



# VIRGINIA RAILWAY EXPRESS

## Update



703-684-1001

www.vre.org

October 15, 2008

### *Editor's Note:*

Good news, bad news. This seems to be the theme at VRE these days.

Ridership is up. But so are the courtesy issues and the difficulty in finding a seat.

We have money for new locomotives. But the budget and possible fare increases continue to be a concern.

Even with all of the ups and downs, VRE is still working hard to keep your commute the best it can be. We are continuing to make improvements on our locomotive maintenance program. While there are still some occasional glitches, the number of mechanical related delays is down. In fact, this past quarter saw the lowest number of mechanical failures in years. The purchase of new locomotives will go a long way to making that even better.

So, sit back and relax. We'll do our best to keep your ride smooth and leave the roller coaster ride to the theme parks.

## VRE Receives Funding for New Locomotives

While global economic news has been nothing short of depressing these past few weeks, VRE received some excellent news from the Virginia Department of Rail and Public Transportation (DRPT), as they secured \$3.8 million in new funding on our behalf, which we will use for the purchase of five new locomotives.

Because we are now buying "in bulk," the manufacturer has given us a significant discount on the cost of the five locomotives, which will equate to approximately \$1 million in savings. The overall result will be that in about two years, we will have new locomotives for nearly half of our current train sets, a big step toward our goal of a total of 20 new locomotives.

Additionally, Senator Webb has been very supportive of VRE, securing an appropriation in FY 07 in the amount of \$4.9M and again this term has a pending earmark of approximately \$5M for locomotive acquisition. In total those earmarks will lend nearly \$10M additional federal resources towards VRE's efforts to bring 20 new locomotives on to the property. However, VRE must still secure the necessary matching funds to fully utilize these monies.

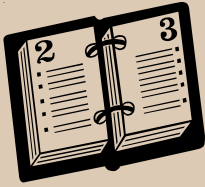
Since sending out our Train Talk message on October 2, we have received several questions about how this money affects the current discussions about fare increases. The grant money was specifically earmarked to help us cover the costs of replacing our aging locomotive fleet. Because of this, we are not permitted to use the funding to offset the monies needed for our operational budget, which is what our fares cover.

As for the discussion about fare increases, our Board asked us to give our riders a look at what the worst case scenario would be. In the meanwhile, we have been continuing to refine our projections.

While we won't know until later this month regarding the first increase and until December for the second increase, we are hopeful that they may not need to be as drastic as we first published.

With that said, we, of course, will continue to aggressively pursue additional funding for more locomotives beyond these first five, and we send out our gratitude and appreciation to Virginia's DRPT for working on our behalf for much-needed funding.





# Security Takes Center Stage

## Upcoming Dates

Friday, October 31  
Halloween

Tuesday, November 4  
Election Day

Tuesday, November 11  
Veterans' Day  
No VRE Service

Thurs., November 27  
Thanksgiving  
No VRE Service

Friday, November 28  
Day After  
Thanksgiving  
"S" Schedule

Anyone who rode Amtrak or VRE in late September may have noticed a police presence worthy of a presidential escort on the Fredericksburg Line. The reason was not the safe passage of a world leader. Instead, it was demonstrative of VRE's ongoing commitment to ensure the safe passage of the most precious cargo VRE transports – our passengers - and boost to awareness of security and safety issues on the railway.

Held September 23 and spearheaded by Amtrak, the first ever "Rail Security Day" resulted in local law enforcement policing 150 rail stations from Burlington, Vt., all the way to Fredericksburg, Va., during the morning rush hour. More than 100 law enforcement agencies were involved. VRE's Fredericksburg line is within the Amtrak North Eastern Corridor and participated in this expansive security initiative as a result.



Along those same lines, VRE is also taking several steps to ensure that our communications about safety and security measures are consistent, cohesive and effective. We're currently updating the safety brochure that every passenger has access to, including updates on how to safely navigate through our fleet of bi-level rail cars. We will also include information about the safety

features onboard all of our trains, and re-enforce safety rules that all passengers must abide by while riding our trains or waiting at our stations, such as staying away from the tracks, being aware of your surroundings at all times, and locking cars and keeping valuables like GPS devices and cell phones out of sight inside cars. VRE also continues to work with local and federal law enforcement teams to strengthen security and emergency preparedness on our rail system. One example is Transportation Security Administration's VIPR (Visual Intermodal

Prevention and Response) teams who will continue to make visits to VRE stations during the morning and afternoon rush hours.

"The idea," explained Sharmila Samarasinghe, manager of transportation services, safety and security for VRE, "was to expand visibility of security personnel during the morning rush hour, but also to increase familiarity and improve partnerships between local law agencies, transit systems and daily commuters." The day was very successful, and Amtrak has indicated they would like to repeat Rail Security Day in future. While no future date has been set, VRE is very supportive of the idea, as safe and secure, cost-effective and reliable transportation have been VRE's mission since its inception!

"In short, we're trying to anticipate situations our passengers encounter while commuting on VRE," added Samarasinghe, "from the point they enter the parking lot or garage, step onto our platforms, board the trains, navigate the train cars, disembark, and get to their final destination. Safety is our number-one priority on VRE, and we try to take advantage of every opportunity available to send that message to our passengers."



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 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.

# Public Workshop on Gainesville/Haymarket Extension - Oct. 22

If you're interested in the the Gainesville-Haymarket extension, mark your calendars for Wednesday, October 22, 2008, from 6:30 p.m. to 9:00 p.m., when the second of three public workshops is scheduled. It will be held at **Battlefield High School, 15000 Graduation Drive, in Haymarket**, with the first half hour providing time for an Open House. At 7:00, the formal meeting will begin with a presentation and update on the progress of the feasibility study and alternatives analysis.

The study, launched in the spring of this year, aims to evaluate the feasibility and desirability of extending VRE service by approximately 11 miles, from the existing VRE Manassas Station to the Town of Haymarket along Norfolk Southern's "B" line in western Prince William County. The study will also address the requirements of the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) for potential project funding.

The first public workshop, held in July, was very well received, with approximately 50 people in attendance.

"Everyone seems very interested in this project," said VRE's Manager of Planning Christine Hoeffner, "and holding these kinds of workshops gives us a better understanding of people's opinions and concerns. We have noted in particular some citizens' concerns about the location of proposed stations and the potential for traffic impacts as commuters travel to and from those stations, as well as potential delays on the roadways where there are railway

crossings. Of course, funding is almost always a topic of discussion, as well!"

Since the last public workshop, additional information regarding the study has been gathered, ensuring that new information will be shared with attendees. For example, the results of the preliminary alternatives study will be presented, as part of the Federal Transit Administration's requirement that the study look beyond just the

expansion of rail and consider other transit options.

"We have a strong agenda for this meeting," Hoeffner added, "and it's a great opportunity for all of us to look more specifically at what types of improvements could happen in that corridor. We're looking for the public's input, their reactions, and their ideas. It's really one of the best ways for people to ask questions and speak freely in an open discussion."

The study will last a total of 12 months, concluding in March 2009. There will be one more opportunity during the study where VRE will seek public input as we move through alternatives development and analysis. Information about these workshops will be communicated via VRE Update, TrainTalk, our Web site, and local press.

Of course, please feel free to call us at 703-684-1001 with your questions, or e-mail us at [gotrains@vre.org](mailto:gotrains@vre.org) with "Gainesville-Haymarket Extension" in the subject line. We look forward to hearing from you and seeing you on October 22nd!



## Courtesy Corner

### Smoking Habits

Certainly, if there is one thing that smokers and non-smokers can agree on, it's this: Smoking is a habit. While some smokers may not want to break their habit, we do have a few requests to make it easier for smokers and non-smokers to get along.

-> Smoke only in designated areas only.

-> Smoking is permitted on the platform but is restricted to the northernmost 100 feet.

-> Smoking is permitted in the parking lots, but please maintain a distance from the entrances, stairways, and ramps.

-> Lighting up as you walk down the platform is cheating. Either stay in the designated part of the platform, or wait until you are out of the station.

## Safety Sense

There is an emergency brake located at the end of the rail car, identified by a red handle with an instructional sign. Please do not use the emergency brake. Pulling the brake irrevocably stops the train, which can delay the train by at least five minutes and sometimes more.

**NEVER** pull the brake for a medical emergency. This delays the ability of emergency response teams to reach the afflicted passenger.

Here's why: Engineers cannot override an emergency brake. They can tell from their gauges that one has been pulled, but cannot tell from which car it was pulled. The crew has to walk the train to see where it was pulled and reset the brake. Then they must walk outside to make sure that the emergency brake application did not damage anything.

Depending on how long this takes, delays are inevitable and usually range from five to ten minutes, which in a medical emergency could make a huge difference.

The emergency brake should only be used if there is extreme danger to the continued movement of the train.

# MetroCheks Coming to an End

## *SmartBenefits Vouchers are Coming!*

Effective December 1, 2008, the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (WMATA) will discontinue Metrocheks and will instead issue paper transit subsidies in the form of SmartBenefits vouchers. Those vouchers, which will be available in \$1, \$10 and \$30 denominations, can be used to purchase VRE fare just as Metrocheks are.

These paper vouchers are important right now, as many regional transit systems, including VRE, MARC, and MTA commuter buses, cannot accept SmarTrip electronic cards due to incompatible fare collection machines. Over the long term, a regional online system is planned, which would eventually allow all commuter transit systems to share the same type of fare media, such as the SmarTrip cards. (Of course, many commuters can sign on for SmartBenefits and have their fares managed electronically, and have their tickets mailed directly to their homes or offices, see page 5.)

WMATA is currently projecting a date in 2010 before their system can be ready for the region, and VRE of course cannot make our ticket vending machines (TVMs) compatible until WMATA finalizes the enhancements and

upgrades they're planning for that 2010 system. Their system, in other words, needs to be up and running before we can get our system up and running!

In the meantime, the SmartBenefits vouchers will help eliminate the possibility of fraud—a major problem for WMATA and for employers—because the vouchers will not have magnetic strips.

**For those of you who currently use Metrocheks, please take note of these important upcoming dates involving this change:**

November 15, 2008: the last day for employers to purchase Metrocheks

March 31, 2009: the last day for Metrochek exchanges at Metro sales offices

Date TBA in 2009: VRE will stop accepting Metrocheks. Stay tuned for more information as we finalize that date!

For more information, please visit WMATA's Web page on Metrocheks at [www.wmata.com/bus2bus/smartbenefits/mc\\_end.html](http://www.wmata.com/bus2bus/smartbenefits/mc_end.html) or contact your employer's benefits administrator.

### THREE GREAT REASONS WHY NOW IS THE TIME TO BUY!

**3**  
FREE FLAT SCREEN TV WHEN  
YOU PURCHASE THIS WEEKEND\*

**2**  
One Year of Condo Fees FREE\*

**1**  
New Condos Blocks from VRE  
Priced from the \$180's

Pricing and offers subject to change  
\*Offers good thru 11/15/08 on full price contracts.

*So, What's The Reason  
You're Not Here Yet?*



703-365-9657

[ChristopherCompaniesVRE.com](http://ChristopherCompaniesVRE.com)



THE CHRISTOPHER COMPANIES



EQUAL HOUSING OPPORTUNITY

# USPS Set to Start Carrying Commuter Direct's Ticket-By-Mail Program

If you're one of the 1,200 VRE riders who receive their ticket in the mail through CommuterDirect's pilot program involving SmartBenefits Personal Service accounts, listen up! First, and perhaps most importantly, the pilot program was a success, and CommuterDirect and VRE have agreed to continue their relationship. Secondly, only one aspect of the program will change—effective October 1, CommuterDirect began mailing VRE tickets via U.S. Mail, at the cost of just 99 cents per mailing, rather than via express delivery services, which charged \$6.50 per delivery. As we did during the pilot program, VRE will cover the cost of the mailing, but the significantly reduced rate will ensure that riders can continue having their tickets shipped to them free of charge, while at the same time allowing VRE to reduce expenses associated with this program.

Not sure what all this is about? Then read on for a quick tutorial ...

Last year, VRE and Commuter Direct launched a SmartBenefits® personalized account service, which essentially allowed 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. It was developed primarily because the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (WMATA), which administers the majority of transit benefits in the region, wants to move away from paper vouchers like Metrocheks in order to reduce the amount of paper they're using and so that they can better utilize the flexibility and convenience that electronic accounting allows. Electronic cards also offer more security than paper cards, since Web-based benefits cannot be easily shared or sold to other people, as some participants were doing with their paper benefit cards.

In order to take advantage of the program, though, riders must be employed by an organization that participates in the SmartBenefits program with WMATA, they must have or be willing to get a registered SmarTrip card, and they must be willing to purchase their VRE fare through CommuterDirect.com or from an Arlington-based CommuterStore.

For more information, visit VRE's Frequently Asked Questions Web page about the SmartBenefits program, located at [www.vre.org/service/smartbenefits/smartbenefits-faq.html](http://www.vre.org/service/smartbenefits/smartbenefits-faq.html), and CommuterDirect's SmartBenefits Web page at [www.commuterpage.com/smartbenefits.cfm](http://www.commuterpage.com/smartbenefits.cfm).

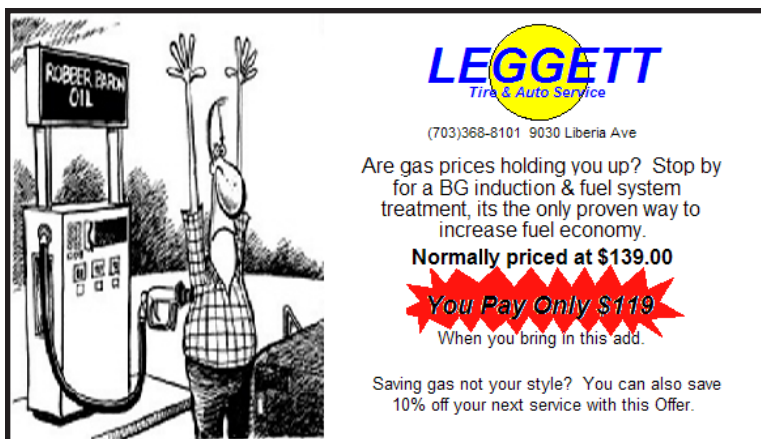
## Leeland Road Vendor Update

Due to an equipment malfunction, VRE's Leeland Road area ticket vendor, 7-11 on Deacon Road, is temporarily unable to take credit/debit cards for VRE ticket sales. VRE tickets are still available at this location using cash and Metrocheks.

We are working to resolve the credit/debit issue as quickly as possible. At this time, we do not have a time frame for fixing the problem.

If you normally purchase your tickets from the Deacon Road 7-11 with Metrocheks and a credit card, it is possible for you to purchase your tickets at one of the TVMs using a credit card and then take advantage of VRE's Metrochek Reimbursement program. This program allows riders to redeem the value of their Metrocheks through the mail and apply it towards their credit card purchase. The reimbursement form can be found on our website.

VRE tickets are also available from other vendors. A complete list of all VRE ticket vendors may be found by visiting VRE's website.



**ROBBIE BRADY OIL**

**LEGGETT**  
Tire & Auto Service

(703)368-8101 9030 Liberia Ave

Are gas prices holding you up? Stop by for a BG induction & fuel system treatment, its the only proven way to increase fuel economy.

**Normally priced at \$139.00**

**You Pay Only \$119**  
When you bring in this add.

Saving gas not your style? You can also save 10% off your next service with this Offer.

*On-Time  
Performance by  
Train for the Month  
of September 2008*

**Fredericksburg Line**

300 – 86%  
302 – 71%  
304 – 90%  
306 – 76%  
308 – 81%  
310 – 81%

301 – 95%  
303 – 100%  
305 – 100%  
307 – 90%  
309 – 100%  
311 – 100%  
313 – 90%

Overall – 89%

**Manassas Line**

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

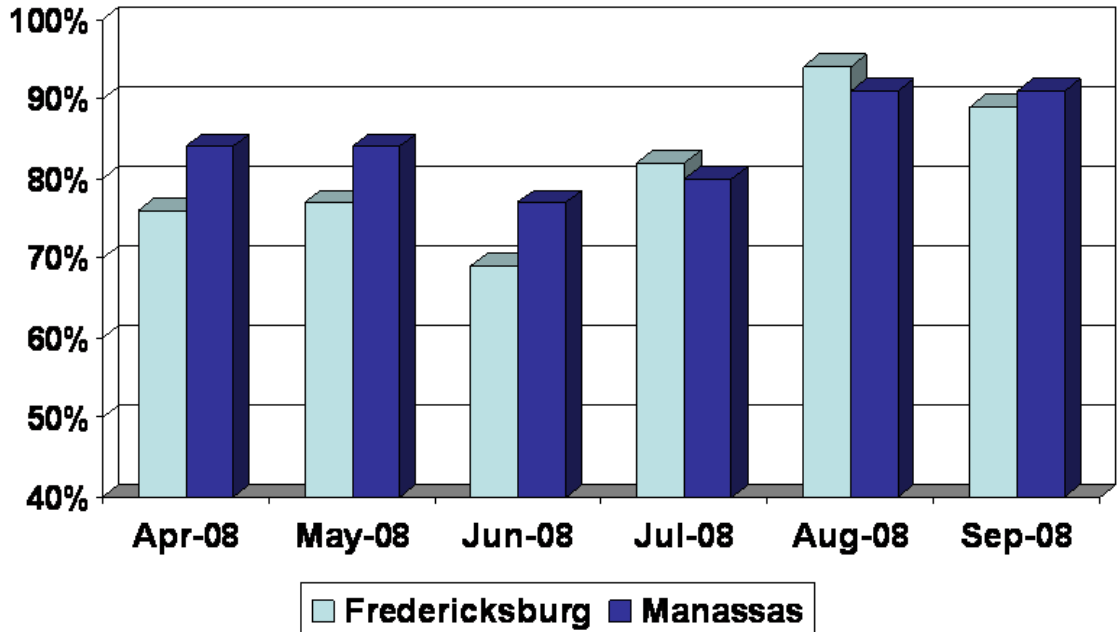
325 – 95%  
327 – 90%  
329 – 90%  
331 – 100%  
333 – 100%  
335 – 86%  
337 – 71%

Overall – 91%

\*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



## It's VRE Time!

Synch your watches, train fans! Because if you don't want to get left behind, you need to know what time it is. What EXACT time it is ... because VRE's trains run not by the time it says on your watch, but by the time that the U.S. Naval Observatory Time Services Department says it is.

Why are we telling you this? Because we've been finding that many people miss their trains because their watches are set a few minutes behind the "real time" ... and since our train crews synch up with the Naval Observatory clock before each and every run, anyone with a slow

watch has a good chance of missing the train. We can't board people once the signal has been given for the train to leave the station, so it's very important that everyone is running by the same time clock.



Getting yourself tuned on the same time is thankfully very easy: you can call the Observatory's voice announcer at 202-762-1401, or you can visit their Web site at <http://tycho.usno.navy.mil/> and click on the "Animated USNO Time in Standard Time Zones" to get the exact time, down to the second. Happy synching, and we'll see you onboard!