



VIRGINIA RAILWAY EXPRESS

Update



703-684-1001

www.vre.org

February 21, 2008

Editor's Note:

Change is never easy. At VRE, several changes are in process. The first has to do with our proposed fare increase. In addition to the proposal this year, our Operations Board is also looking into an indexing plan that would give a guideline to when and how to raise fares in the future.

The second change is to our FRC policy. In the past, riders could exchange out expired FRCs for new ones. With last year's change to the FRC procedures, this is no longer an option. We know that, especially for our monthly ticket users, this is not a popular feature of the FRC. However, this change was made in an effort to keep the FRC program available for our passengers.

Lastly, the change over from Metrocheks to SmartBenefits has not been an easy transition. We are working with WMATA and Commuter Stores/Commuter Direct to make this process easier. In addition to the changes already made, we anticipate being able to make the program even better.

Public Hearings Began This Week!

If you have an opinion about VRE's proposed fare change; the subsequent amendment to VRE's Tariff; or an indexing plan for future fare increases, now's the time to speak your mind ... because this week, VRE began holding a series of public hearings to discuss these issues.

The first hearing was held yesterday, at the PRTC Board Room. See page 5 of the schedule for the remaining public hearings.

The public hearings are the result of the FY2009 budget process, in which VRE's Operations Board authorized a fare increase of up to three percent to offset increases in fuel, insurance and maintenance costs. The increase, if approved, would not result in any changes or modifications to the current ticket discount structure.

If adopted, these changes will become effective the first week of July 2008, to coincide with the start of the FY 2009 budget.

Some things to keep in mind:

- When gas prices go up one cent per gallon, our fuel costs increase by about \$1600 a month.
- Insurance premiums have doubled in the last six years.

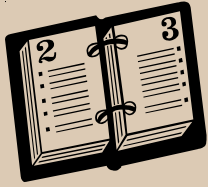
- Maximum allowed transit benefit increased 4.5% in January 2008.
- Federal workers received a cost of living increase of 4.49% this year.



Written comments will be accepted through **Friday, March 14, 2008**. Please mail comments to the attention of: Milton Telleria, 1500 King Street, Suite 202, Alexandria, Virginia, 22314. To make your comments via e-mail, please send them to: publiccomment@vre.org OR by fax to: (703) 684-1313.

All public hearings are being conducted in locations accessible to persons with disabilities. Any individual with a disability who requires special assistance, such as a sign language interpreter, should send an e-mail to publiccomment@vre.org or call Milton Telleria at (703) 684-1001 or TTY (703) 684-0551 at least 10 business days prior to the public hearing in order to make the necessary arrangements.

For additional information regarding these hearings, please see VRE's Web site at www.vre.org.



Use ‘em or Lose ‘em ...

Batch of FRCs Set to Expire in July

Upcoming Dates

Thu., February 21
Public Hearing
Holiday Inn [L'Enfant]
12:00n – 2:00p

Fri., February 22
Public Hearing
Crystal City Marriott
12:00n – 2:00p

Tue., February 26
Public Hearing
Burke Centre
Conservancy
7:00p – 9:00p

Wed., February 27
Public Hearing
Stafford County
Government Center
7:00p – 9:00p

Tue., March 4
Public Hearing
Rappahannock
Regional Library
7:00p – 9:00p

Thu., March 13
Public Hearing
Manassas City Hall
7:00p – 9:00p



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 or at (703) 684-1001.

If you're carrying around wads of Free Ride Certificates (FRCs) in the bottom of your briefcase or purse, it's time to pull them out and take a good look at them, because some are set to expire in July and cannot be exchanged for new FRCs. Specifically, any FRCs that are orange and green will expire on July 1, and the wise commuter will start using them now to ensure that they are not left with a lot of FRCs that can no longer be used.

If you're wondering why we're announcing a use 'em or lose 'em policy instead of an FRC exchange program, here's the scoop: In years past, about-to-expire FRCs could indeed be sent in to VRE offices and exchanged for new ones with later expiration dates. But when the FRC program was overhauled last year, several changes were made in order to keep the program viable and ensure it didn't require quite the administrative load that it had previously.

Below is a refresher on the details of the program overhaul:

- FRCs are distributed when trains are 60 minutes late (rather than 30 minutes late, as had been the case when the program was first developed).
- FRCs are no longer exchanged after their expiration date. Hence the so-called use 'em or lose 'em policy.
- Conductors distribute FRCs at the time of the delay, but if for some reason they're not

able to distribute them, FRC requests are then handled by mail. Distribution does not occur on the train the next service day.

- If FRCs are passed out on-board the day of the delay, it is the passenger's responsibility to follow up with the conductor prior to disembarking the train, or sooner, to let him or her know that they didn't get one, especially if they detrain at stations like Quantico or Lorton in the morning, before FRCs are handed out.
- FRC requests submitted for delayed trains when distribution has occurred on board will not be honored.



Orange, green and grey FRCs will expire July 1, 2008. They cannot be exchanged.

- VRE reserves the right to deny a written request for any reason. Sadly, we found that some riders were fraudulently using our Daily Download online report to see what trains were late, and then they were claiming they were on that train even if they weren't.

VRE is one of a few transit services in the nation that provides FRCs to its passengers, and we know that many of you were very upset when the program was on the chopping block last year. The Operations Board heard your pleas to keep it, however, and it has continued to work extremely well for everyone over the past year as we've all become accustomed to these modifications. But we don't want the goodwill to sour if lots of FRCs go unused, so please, make it a point to check your FRCs and use up any that are set to expire this summer!

Signing Up for SmartBenefits Made Easier for VRE Riders

Last fall, VRE and Commuter Direct launched the SmartBenefits® personalized account service. The program allows transit customers the option of electronically transferring transit benefits to individual customer accounts ... and for VRE riders, it meant that they could purchase VRE fare media directly through the program.

Many of our riders have signed up for the program and have been very pleased with it, while others have found registration rather bewildering and have, as a result, shied away from using the program. Still others, based on questions our customer support staff regularly receive, are unaware of the program entirely.

So, in this issue of *VRE Update*, allow us to provide a quick tutorial on getting the biggest bang out of electronic benefits and personal service accounts:

First, why is it happening? The Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (WMATA), which administers the majority of transit benefits in the region, is moving away from paper vouchers, like Metrocheks, in order to reduce the amount of paper they're using and to better utilize the flexibility and convenience that electronic accounting allows. Electronic cards also offer more security than paper cards, since they cannot be easily shared or sold to other people, as some participants were doing with their paper benefit cards.

How does the program work? In short, registered SmarTrip cardholders can participate two ways: They can purchase VRE fare media at any Arlington, Va.-based CommuterStore®,

or they can set up a reoccurring mail-order account with CommuterDirect.com®. (Currently, all of the CommuterStore locations in Arlington, Va., are participating, although VRE riders will likely find that the Crystal City location is most convenient. The Connector Store in Springfield, Va., is a separate entity and is not accepting SmartBenefits at this time.) Participants can also split their benefits among

several public transit options, meaning, for example, that a rider from Fredericksburg who works in Rosslyn could conceivably assign some dollars to their personalized account to purchase VRE tickets and assign some dollars to their SmarTrip card to use on Metrorail to reach their place of employment.



“Riders will still need to use VRE tickets to board our trains, however,” explained E.B. Easter, VRE’s fare collection manager. “This program will not mean that they can use their SmartTrip cards at our validating machines ... this program and the SmartTrip cards are merely a means of simplifying the purchase of VRE fare media using SmartBenefits and keeping all of your transit accounts in one place.”

Can everyone participate? All participants in the program must be employed by an organization that participates in the SmartBenefits program with WMATA, they must have a registered SmarTrip card, and they must be willing to purchase their VRE fare from an Arlington-based CommuterStore or through CommuterDirect.com.

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Courtesy Corner

Don't Be Cell-fish

We've issued numerous courtesy reminders about cell phones in the Quiet Car (they're not allowed). Now we thought we'd pass along some reminders about general cell phone use and courtesy.

Everyone has been to a public place and experienced either an annoying cell phone ring or a loud one-sided conversation. As a courtesy to your fellow riders, please try to have phones set to vibrate if possible. If you get a call, try to keep it short and to the point and try to speak in a hushed voice.

We realize the importance of cell phones in this day and age and we're not telling you that you can't use phones (except for those in the Quiet Car), but please try to show a little courtesy when doing so.

SmartBenefits

Continued from page 3

Safety Sense

Platform Safety

An important aspect of railroad safety (and life in general) is to always be aware of one's surroundings. For example, if you are standing near the yellow line on a very crowded station platform with people jostling to maneuver through the crowd, it is possible to be accidentally bumped off the platform. Keeping this in mind, please stand well behind the yellow tactile strip at the platform's edge. Also, if you are waiting to board and it is crowded, make sure that you are not blocking the entrance to the platform or the TVMs. Always try to give people space.

If that describes you, then registering for electronic benefits is the next step ... and WMATA has simplified their online process considerably since the program was first expanded to include VRE last fall. There are just a few easy steps to get you started:

- 1) Talk with your employer and tell them that you want to switch from paper Metrocheks to electronic SmartBenefits.
- 2) Visit <http://wmata.com/bus2bus/smartbenefits/index.html> and click on third link (which reads "D & B Bus/Quick's Commuter, MARC, VRE, CommuterDirect and Van Pools") On the next page, you will see a large blue box in the lower right hand corner set up specifically for MARC & VRE passengers that clearly and easily walks commuters through a three-step process.

In essence, the Personal Account Service means that VRE passengers can choose how they want to receive their electronic fare media, depending on what is most convenient for them. The first option will be to assign the benefits to a Commuter Store, which means that VRE passengers could pick up their tickets at any Commuter Store in the area (the Crystal City

location would presumably be the most convenient, since VRE has a station there).

Alternatively, riders can assign their benefits to "Commuter Direct," which means that the tickets will be mailed directly to their home. In order to encourage participation in the program, VRE is currently covering the \$6.50 shipping fee that this option entails. The waived fee will definitely continue through September of this year, and we expect that this offer will be extended beyond that date.

"We're working with WMATA, the Commuter Stores and Commuter Direct to make this process much easier and simpler for our passengers," added Easter. "We ultimately want this to be a one-stop shop where passengers with registered SmartTrip cards can simply go to CommuterDirect.com and have representatives there set up their SmartBenefits account for them to ensure that their benefits are available at a nearby Commuter Store or VRE tickets are mailed directly to their homes with minimal hassle on the part of our riders. WMATA has really taken a big step toward improving the process with the easy-to-follow three step process on their Web site, and we aim to improve that even further."

Ask VRE – Calculating Fares

Dear VRE,

When I look at the proposed fares on your website, my fare is going up by more than 3%. What gives? -- Frustrated by Fares

Dear Frustrated,

Our tariff documents how fares are to be calculated. It's a tricky process that prevents us from doing a straight 3% increase. When we calculate a fare, we follow these steps:

- 1) Determine the zones that the trip will be: In our example, we'll use a 6-1 monthly ticket.

- 2) Determine the single-ride fare: Add together the base fare (proposed to be \$4.70) and one zone fare increment for each change in zone. The proposed fare zone increment is \$0.55. The total in this case would be \$7.45 or [$\$4.70 + (\$0.55 * 5)$].

- 3) Determine the discount: Then take this fare and multiply by 10 for 10-Trip and Five-Day tickets or by 42 for monthly tickets. Then subtract the discounted amount from that total and round to the nearest dime. A monthly 6-1 ticket is \$206.50 or $(\$7.45 * 42) - 34\%$.

We hope this helps explain the process a bit better. -- Your Customer Advocate

Public Hearing Schedule

DATE	LOCATION	TIME
Thursday, February 21, 2008	Holiday Inn [L'Enfant] Discovery II Ballroom 550 C. Street, S.W. Washington, D.C. 20024	Noon to 2pm
Friday, February 22, 2008	Crystal City Marriott Crystal Club Room 1999 Jefferson Davis Highway Arlington, VA 22202	Noon to 2pm
Tuesday, February 26, 2008	Burke Centre Conservancy "The Ponds" Community Center 9837 Burke Pond Lane Burke, VA 22015	7pm to 9pm
Wednesday, February 27, 2008	Stafford County Government Center Board Chambers 1300 Courthouse Road Stafford, VA 22554	7pm to 9pm
Tuesday, March 4, 2008	Rappahannock Regional Library Theatre Room 1201 Caroline Street Fredericksburg, VA 22401	7pm to 9pm
Thursday, March 13, 2008	Manassas City Hall City Council Chamber Room 9027 Center Street Manassas, VA 22110	7pm to 9pm

On-Time Performance by Train for the month of January 2008

Fredericksburg Line

300 – 76%
302 – 71%
304 – 85%
306 – 71%
308 – 81%
310 – 81%

301 – 81%
303 – 76%
305 – 90%
307 – 62%
309 – 90%
311 – 100%
313 – 90%

Overall – 81%

Manassas Line

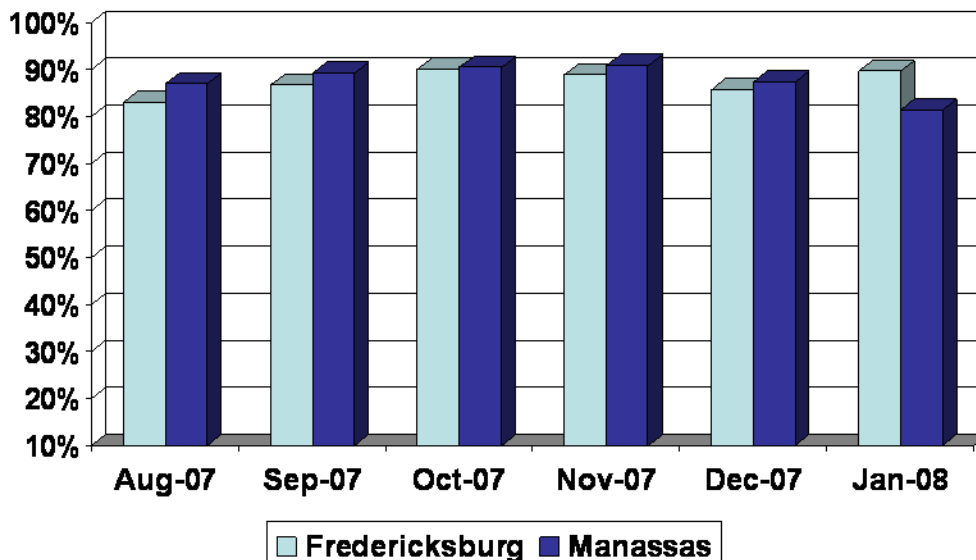
322 – 100%
324 – 90%
326 – 86%
328 – 95%
330 – 100%
332 – 100%

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

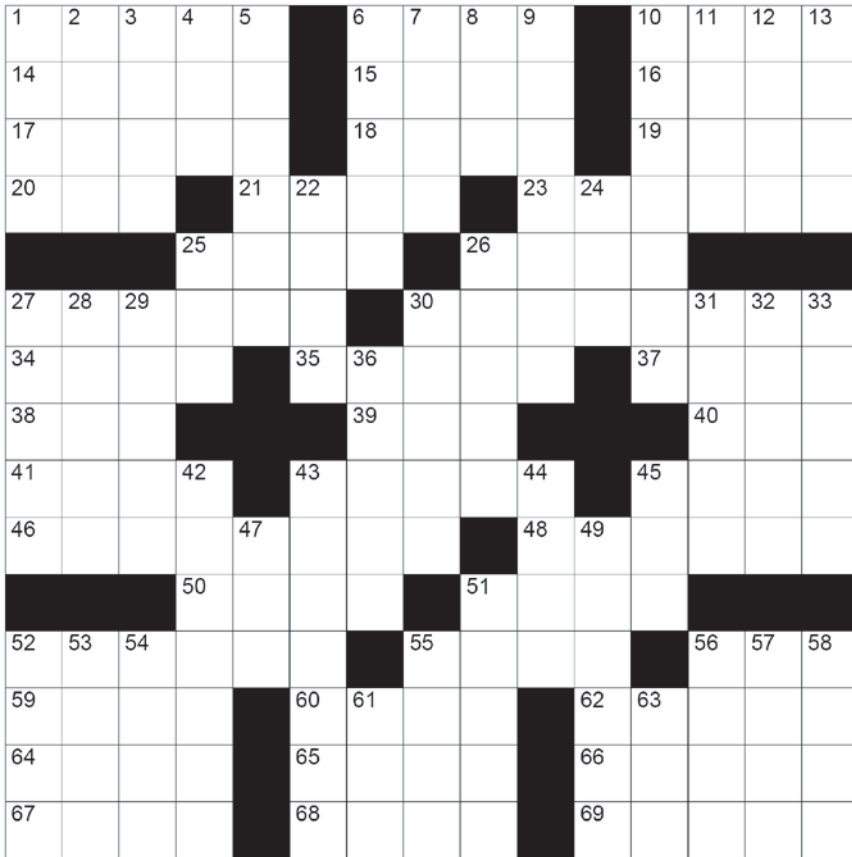
Overall – 90%

*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*



Crossword Puzzle



ACROSS

- 01. Decoration
- 06. Stand for corpse
- 10. A French clergyman
- 14. Odor
- 15. Highest point
- 16. For serving food
- 17. City in Italy
- 18. Repose
- 19. Salt ___, in Utah
- 20. Perform
- 21. Taxis

- 23. Mental representation
- 25. Malacopterygians
- 26. Square measures
- 27. Heavenly bodies
- 30. Frantic
- 34. Opaque gem
- 35. Double-reed instruments
- 37. A flight in which the aircraft pilot is unaccompanied

- 38. ___ student, learns healing
- 39. Operated
- 40. National Educational Assn.: Abbr.
- 41. Riding horse
- 43. Tossed, for one
- 45. Pope John ___
- 46. Uniformity
- 48. Spheres
- 50. Beverages

DOWN

- 01. Female parent
- 02. ___ Clapton, musician
- 03. Idiot
- 04. Doctors' group: Abbr.
- 05. Surgical knife
- 06. Carping remarks
- 07. Frosts
- 08. Printers' measures
- 09. Sacks out
- 10. Reference works
- 11. Show off
- 12. A way to cook
- 13. Opinion or judgment
- 22. Too
- 24. The opposite sex
- 25. Slippery one
- 26. An enclosed space used for public entertainments
- 27. Unconsciousnesses

- 28. Classical music for the stage
- 29. A woman of refinement
- 30. Gives birth to horse
- 31. Musical
- 32. Between the jejunum and the cecum
- 33. Embers
- 36. Common alloy
- 42. Early
- 43. Salts and peppers
- 44. Avoirdupois unit
- 45. A platform from which rockets or space craft are launched
- 47. Born: Fr.
- 49. Remedies
- 51. Goes on a horse
- 52. In a way, frees
- 53. At the peak
- 54. Greek letter
- 55. Fender mishap
- 56. Giant
- 57. Competed
- 58. High cards
- 61. Misery resulting from affliction
- 63. Length of time

- 51. Monetary unit of South Africa
- 52. Animal disease
- 55. Roosevelt coin
- 56. Egg cells
- 59. An individual unit
- 60. Was in debt
- 62. Supernatural
- 64. Bestow excessive fondness
- 65. Not one

- 66. Have the same opinion
- 67. Watering places
- 68. Gels
- 69. Acorns, for example



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