



# VIRGINIA RAILWAY EXPRESS

## Update



703-684-1001

www.vre.org

May 16, 2007

## Lost & Found Offers Lots to Smile About

### Editor's Note:

Big changes are happening this week. VRE is going paper-free with this year's survey. Be sure to visit our website between now and May 23 to help us out and share your opinion with us. Even though we expect that you will continue to give us the high response rate that we've had in past years, please only fill out the survey once.

Another change is to our Lost & Found Policy. With the high cost of replacing keys, we're holding on to them longer. If you have lost a key, make sure you check with us before getting a new one cut. The short trip to our office just may save you money later.

Next week, we'll be starting our morning Meet the Management events, beginning at our Fredericksburg station. Have something you want to share with us? This is a great opportunity to do so!

In our busy and crowded world, it sometimes seems impossible to believe that a lost umbrella or cell phone could ever find its way back to us ... but at VRE, thousands of "lost" items have been reunited with their owners over the years, and it's all due to a very efficient and effective Lost & Found program.

The Lost & Found, part of VRE Senior Administrative Coordinator **Brenda Thompson's** domain, carries a rather impressive 85-90 percent return rate and is one aspect of



VRE that nearly always gets unanimous

approval from riders. And one of the most recent changes to the Lost & Found program will surely get even more nods of approval: while VRE keeps most lost items for 30 days, we will now begin keeping keys for a full six months before officially declaring them hopelessly lost.

"Keys, especially those for the newer models and upper-end cars, can be very expensive and a hassle to replace," explained Thompson. "We're trying to reduce that risk of time and expense for our riders. Keys are small and easy to store, so extending the 'hold' period by five months was easy to do. We really hope it will result in getting even more lost keys back to their owners and save them a lot of expense and frustration."

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## The Problem With Panhandling

There are some issues in life that can make just about anyone feel as though they're stuck between a rock and hard place, and at VRE, we're definitely finding ourselves in such a spot right now. We're hoping that you can help.

Specifically, the problem is that there are some overly assertive homeless people at the L'Enfant station who are regularly interfering with VRE passengers trying to access the platforms. Some are blocking pathways asking for money,

while others have become verbally aggressive to passersby who do not offer them what they want. Unfortunately, the problem is not a new one for us or our L'Enfant commuters, but the problem seems to be worsening. Equally unfortunate is the fact that a "solution" cannot be found overnight.



When "panhandlers" are on VRE property, we *can* ask the Metropolitan Police Department

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# VRE's Lost & Found

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## Upcoming Dates

May 16-23  
Customer Service  
Survey- Online

May 23  
Meet the Management  
Fredericksburg  
All Morning Trains

May 28  
Memorial Day  
No VRE Service

May 30  
Meet the Management  
Broad Run  
All Morning Trains

June 6  
Meet the Management  
Leeland Road  
All Morning Trains

On-Line Forum  
12 noon



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.

But regardless of what you've misplaced, the process for making a claim will remain the same: The first thing to do is fill out VRE's online Lost Item Report at [www.vre.org/feedback/lostitems.php](http://www.vre.org/feedback/lostitems.php), or, call (703) 684-1001 as soon as you realize an item is missing. Please be sure to provide as much detail as possible to help distinguish your property from similar items.

In the meantime, VRE staff collects and tags items that are found on the trains every day. It can sometimes take up to 48 hours for an item to make it off the trains and through the proper channels to end up at our executive office in Alexandria, so please plan accordingly if you want to pick up an item. Office hours are Monday through Friday, 7:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m. You must have a photo ID to recover your item from Lost & Found, and items are only kept for 30 days, except for the aforementioned keys, which will now be held for six months. (For health reasons, *food items 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.) Unclaimed items (except keys and food) are all donated to charity.

"We ask that everyone coming to our offices to retrieve a lost item have a photo ID," said Thompson. "And please don't come until you've filed a report ... arriving unannounced without a report on file slows the whole process down and will likely result in more frustration for the customer. We're here to help, and we'll welcome anyone to come in to take a look at keys, umbrellas, glasses ... but please, forewarn us that you're coming and everything will move forward more smoothly."

If you lose your ticket, the procedure is similar: except you use the on-line Lost Ticket Report

at [www.vre.org/feedback/losttickets.php](http://www.vre.org/feedback/losttickets.php). 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 and Five Day Passes 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 may be eligible for a replacement ticket. 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 the VRE. Please see our VRE-TLC page at [www.vre.org/service/vretlc.htm](http://www.vre.org/service/vretlc.htm) for details. (Proof of purchase is required, so please retain your receipt when purchasing your VRE ticket.)



While we will do our absolute best to recover lost items and tickets, we are not ultimately responsible for them. In the case of a lost ticket, it is your responsibility to be in possession of a valid ticket when riding on trains until the missing ticket surfaces and is returned.

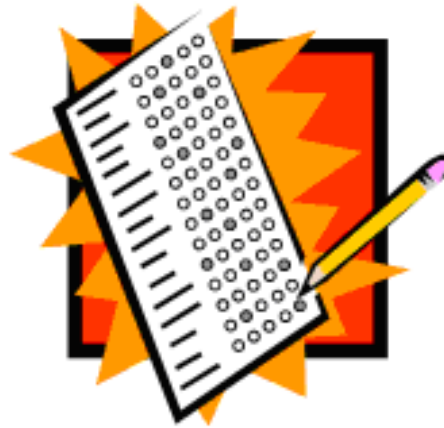
To help ensure your ticket is returned, follow these simple suggestions: 1) Always print your name and daytime telephone number on the front of your ticket, 2) Try not to keep other people's business cards in your ticket holder, and 3) Do not keep other valuables, like Metrocheks, IDs or other tickets inside your ticket pouches. The higher its value, the more tempting it maybe for someone to take your ticket/pouch rather than turn it in.

One final suggestion: A number of lost items and tickets go unclaimed. Please make sure to file a report even if you think your lost item or ticket(s) may not be of value.

# Annual Customer Survey Now On-Line

Call it being eco-friendly or just being hip to the times, VRE is making a few changes to this year's Customer Opinion Survey. Over the past several years, we have been testing the usefulness of an on-line survey. This year we are taking the big step and making our survey paper-free and available only on our website, [www.vre.org](http://www.vre.org). We know that your time on the train is valuable, whether you are catching up on work, catching a quick nap, or catching up on that book you've been waiting to get your hands on. With a week to visit our website, you can give us your feedback at a time that is convenient to you!

Good, bad, or ugly, we want to hear from you! With your help and comments, we can work together to make VRE the best that it can be. So don't delay; visit our website today.



## Helping the Homeless

Continued from page 1

to remove these individuals from our property, and we ourselves can of course ask them to leave. We've even, on occasion, escorted them off our property. But when a panhandler "hangs out" at the bottom of the stairs on the sidewalk, they are technically off our property, and the police cannot do anything—even when they're impeding our passengers' path or are verbally abusive to those who do not do as they wish.

We have found, therefore, that one of the best longer-term solutions is to ask our passengers to please refrain from giving money to the people who loiter at the station. While this may seem like a harsh request, we cannot convince them to leave if staying proves consistently profitable.

We do recognize that many of us (VRE passengers) are fortunate and would like to help where we can. Sadly, your generous dollars are, in this case, resulting in an overall negative situation that is making the L'Enfant station

an uncomfortable place for many VRE riders. We would like to urge those of you who would like to help the homeless to instead make a donation to a charity that focuses solely on the homeless population in D.C. rather than offering them money directly.

To help you do that, listed below are several Web sites that offer more information about local charities.

- So Others May Eat:  
[www.some.org](http://www.some.org)
- D.C. Central Kitchen:  
[www.dccentralkitchen.org](http://www.dccentralkitchen.org)
- Central Union Mission:  
[www.missiondc.org](http://www.missiondc.org)
- Help the Homeless:  
[www.helpthehomelessdc.org](http://www.helpthehomelessdc.org)

We appreciate your help as we work to keep our stations safe, and we welcome any further suggestions that you may have.

### *Safety Sense*

#### Three Steps for Train Emergencies

1. Don't panic. Keeping your cool not only helps you, but it helps your fellow passengers to maintain their composure.

2. Wait. Unless there are visible signs of imminent danger, such as smoke, fire, or noxious fumes, stay in your seat and wait for instructions from the crew. While the "flight" part of your instinct may want to take over, exiting from the car is not always the best course of action. Trains and other hazards may exist along the railroad right of way.

3. Follow the crew's instructions. The crews are trained on how to handle emergencies. They will evaluate the scene, contact the proper authorities (host railroad, EMS, etc.), and determine what steps you should take. Unless the danger is imminent, wait for their instructions.

# Mind Your Ps & Qs: Use TP!

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

## Fredericksburg Line

300 – 95%  
 302 – 76%  
 304 – 81%  
 306 – 90%  
 308 – 81%  
 310 – 81%

301 – 86%  
 303 – 86%  
 305 – 86%  
 307 – 86%  
 309 – 90%  
 311 – 95%  
 313 – 95%

Overall – 87%

## Manassas Line

322 – 100%  
 324 – 86%  
 326 – 95%  
 328 – 95%  
 330 – 86%  
 332 – 95%

325 – 81%  
 327 – 76%  
 329 – 76%  
 331 – 95%  
 333 – 100%  
 335 – 86%  
 337 – 81%

Overall – 89%

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

Paper towels are popular for a lot of things ... drying hands, wiping counters, lining the microwave, or wrapping fruit. One thing they're NOT good for is lining toilet seats ... but unfortunately on VRE, that's what a lot of people are deciding to do with them. The result is nothing short of awful: Jammed plumbing, inoperable toilets, and riders who find themselves without a bathroom because the person before them just plugged up the works with towels that should never go in the toilet.

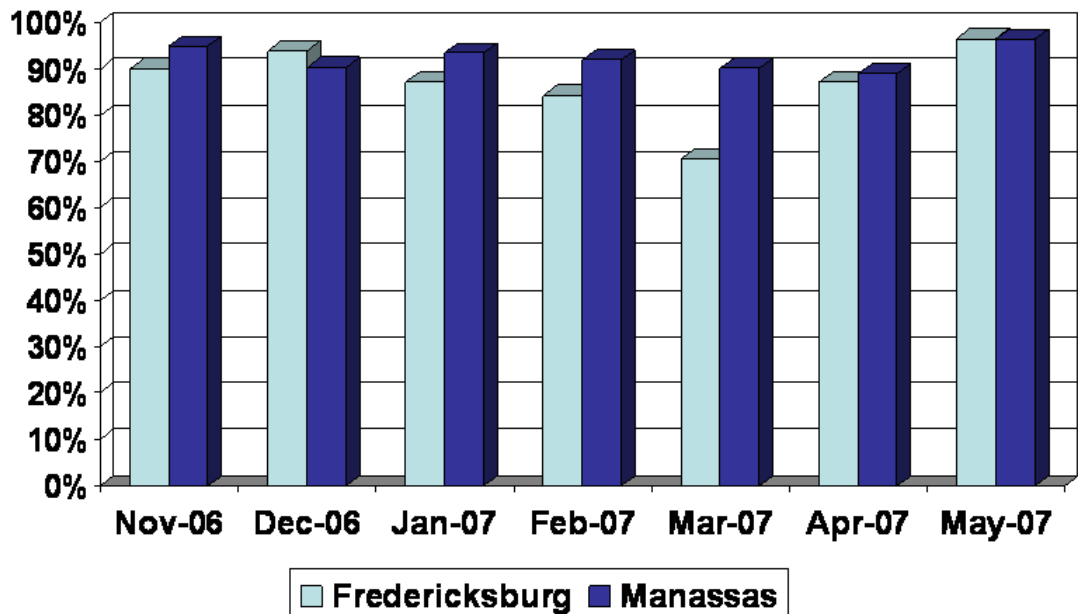
Dennis Larson, VRE's Director of Rail Equipment and Services, explained that the bathrooms on the trains are designed with a pressurized system that flushes the waste out from under the toilet flapper and blows it into a processing or retention tank. The pressurized system means that the pipes are much smaller in diameter than the pipes in home bathroom systems, but when something is thrown in the toilet that isn't meant to be there—like paper towels—the pressure is simply no match for a wad of wet paper towels that, by design, don't disintegrate easily.

“We learned a long time ago that virtually every single time we have a backed-up toilet, it's because of paper towels or some other improper material in the toilet,” said Larson, “and the solution is maddeningly simple: only put toilet paper in the toilets. When it first started happening, I thought that maybe we had run low on toilet paper ... but that was never the issue. We next looked into other solutions, such as installing electric hand dryers, but they tie up the bathroom for too long. Waterless systems, like ‘Purell,’ are antibacterial, but they're not cleansers. So, we're back to asking people to use their common sense, have some respect for their fellow riders, and remember that these bathrooms are not outhouses.”

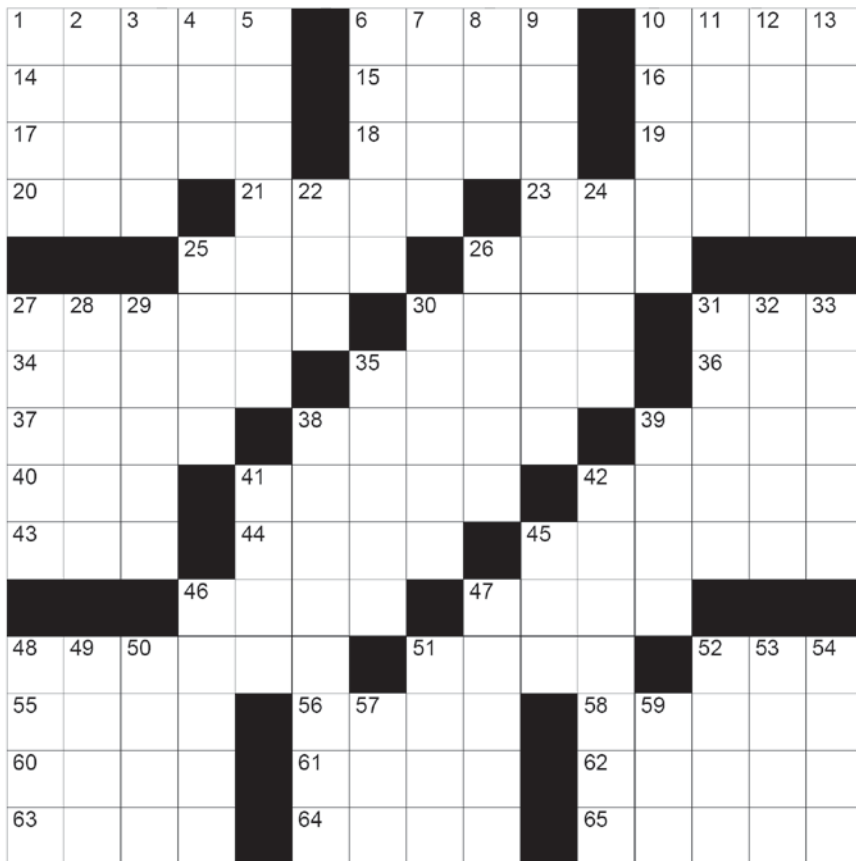
The message is a simple one: if you want to line the toilet seat, use toilet paper. If you have an urge to throw something other than toilet paper into the toilet, don't. VRE and your fellow riders thank you.

## Overall On-Time Performance

May numbers are through May 11, 2007



# Duck Soup



## ACROSS

- 01. Saying
- 06. London gallery
- 10. — dive
- 14. Great Lake
- 15. Angle between stem and branch
- 16. Tropical bulb
- 17. Like pond scum
- 18. The — Ranger
- 19. Suffix for a base
- 20. Party acronym
- 21. Golf club
- 23. C6H5OH; disinfectant
- 25. Level
- 26. Norse god of thunder

- 27. — trot
- 30. Rime
- 31. — days
- 34. Foreigner
- 35. Rotates
- 36. Public transportation system
- 37. School groups
- 38. Thai breed of cats
- 39. Prejudice
- 40. Sea eagle
- 41. Twosomes
- 42. Do's and —
- 43. College entrance exam
- 44. Mere

- 45. — business
- 46. Venetian magistrate
- 47. Free from contamination
- 48. Kodak invention
- 51. Therefore
- 52. — boy
- 55. Tons (sl.)
- 56. Talk irrationally
- 58. Garbage (sl.)
- 60. Prong
- 61. Orchestral instrument
- 62. — laugh
- 63. Polaris, for one
- 64. Augury
- 65. Swiss cry

## DOWN

- 01. King of Israel
- 02. Fittingly
- 03. Jason's ship
- 04. Tibetan gazelle
- 05. Invigorate; animate
- 06. Claw
- 07. Part of a neuron
- 08. Metal
- 09. — ears
- 10. Range animal
- 11. Farm cart
- 12. Italian river
- 13. Christmas carol
- 22. King (Sp.)
- 24. — d'oeuvres
- 25. Metes out
- 26. Jewish documents
- 27. Audio or video
- 28. Excessive
- 29. Laughing
- 30. Move with haste
- 31. Sip

- 32. Mexican grass
- 33. Flatulent
- 35. Transparent linen
- 38. — court
- 39. Femur, for one
- 41. Having little money
- 42. Girl from Kansas
- 45. Coffee cup
- 46. Discourage
- 47. Groom
- 48. — pajamas
- 49. Got off
- 50. — Lisa
- 51. Heraldic cry
- 52. — brain
- 53. Church recess
- 54. Gen—; well bred
- 57. Antiballistic missile
- 59. Pooh's friend





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