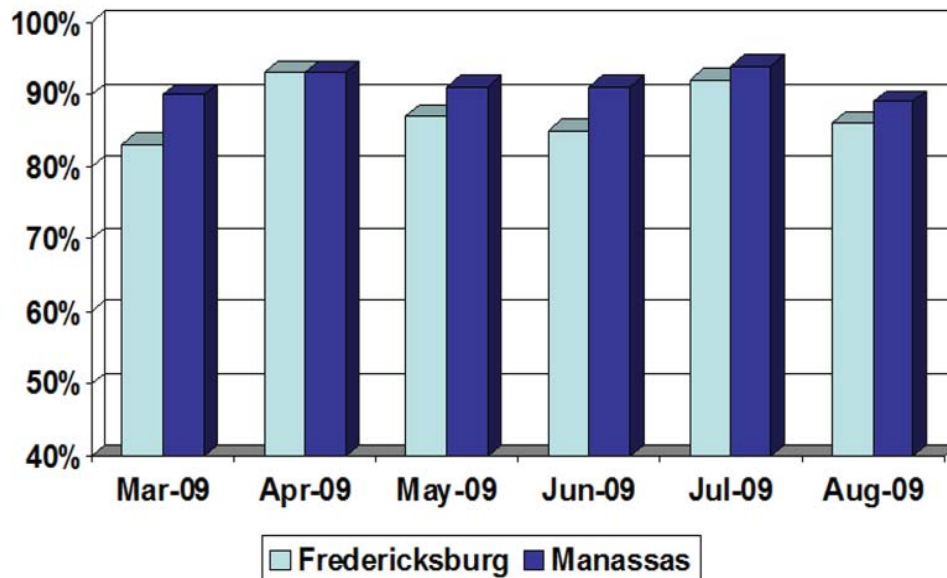
**Manassas Line**

- 322 – 90%
- 324 – 90%
- 326 – 86%
- 328 – 95%
- 330 – 90%
- 332 – 100%
- 325 – 90%
- 327 – 76%
- 329 – 90%
- 331 – 90%
- 333 – 86%
- 335 – 86%
- 337 – 71%

Overall – 89%

\*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



## Bicycles On Trains



Some of you have been asking if VRE allows bikes on its trains. Well, it just so happens that we have recently updated our policy regarding carrying bicycles on our trains. The following are some of the rules to keep in mind when taking a bike on board:

Collapsible bicycles are permitted on all of our trains. Full size bicycles will only be allowed on the last three northbound, the mid-day, and the last three southbound trains on each line. Specifically, these trains are:

Fredericksburg Line				
Northbound	306	308	310	
Southbound	301	309	311	313
Manassas Line				
Northbound	328	330	332	
Southbound	325	333	335	337

Bicycles must board at the northern-most car on the train and use the southern half of the car.

No more than two (2) bicycles are allowed on the car. If the car already has two bikes, you cannot bring your bike on

the train and must wait for the next one.

Bicycles must be tethered to the bench seats using a bungee cord attached to the eyelet on the seat frame. The south end bench is distinguishable by only having four (4) folding seats. Bicyclists will be responsible for securing their bicycle.

The bench seating on the north end of the car is priority seating for passengers with disabilities. This area is located directly across from the restroom and cannot be used for bicycles.

If the bench seating for bicycles is occupied by passengers, the bicycle rider may ask the passenger to vacate the seat or ask the conductor for assistance if the passenger is unwilling to move. The priority will be for the bicycles.

For the safety and convenience of our other riders, bikes will be boarded and removed last after all other passengers have boarded or detrained.

Passengers are not permitted to ride bicycles on the platforms or trains.

Bicycles must be clean and free of grease.

VRE will not be responsible for the security of bikes brought on board.