



# VIRGINIA RAILWAY EXPRESS

## Update



703-684-1001

www.vre.org

April 18, 2007

### Editor's Note:

As we go to print, the events at Virginia Tech are unfolding. We would like to take this moment to offer our thoughts and prayers to those who lost loved ones this week. Words cannot express the sorrow or begin to solace those who have been affected by this tragedy.

It is easy to get lost in the day to day drudgery of work and commuting and to lose sight of those that really matter. We know that when we are delayed, we affect you and your family. As discussed in our article on efficiency tests, our top priority it to get you home safely at the end of the day. We also offer our annual Take Your Children to work day. Each year we offer youngsters a free ride when they visit their parent's place of work.

All this adds up to giving you more time with your loved ones. Time that we can all remember to use more wisely.

## The Real Purpose Behind Efficiency Testing? Passenger Safety!

The morning's commute has been a breeze. You found a parking space no problem, got your favorite seat in your favorite car, and the train headed out of the station exactly on time. You're already planning on having plenty of time before your first morning meeting at work. Just then, the scene out the window slows ... and your train glides to a halt. The PA system crackles to life, and the conductor announces that the train is undergoing an efficiency test and will be delayed.

Efficiency? Delay? What kind of oxymoron is *that*? And really, what exactly is efficiency testing anyway, and how come it can't be done at the

station before a train leaves or after a train arrives at its destination?

To give a quick tutorial on this bothersome-to-our-riders fact of life, efficiency tests are a bit like "traffic cops" of the railroad. In order to ensure your safety on a heavily traveled rail corridor, the operating officials of Amtrak, CSXT and Norfolk Southern



Continued on page 2

## Bring Your Child To Work Day is April 26!

Having kids often allows parents to view the world wearing kid-colored glasses, and on Thursday, April 26, lots of commuters will have a great opportunity to see a kid's spin on their workday (and their commute). That's because April 26 is the 15<sup>th</sup> annual "Take Our Daughters And Sons To Work<sup>®</sup> Day 2007!" The event, organized by the Ms. Foundation for Women in 1993, was originally designed to help America's young women become more visible, valued and heard in our society. The program has been expanded to both boys and girls, giving thousands of children the opportunity to learn how work, family and community life intersect.

For nearly ten years, VRE has strongly supported "Take Our Daughters and Sons to Work Day" by allowing school age children to ride free with their parents that day.



Continued on page 3

# Efficiency Testing

Continued from page 1

periodically conduct “efficiency tests” on the crews that operate your trains. Much like troopers on highways, these teams create unannounced “tests” and “observations” of employee compliance with the Codes of Operating Rules that ensure your safety. In recent years, railroad locomotive engineers have become licensed within strict, federally-approved guidelines. Part of this rulemaking, created by the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA), requires periodic testing of your engineer, in the field. Conductors are also tested within the owning railroad’s rules and regulations. And, because the tests are administered by Amtrak, Norfolk Southern and CSX, we do not have any control of when and where they will occur.

Efficiency tests have many similarities with highway rules enforcement. The tests include using radar to discreetly check maximum speed compliance; setting railroad traffic control signals to “red” to check stopping compliance; and stopping and boarding trains to check that conductors and engineers have the proper rule books, bulletins and other associated paperwork required to safely run your train (much like a police officer stopping drivers at road blocks and asking for their license and registration). In some cases, a barricade is placed on the tracks, simulating another “train ahead.” When a train has received verbal permission from a train dispatcher to pass a red (stop) signal, the train must proceed “prepared to stop short of train ahead or obstruction.” The train must stop short of the barricade. These procedures have continued to insure alertness, professionalism and, most importantly, cautious and safe train operation by Amtrak-VRE crews.

“Operating a train is very similar to piloting an airliner,” said Dave Snyder, VRE’s supervisor of operations, safety and security. “The engineers and conductors are constantly communicating with each other, just as pilots and co-pilots must do to safely operate a plane. They are continually verbalizing operating instructions and safety checks with each other, but on a train, they have to do it by radio rather than by sitting side-by-side. Conductors are responsible for reminding the engineers of where they must reduce their speed ... engineers call out the signals as he sees them from the front window. It’s a constant b a c k - a n d - f o r t h communication, and nothing can be overlooked. In today’s world, where rail traffic is heavy and a lot of track work is underway, there are countless danger areas. The crew starts every day with a sheaf of orders that they must quickly digest, commit to memory, and then comply with throughout the trip. In that kind of intense environment, these tests are critical for the safe operation of our trains.”

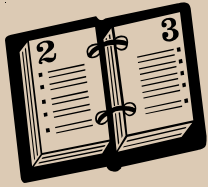


*Simulating the end of train, this “banner” was used in a recent efficiency test.*

Recently, a staff member from VRE accompanied testers on the Fredericksburg line to see first-hand what the efficiency tests are all about.

“The test I observed involved several different aspects of train safety,” said VRE Customer Communications Manager April Maguigad. “They used a radar gun to check that trains were operating within the speed limit. They also tested the ability of the train’s crew to stop a train quickly and safely. They did it by placing a shunt across the tracks, which immediately caused the signals to ‘go red’ in that section of

Continued on page 3



## Upcoming Dates

April 18  
Meet the Management  
L’Enfant  
All Evening Trains

April 25  
Meet the Management  
Crystal City  
All Evening Trains

May 2  
Online Forum  
12:00 noon

Meet the Management  
Alexandria  
All Evening Trains

May 9  
Meet the Management  
Franconia-Springfield  
All Evening 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.

# Efficiency Testing

Continued from page 2

track. A barricade was then placed in the tracks. From there, the testers could have boarded the train to check for papers and other books. The whole process took less than five minutes.”

The efficiency tests and procedures can occur at any time, at any location, in any weather. Delays to your train can be as short as five minutes to as much as 20 minutes. If a crew failed a major test, a new crew would be called to take over operation, and the delay would be lengthy. Thankfully, VRE has always passed its

efficiency testing and has never had to have a crew replaced ... and we, of course, plan to keep it that way! But the only way to ensure your safety and our continued safe operations, is to continue to endure with these tests.

So, if you experience a delay due to an efficiency test, we ask for your patience. The reward is a great one: knowing that you are in good hands with well-trained crews—and safe from the maddening unknowns of the nearby highways.

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## Bring Your Child To Work Day

Continued from page 1

“We have long supported the ideals of ‘Bring Your Child to Work Day,’” said VRE CEO Dale Zehner, “and we’re proud to participate again this year. Kids will have a great introduction to their parents’ work world, and kids will get a first-hand look at the advantages of mass transit. With environmentalism continuing to expand in importance, it’s a terrific way to demonstrate to our children that commuting doesn’t have to mean putting more cars on our already congested roads.”

More than 3 million employers are expected to participate in the program this year, ranging from Fortune 500 companies to small employers and government agencies in every state across the country. That level of participation from employers is expected to translate into 35 million Americans participating in this year’s program.



“Over the past 15 years, millions of children have been going to work with Mom or Dad or another trusted adult on Take Our Daughters And Sons To Work® Day,” noted Sara Gould, the president and CEO of Ms. Foundation for Women. “The overwhelming success of this program has made the Ms. Foundation even more ambitious in what we – along with the American people – will do next to nurture girls’ voices and leadership.”



For more information about the program, and to find out ways to make the event more meaningful for your own child, visit [www.DaughtersandSonstoWork.org](http://www.DaughtersandSonstoWork.org) for up-to-the minute information on this year’s program and to see what an array of workplaces are planning for the day.

### Courtesy Corner

#### Smoking!

Every spring, we hear more and more about a topic that has our passengers divided on the platform, literally and figuratively: smoking. In an attempt to create a happy medium, the smoking is only permitted at the northern most 100 feet of the platform. At most stations, a white line has been drawn to inform passengers where the smoking section stops and the no smoking section begins. Often, even this is not enough.

While we remind you to smoke only in designated areas, we also ask that you refrain from smoking in the non-regulated areas, like the entrance to the platform from the parking lots. If you must smoke before reaching the platform, be sure to finish up so that you are not standing near the stairs or ramps. Your fellow passengers would appreciate the courtesy.

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

**Fredericksburg Line**

300 – 88%  
 302 – 59%  
 304 – 65%  
 306 – 59%  
 308 – 82%  
 310 – 73%

301 – 82%  
 303 – 82%  
 305 – 59%  
 307 – 71%  
 309 – 64%  
 311 – 76%  
 313 – 68%

Overall – 70.5%

**Manassas Line**

322 – 91%  
 324 – 86%  
 326 – 73%  
 328 – 86%  
 330 – 95%  
 332 – 91%

325 – 95%  
 327 – 91%  
 329 – 95%  
 331 – 91%  
 333 – 86%  
 335 – 95%  
 337 – 91%

Overall – 90.1%

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

# Ask VRE!

Dear VRE,

Today, my train continued through my station on “express,” and I had to wait a few extra minutes for my regular train. Why does VRE express trains when they’re running late? How come they don’t all just stop at every station so that I can board whichever train gets there first?

Confused about Express Trains

Dear Conused,

First of all, let’s name trains to help make this a little more clear. Let’s say the Apple Train is supposed to arrive at Anywhere Station at 3:00, and the Orange Train is supposed to arrive at Anywhere Station at 3:30. But the Apple Train gets bogged down by some slow freight trains, and pretty soon it’s running 25 to 30 minutes late. But because we run our trains about 30 minutes apart, once a train becomes 25 to 30 minutes late on the VRE, it ends up being a little early, or “on time,” for the next train. In other words, the Apple Train morphs into the Orange Train.



What’s so bad about that? Well, a few things. First, it slows down the first train (Apple) because all the people who would normally board the second train (Orange) think, “Hey, this train is here five minutes before my regular train, so I might as well hop on!” So now the Apple Train has to pick up a double load, which takes longer to load.

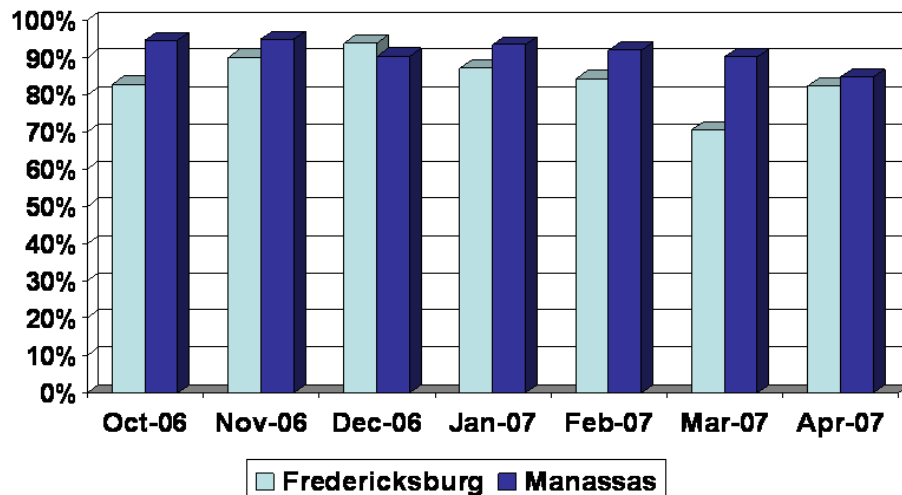
Then, the signal systems on both the CSX and Norfolk Southern rail lines are set up so that when two trains are following fairly closely behind one another, the second train cannot run at maximum speed because it needs to travel as many as five to six miles to the rear ... thus slowing that train down even more.

So, the justification to run the Apple Train as an express is simple: It allows the first train to skip stops, and make up time avoiding further delay, and it also allows the second train to travel at a faster following speed. People waiting for the second train will only have to wait an additional five to eight minutes for it to arrive, and there will be ample seating for all.

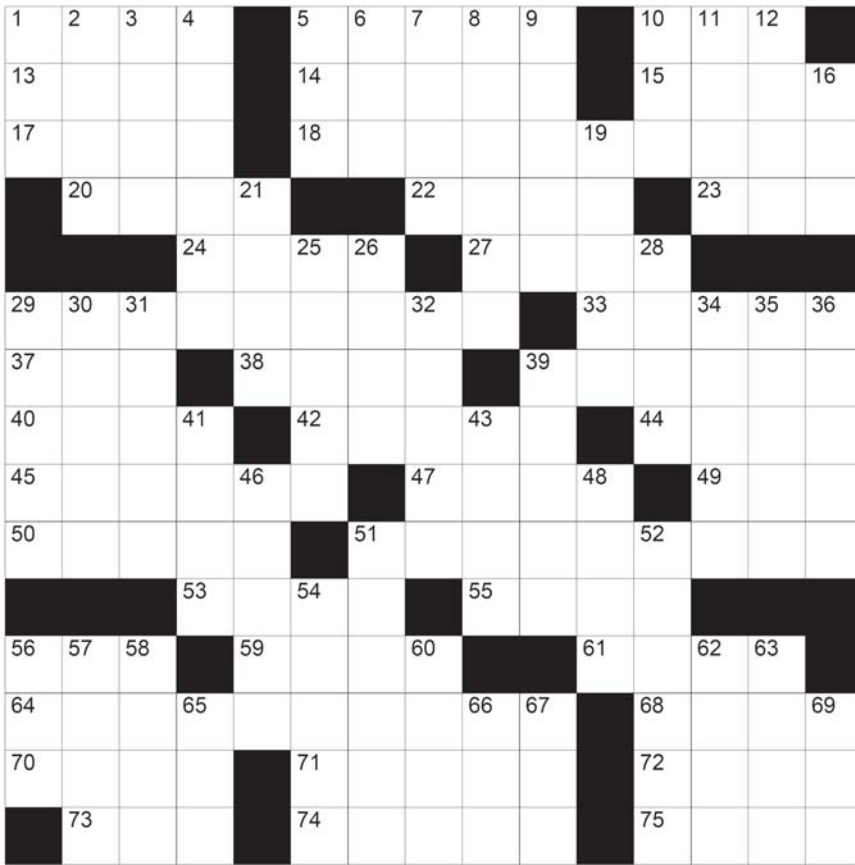
Your Customer Advocate

## Overall On-Time Performance

\*April numbers are through April 13, 2007



# Crossword Puzzle of the Week



## ACROSS

- 01. Perform
- 04. Contend
- 07. Elevated
- 11. Shellfish
- 13. Priest
- 15. Thought
- 16. The frame or body of ship
- 17. Warn
- 18. Happy
- 19. Aside
- 21. Escort at a wedding

- 23. Ceremony
- 24. Swab gently
- 25. Potato or water chestnut
- 27. Based on sound reasoning or evidence
- 31. Posed for a picture
- 32. Type of node in the body
- 35. Catch some Z's
- 36. Saga
- 38. Wrath
- 39. Saturday Night \_\_\_

- 40. Bowed stringed instrument
- 42. Wanderer
- 45. Born: Fr.
- 46. Foot lever
- 48. Suit material
- 50. Fish eggs
- 51. Supplication
- 52. Draft horse
- 54. Annual
- 58. Aquatic bird
- 59. Sing softly
- 61. Golf club
- 62. Fair

## DOWN

- 01. Pain
- 02. The \_\_\_ of the matter
- 03. Bath powder
- 04. Worth
- 05. The \_\_\_ of March
- 06. Make a mistake
- 07. Mixed drink
- 08. Inactive
- 09. Equipment
- 10. Owned
- 12. Promotional material
- 13. Used in making pie
- 14. Musical composition
- 20. Cambodian monetary unit
- 22. Without: Fr.
- 25. Candle
- 26. Helpful
- 27. Those
- 28. Living thing

- 29. Dike
- 30. Fencing sword
- 31. Religious order
- 33. Excavation
- 34. An athlete who plays for pay
- 37. Single-reed instrument
- 41. Scent
- 43. At an angle
- 44. Bambi, for one
- 47. Bloodsucker
- 49. Fanatical
- 51. Plant with showy flowers
- 52. Mop the deck
- 53. Exhibiting vigorous good health
- 54. Possessive pronoun
- 55. Spoken
- 56. Seep
- 57. Joint
- 58. Watering hole
- 60. Knock



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