



# VIRGINIA RAILWAY EXPRESS

## Update



703-684-1001

www.vre.org

December 19, 2007

### Editor's Note:

Another year has come and gone. Looking back, what a wonderful year it has been! The Quantico Bridge was completed on-time and on budget, eliminating the biggest bottleneck in the VRE service area. On-time performance has improved dramatically since then. More improvement is on the way thanks to a new initiative called Partners in Performance. Our lead article tells all about this promising venture to make next year even better.

While we are thinking about making things better, this year was another red banner year for our Toys for Tots collections. Thanks to you, many children will be having a happier holiday season. Read more about it on page 3.

Finally, as we close out 2007, we would like to wish you a wonderful holiday season and a merry new year.

## Partners in Performance:

### *Amtrak, CSXT and VRE Commit to 90% On-Time Performance*

The Richmond to Washington, D.C., rail corridor is among the busiest in the nation, with freight, passenger and commuter trains all vying for space on increasingly crowded rail lines. And for years, the orchestration of those trains has been akin to the old adage of too many cooks in the kitchen spoiling the broth: CSXT operates the freights, owns and maintains the tracks, and dispatches all of the trains; Amtrak operates and maintains their passenger trains; and VRE operates its trains with crews contracted from Amtrak. The result was that when something went wrong—a switch went out, a locomotive broke down, a freight held up a passenger train—fingers were pointed and the blame game began. On-time performance for all involved was reduced to sometimes-pitiable percentages, and an adversarial relationship oftentimes won out.

But things started to change in November 2006, when CSXT needed to repair its bridge over the Anacostia River. Daryl Pesce, general superintendent at Amtrak, was approached and asked what it would take to run certain CSXT freight trains carrying items such as juice, UPS and other non-hazardous material through Amtrak's Washington terminal.

It was a significant request, with legal issues and train length, routing, and tonnage issues that need to be considered whenever freight is

allowed to run through a passenger terminal. Not surprisingly, the request also meant that Pesce and Amtrak's operations team would need to work closely with Don Jones, division manager of CSXT's Baltimore Division.

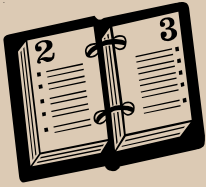
"I remember well the first night we ran the first few freights through the Washington terminal," said Pesce, "and the relief we all felt when it went beautifully. The routine eventually became so routine and so smooth—and our cross-departmental communications between Amtrak and CSXT became so seamless—we realized we were on to something good."

And it's that something good that has ultimately led to a groundbreaking new partnership recently announced by Amtrak, CSX and VRE: Called "Partners in Performance," the program commits each organization to achieving a 90 percent on-time performance rate for the Richmond to D.C. route.

"For so long," VRE's CEO Dale Zehner said, "we were all trying to make improvements independently of each other, but we had never all sat down together and 'signed up' toward a common goal. We can no longer think of the components of this rail corridor as being someone else's job ... we're all in this together



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### Upcoming Events

**Mon., December 24**  
Christmas Eve  
“S” Schedule

**Tue., December 25**  
Christmas  
No VRE Service

**Mon., December 31**  
New Year’s Eve  
“S” Schedule

**Tue., January 1**  
New Year’s Day  
No VRE Service

**Wed., January 9**  
On-Line Forum  
12:00 noon

**Mon., January 21**  
Martin Luther King, Jr.  
Holiday  
No VRE Service



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# Partners in Performance

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now, and it really does add to the pressure to perform at the top of our game. It’s personal now—I’ve signed up for this with colleagues whom I highly respect. By publicly committing to this partnership and to this goal, we’re all taking a huge step toward the kind of performance we all want and need.”

“This new level of cooperation, communication and team problem solving is already paying great dividends,” agreed Jay Westbrook, assistant vice president at CSX. “This kind of focus and concentration is helping us step up to the next level of performance. The end result is that all rail traffic is moving better, and the passengers and commuters on Amtrak and VRE are the winners—as they should be.”

Reaching the 90 percent goal depends on a large number of factors, perhaps the most important of which is increased capacity. The completion of the Quantico Bridge last April, which eliminated the biggest bottleneck in the entire Richmond to D.C. corridor, led to significant improvements in VRE’s on-time performance. Last summer, for example, VRE’s Fredericksburg line experienced performance rates during the summer months between 48 and 60 percent. Since the bridge opened, that number has jumped to an average of 88 percent.

Outside of VRE, other improvements can be easily found: the on-time performance rate of Amtrak train 79 (NY to Charlotte), historically the worst performer of any of Amtrak’s Northeast corridor trains, has jumped from the mid-50 percentile to 81 percent.

“It’s obviously not where we ultimately want to be,” said Pesce, “but it’s still a huge improvement, and we attribute it to the combined efforts of Amtrak and CSX and this ‘Partners in Performance’ effort.”

Outside of capacity and improving much of the corridor’s infrastructure, each of the three organizations has already identified their next steps toward improvement.

“Now that we have some of the capacity and structural issues out of the way,” said Zehner, “we need to move on to the really detailed aspects of operating and focusing on how to run it better. At VRE, we’re focusing a great deal of attention in a few areas: First, the maintenance of our coaches and locomotives has to be top-notch ... we should never have to tell the dispatchers that due to some maintenance issue, we’re going to come out of the yards a few minutes late, and we should have zero mechanical failures once en route.”

“In the stations,” he added, “we have to keep our dwell time at a minimum by loading and discharging our passengers safely but not taking our time at it. And we have to always remember

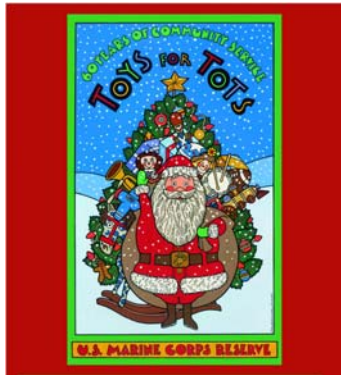


that the biggest concern for our passengers is being on time. Minutes matter—if we can shave a minute here and another there, they start adding up, and we can make a real difference in our passengers’ lives. It’s also key to remember that all delays are not equal: a passenger can typically handle an afternoon delay more easily than a morning delay—it’s usually less stressful to arrive home 15 minutes late than it is to walk into a meeting with a boss 15 minutes late. So, we’re focusing first on eliminating morning delays, and then on afternoon delays.”

At CSX, improving performance is a matter of pulling on three levers: 1) intense management

# Thank You – Our Toys for Tots Update

You did it! You made this year's Toys for Tots collection one of the most successful that we have ever had. As in past years, VRE held two separate toy collections. Our first was held in



conjunction with our annual Operation Lifesaver Santa Trains on Saturday, December 8. Riders of those trains were asked to bring a toy to donate to Toys for Tots.

Through that event, over 2000 toys were collected. Then, our daily VRE riders called and raised their ante! On Wednesday, December 12, VRE riders

donated over 1100 toys and nearly \$9500 in cash, checks, and gift cards.

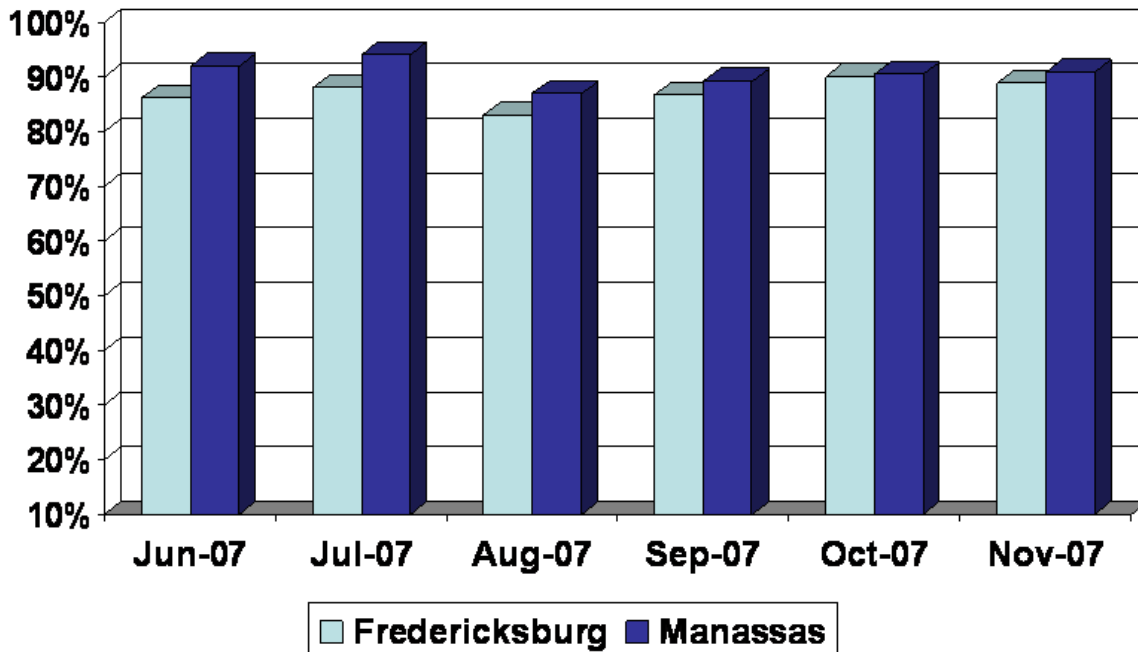
“I continue to be amazed at the generosity of our riders,” said Dale Zehner, VRE’s CEO. “It’s not only the number of gifts that our riders donate, but the quality of those donations.”

Among this year’s bounty were eleven bicycles. Ten were brought to the stations during the Santa Trains, and one was left on board one of our morning trains! Other donated toys included an HO scale train set (complete with track), remote controlled airplanes and cars, and a Barbie playhouse.

A huge thank you to everyone who participated. Thousands of children in our area will benefit from your generosity.

## On-Time Performance

*Over the Last Six Months*



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

### Fredericksburg Line

300 – 89%  
 302 – 95%  
 304 – 89%  
 306 – 95%  
 308 – 95%  
 310 – 84%  
 301 – 95%  
 303 – 89%  
 305 – 89%  
 307 – 95%  
 309 – 89%  
 311 – 84%  
 313 – 79%

Overall – 89%

### Manassas Line

322 – 89%  
 324 – 89%  
 326 – 100%  
 328 – 100%  
 330 – 100%  
 332 – 95%  
 325 – 89%  
 327 – 74%  
 329 – 95%  
 331 – 95%  
 333 – 84%  
 335 – 89%  
 337 – 79%

Overall – 91%

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

## Safety Sense

### Create a Commuter Bag

Just as many of us have emergency kits should we break down on the road, you may wish to create yourself a Commuter Bag containing different items for possible emergencies, or perhaps add some items to your briefcases or purses.

Small flashlight - This time of year, only a few of our trains operate during daylight. With the possibility of power outages either on the train or at stations/parking lots, a flashlight might come in handy.

Bottle of water/various snacks - For those hard working type-A personalities who like to skip lunch, such items might ease your predicament during a delay.

Other possible items: ID, tissues, something to read, hand sanitizers, compact umbrella, VRE's phone number (703-684-1001), and, of course, a change of shoes in case you have to do some walking.

As in any emergency, preparedness is the key.

# Partners

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focus; 2) reliable schedules; and 3) intelligent investment (the Quantico bridge is a classic example, as it eliminated a single track).

"VRE has been very responsible in putting together schedules that are reliable and that the passengers can depend on," said Westbrook. "We've also agreed to review the schedules on a regular basis to ensure that they allow for changes in ridership patterns and other variables that can cause a schedule to become outdated."

"We are also working with VRE to help everyone understand the inter-relationship of passenger and freight rail service. For instance, when commuters see a freight moving past their



train, they may get upset," said Westbrook. "What they don't see is that the dispatcher is simply clearing that train out of the way so it won't affect other commuter trains heading its way."

CSXT also is strengthening a program to help dispatchers visit their territories and ride the trains they help move. With three manned shifts a day and 500 trained dispatchers covering 1,200 trains on 23,000 miles of track in 23 states, it's a tall order but one that CSX is taking very seriously.

"Our dispatchers take pride in keeping passenger and freight trains on schedule," Westbrook said. "We've found, though, that when dispatchers can get away from their screens, ride the trains and become more

familiar with the geography, they can be even more effective and efficient in their jobs. Of course, the better they know the crews, the better they all work together, too."

"We also plan to relocate the dispatchers responsible for this area's passenger trains to Baltimore in 2008," Westbrook added. "Being that much closer to DC will allow them to climb aboard a VRE or Amtrak train, ride alongside the engineers and conductors, and see for themselves how they can better dispatch those trains."

"Years ago, when we didn't have the kind of collaboration we have today, it was a situation where both sides felt like it was 'passengers versus freights,'" Pesce said. "But with this change of mindset and our new partnership, we all share an understanding that passenger trains are prioritized whenever possible, but freights can't be completely ignored either ... people need to understand that the freight business isn't about hauling dirt. There are a lot of valuable products in these freights, and they can't just sit there forever either. With much more consideration and sensitivity on all sides, we're seeing a great blend of freight, Amtrak and VRE traffic. It's really a very significant change."

In the end, all three organizations are faced with the same challenges: limited capacity and a growing population that needs more goods and services. If one entity isn't performing well, it will negatively impact the other entities that occupy the same railroad, and everyone suffers.

"By identifying what we all do best—and what we can all improve—our common goal becomes everyone's goal," concluded Zehner. "We're all in this together now, with everyone from the dispatchers to the crew to the supervisors knowing about it and caring about it. And given the resources, responsibility and authority that we all have, if we can't get it done, I don't know who else can."