Anna Gotthardt

From: Allen, Michael
Sent: Thursday, February 19, 2015 3:21 PM
To: PublicComment
Subject: Fare increase

I am not in support of the VRE proposed fare increase. The cost increase is sending me further into the poorhouse! What is the justification for the increase?
Anna Gotthardt

From: Barnes, Christopher D <redacted>
Sent: Wednesday, March 4, 2015 9:26 AM
To: PublicComment
Subject: We don't need another fare increase.

VRE,

I understand that you need to make improvements. Unfortunately what you seem to be failing to take into account is that a large portion of the people who ride the train are federal workers. The government has cut our subsidy and we haven't gotten a decent raise in years. Riding the train is already expensive and if you keep raising the cost a lot of us will have to resort to getting to work by other means. Remember VRE isn't the only game in town, people can slug, carpool, ride the bus or drive.

Thanks,

Chris D. Barnes
U.S. Department of State
Washington D.C.

In accordance with Executive Order 12958, this message is UNCLASSIFIED.

PERSONAL
This email is UNCLASSIFIED.
Hello,

I realize you need more money but I'm a federal worker and we have been getting any real pay raises for a long time. Also our subsidy has been cut and it looks like we will not get it back. If the price of the VRE and Amtrack step us keeps increasing a lot of us are going to have to start car-pooling. Its a lot cheaper anyway and not as crowded.

And why don't you invest some money in some new speakers??? They are not that expensive. No one can understand the announcements on the platforms.

Chris Barnes
To Whom it May Concern -

While I appreciate the cost concerns that VRE must face, I feel it necessary to tell you that a rate increase at this point would push me toward carpooling and away from VRE. My wife and both take the VRE every day from Woodbridge. Together we pay over $15 each way. Even without picking up slugs, the cost of the HOV lanes plus parking comes out to less than that. With slugging we would actually save money.

The government used to subsidize more of my VRE travel, and I can use that money instead to subsidize my parking. I'm sorry to say, since that subsidy has not passed Congress for 2015, it's the wrong time for a rate increase. I love the VRE, but it's just simple math at this point. Thanks for the years of service.

David Borak
Woodbridge, VA
From: Andrew Brewton  
Sent: Wednesday, March 4, 2015 10:43 AM  
To: PublicComment  
Subject: Public Comment

To whom it may concern

I am aware that VRE is seeking to increase fares by 4% to cover rising costs. or so we are told. I would not vote for this because of the following reasons.

1. Though service has improved within the past few years, you already had an increase last year.
2. Federal Employees benefit has not increased in the past 2 years. I know you say that most of your riders are not Federal employees but I call that a falsehood or bad reporting why else would you not have enough riders to go to and from DC on a soft Federal holiday and during the furloughs last year you ridership dropped drastically. Just saying please don’t think that all of your riders don’t pay attention to there surroundings.

I ask that VRE not be a lemming by following the other Passenger Rail Service and increase the fare for rider that are already a little cash strapped. No one want to say the best way to reduce cost MAKE VRE Employees that Ride FOR FREE, PAY for there travel! barring that start the Layoffs but only has a last resort. But it has been my experience with VRE that you do not listen to your Passengers unless they are on the Manassas but for those of us that ride the Fredericksburg line it feels like all VRE wants from us is our money and to get on the train and not complain.

I am sorry if this upsets whom ever reads this but it is my opinion and I cannot attend any hearings.

thank you

Andrew Brewton
Anna Gotthardt

From: Shirley Brown-Bigelow
Sent: Wednesday, February 18, 2015 3:30 PM
To: PublicComment
Subject: Proposed 4% VRE Fare Increase - Oppose

I am not in favor of an increase in fare until someone takes a study to determine how everyone who purchases a ticket can actually be guaranteed a seat. The trains are crowded at least three days out of the week (Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays; heavy rider ship), and paying over $240 a month for a monthly ticket and having to stand up part of the way is unacceptable to me as a paying customer.

The irony is the conductors walk through and tell some people to remove personal items off the seat to allow those standing to sit down. The verbiage used is, "you only paid for one seat." When you are standing up, my thought is, "than where is the seat I paid for?"
To Whom it may concern,

I am against the idea of a fare hike. Considering that those who are fortunate to get subsidy took a large hit last year with the commuting subsidy going from $240 down to a painful $130 a month, that took a large chunk of my income to continue taking the train. If the fares are increased, the VRE is going to become a luxury item and deemed not worth putting in the budget as I currently spend $120 out of my own pocket to ride. I can’t even begin to imagine those who take the VRE and are not able to receive any subsidy.

Metro is also discussing increasing fares alongside the VRE (http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/drgridlock/wp/2015/02/09/metro-fare-hike-service-cuts-recommended-for-public-hearing-agenda/), which a lot of VRE riders also take to get to their final destinations. Asking VRE riders to increase fares from both services puts a huge crimp in their economic welfares, particularly after we have been facing increasing fare hikes all across all commuting services as well as increased tolls on toll roads and an increase on toll roads themselves. These fees are adding up where most workers in the DMV are now actually paying to work instead of working to get paid.

Eventually, we are going to be left with slugging if these increases continue.

In Solidarity,

Victoria Burris
Membership Coordinator
International Federation of Professional & Technical Engineers
501 3rd Street NW, Suite 701
Washington DC 20001
Phone: [redacted]
Fax: [redacted]
Anna Gotthardt

From: Burton Roy A TIGTA <redacted>
Sent: Monday, February 23, 2015 3:13 PM
To: PublicComment
Subject: VRE Public Hearings

Unfortunately, I can’t attend any of your hearings in person, but appreciate you providing this medium.

I’ve been riding the VRE for years and think your crews are top notch and personable. Great Job!

One way to make this increase more palatable is to add free Wi-Fi to your trains. I’m sure your marketing team can work out some kind of deal with a company to make this happen at a nominal cost to you while giving them access to a “captive audience,” your ridership, for their advertising. In all reality, you can probably roll another penny or two onto the cost of each trip to cover your cost and folks will still think they’re getting it for free.

Thanks for your time and keep up the great service, Roy
This percentage is too high. We did not even get a cost of living increase that high. The trains are invaluable to passengers getting to work, but we still have to sit on old cars and the trains are too crowded and many times not on time. 4% is too much to increase at one time. Maybe 2% this year and 2% next year but 4% at one time? I am going to have to move over to the slug lines or drive to DC myself. This increase is too high. Please reconsider this. Thank you.
What do riders get with a proposed 4% fare increase? More reliable service? Wi-fi service?
Anna Gotthardt

From: Coffey, Reginald D CIV.CPMS (US)  
Sent: Wednesday, February 25, 2015 9:49 PM  
To: p_coffey@hotmail.com  
Cc: VRE PRice Hike (UNCLASSIFIED)

Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Caveats: NONE

While I fully understand that operational cost rise, the price increases on VRE riders must be tempered with the general COLA for the majority of riders. VRE rider come from all walks of the economy but the majority are federal workers. Federal workers went three years with no pay raise while the cost of living commodities around us rose. I strongly recommend that VRE cost increases be tied to the average COLA raises for the majority of riders. The majority of rider for the VRE are federal employees and we only received a 1% COLA increase. This is fair.

Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Caveats: NONE
I've been a rider of the VRE since 2000 and have seen many a fare increase over those 14-15 years. And not once did the 'public meeting' process postpone or cancel the proposed increase. How about lobbying Congress for an increase in the monthly transit benefit instead of holding public meetings on something you are going to do, anyway? I know, however, that you are required by law/reg etc. to hold public meetings.
From: Joe Cummings
Sent: Wednesday, February 25, 2015 12:10 PM
To: PublicComment
Subject: price hike on the VRE

Hi Bryan Jungwirth and friends at VRE,

I'm sure I'm not the first to ask this question, and it's perhaps more of a rhetorical, but here it is anyway:

In light of recent reduction in fuel costs, VRE is raising rates. If/when fuel prices rise in the near/distant future, how much corresponding reduction in VRE rates can customers anticipate?

Thank you,

Joe
Anna Gotthardt

From: Dooley, Sue Ellen (SAA) <[redacted]>
Sent: Tuesday, February 24, 2015 12:43 PM
To: PublicComment
Subject: Step-up Comments

Sir or Ma’am- Like most others, I can’t make the meetings. So my input is that I use the step-ups almost every day of the week, as long as the evening trains are on schedule; and sometimes twice a day. If you raise the rates, I won’t use them at all. $5 a ride is far too much, particularly given that they are stops the train is making anyway, and I already pay a substantial amount out of pocket for my monthly ticket. I imagine you will lose most VRE riders (that’s probably why the rates dropped a few years ago... lack of ridership.) People live in the suburbs to keep costs down, not to spend a major part of their paycheck on transit.

Sue Ellen
This comment is for inclusion in the hearings record:

VRE is the most expensive commuter train system in the country. It costs more for a monthly ticket from Alexandria or Crystal City to DC one zone away than MARC charges to travel from Baltimore to DC. VRE should explore economies, such as wider use of S schedules, rather than fare increases because VRE’s fares being so out-of-line with typical commuter train fares deter ridership, thereby contributing to traffic congestion and environmental impact. By contrast, MARC provides significant counter-flow service on two of its three lines and weekend service on its main line, little of which VRE does. A side-by-side comparison of the two shows VRE costs more and provides less. Before VRE presses for a fare increase, it should seek other sources of funding and should consider economies.

Thank you.

Dino Drudi
Comments on the VRE fare increase proposed for 2015:

Before VRE increases fares again, it must take advantage of neglected sources of revenue:

1. Step-up fares between VRE zones. It has been maybe 15 years since VRE said it would sell step-up tickets so that passengers with a monthly ticket could travel beyond their zone occasionally. All they need is a paper ticket that they hand to the conductor. It should be reasonably priced (maybe a dollar per zone). Instead, when asked, VRE tells people to buy a one-way full-fare ticket, get off the train at the last zone on their monthly ticket, validate the one-way ticket, and get back on. When I have to get off the train, I stay off and ride Metro at a much lower price, and I know other people who do the same. Yet between Crystal City and Washington, DC, is one place where VRE has empty seats to sell and people who would ride more often if it were not so inconvenient and overpriced. Don’t make us wait 15 more years. Start selling convenient step-up tickets and getting some more revenue.

2. Passengers willing to pay to travel to special events. Many thousands of people traveled to the presidential inauguration in 2013. Many of them would have ridden VRE and would have purchased full-fare tickets. Yet VRE refused their patronage and their money.

Also, VRE needs to redirect its communication efforts to give correct messages all the time and dispense with personal advice such as what kinds of shoes to wear, which is a waste of our money. We passengers hear wrong station announcements, wrong train announcements, wrong platform announcements, wrong announcements about the location of the quiet car, and wrong announcements about whether VRE will operate service. Hardly a weekday goes by that I do not hear a false announcement. And, yes, as instructed in the monthly chat, I have sent messages to Gotrains@VRE.org, and most of the messages went unanswered, and the wrong announcements continue. Use the communications money on accurate, needed communications.

Steve Dunham
Fredericksburg (Spotsylvania), Virginia
Anna Gotthardt

From: Ryan Lange on behalf of Gotrains
Sent: Monday, March 2, 2015 8:16 AM
To: ANNIE
Subject: RE: upcoming rate increase

Thank you for your comments. They were forwarded along to VRE management.

From: ANNIE [mailto:_________________]
Sent: Sunday, February 15, 2015 3:25 PM
To: Gotrains
Subject: upcoming rate increase

To whom it may concern: This email is being sent to express my disagreement with the proposed rate increase. The rate increase for Fredericksburg customers is not fair. The service increase is not warranted until the parking facility can accommodate the VRE customers. There is very limited parking for VRE riders who ride the last two trains the morning. It is almost impossible to find a parking space in order to ride those two trains. If you ride the last two trains, you must have an alternate plan due to the parking issue. It is not fair to those customers who ride the last two trains to have to struggle to find parking spaces, pay the same fair as other VRE riders, and to now have to suffer a new increase in rates. Let me point out that when you cannot find a parking space, which is 3-5 times per week, VRE riders who the last two trains must result to paying a rate of $8 per day fee to park in the public parking garage or $100 per month for a monthly ticket or if we are lucky we can pay the $5 per day public fee in another limited parking lot. VRE needs to enter into an agreement with the city of Fredericksburg to subsidize the needs of VRE riders to accommodate VRE riders for the last two trains before rate increases are entertained and/or find another means to support the customers to minimize the effect parking has on their current customers at the Fredericksburg Station. For these reasons, I strongly disagree with the rate increase.

Additionally, as far the rate increase for the AMTRAK. I totally disagree with the increase proposal for the following reasons. There is no compensable reimbursement and/or no retribution for the VRE customers who ride the AMTRAK particularly when we are inconvenienced for the tardiness and/or the cancellation of the AMTRAK trains. We are sometimes inconvenienced for hours which has been and continues to be very costly to the VRE customers. In addition, it $3 fee is excessive particularly when you take the 7:05 p.m. AMTRAK train. Although the ride may be comfortable, service is awful. You sit in the quiet car and the conductor talks the entire time all the way from Union station continously interrupting passengers to remind them of their stop or upcoming stop. He consistently and continuously does it on both sides of the quiet car train. If he is not walking through then he loves to hear himself talk and remind folks of the next stop on the intercom on both sides of the quiet car. If you want rest, forget about getting it on the 7:05 Amtrak train. In addition, if the VRE ticket station is broken and you do not have time to get to the office on the 1st floor to pick up a ticket, the conductors on the AMTRAK have no compassion whatsoever to the VRE customers. The conductor clearly states that it is a VRE problem, not am AMTRAK problem. VRE and AMTRAK should have some type of an agreement to make the VRE customers feel as if they are valuable. This type of behavior makes it appear like neither company cares about your well being. These are the reasons I feel the step up fee is too high already and let alone, does not warrant an increase. I think the amount of times the AMTRAK is late and/or cancelled VRE customers are inconvenienced when we ride the AMTRAK or have to find another means to get home when cancelled, without restitution, the VRE management should not ask for a rate increase. To my knowledge, there is no provision for restitution when the VRE customers use AMTRAK as another optionally means for transportation. In the a.m. when the AMTRAK is late, VRE customers must take vacation time to offset the tardiness, pay for parking due to limited parking spaces or pay a cab for drop-off service, or be scrutinized by our employers because of the continous tardiness pattern and the unreliability of the AMTRAK. While we appreciate use of the AMTRAK, it is not a reliable source of transportation for commuting and VRE should not treat it as if it is. It is an alternate means of transportation for VRE riders
and since it is not dependable, VRE should not try to capitalize its service and treat it as if it is a reliable mode of transportation.

I am unable to make to the meetings to voice my opinion and I do hope that this email transmittal is useful for VRE to improve it service and to not obtain a rate increase for VRE riders as well as not increase the step up ticket fare.

Respectfully,

A Evans
Anna Gotthardt

From: Evans, Iris - FSA, Washington, DC
Sent: Wednesday, February 4, 2015 2:33 PM
To: PublicComment
Subject: VRE Ticket Increase

This is a comment to the meetings held to discuss, increasing ticket prices;

Here you go again taking what minuscule raise government employees received this year, mine was a mere 1.0% , the first by the way in 4 years and suddenly It’s time to raise the price of a train ticket. It’s criminal and obviously being done to line your pockets. Gas prices are the lowest in years and the trains are full which tells me ridership is up, so, can someone please tell me why it is necessary to raise the rates?

I don’t expect to hear back from anyone, I’ve yet to receive a response on any email I’ve sent. I’m sure you’ll just ignore this and go ahead and do whatever you wish and take every last penny from the working class, God forbid anyone actually get ahead in the world. It’s pathetic and I am totally disgusted by your company and the way your business is being run. Tax payers are picking up a huge tab to keep you all in business, I just don’t think it is worth it anymore.

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Multiple "negligible" expenses all add up. And how are expenses within the VRE budget not correlated to revenue (fare increases)?

Sent from my iPhone

On Mar 6, 2015, at 10:43 AM, Braddock BOS Email <BraddockBOSEmail@fairfaxcounty.gov> wrote:

Mr. Franklin,

Thank you for writing me about this VRE issue. VRE started a program to honor long-time Board members by naming a rail car after them as a gesture of appreciation. The cost of this program is negligible in comparison to the VRE budget and has no effect on any fare increase.

As the Chairman of the VRE Operations Board, I will do my best to serve the needs of our riders. Thank you and don’t hesitate to reach out with any further questions.

John C. Cook
Braddock District Supervisor
9002 Burke Lake Road
Burke, VA 22015-1608

How does VRE consider a fare increase at the same time they plan on painting board member (politician) names on the engines? Are the board members so narcissistic they need to see their names displayed? Or does VRE just like to spend money?
Anna Gotthardt

From: Franklin, Christine
Sent: Wednesday, February 25, 2015 10:24 AM
To: PublicComment
Cc: Franklin, Christine
Subject: 4% Fare Increase

Importance: High

Good morning,

In comment to the potential upcoming 4% fare increase for VRE, I would ask the VRE officials who are making this decision to please consider the impact that this increase will have on the VRE passengers who do NOT receive federal subsidies towards the cost of monthly commuting.

While VRE has openly stated that the “majority” of its passengers are federal employees, the remainder of those riders, like myself, are not federal employees. We do not have the luxury of receiving every federal holiday off of work, we have to arrange for other means of transportation on several federal holidays at our own additional expense, and we now will have to yet again feel the impact of an additional fare increase of 4% out of pocket.

Currently I am spending $232.40 for a monthly VRE ticket to travel between zones 1-5 along with more than $100 per month for the additional cost of Metro. This does not include the additional out of pocket expenses of driving and parking incurred on the federal holidays that VRE chooses not to operate service for the remainder of its “non-federal” passengers.

If I calculate the numbers correctly, an additional 4% equates to $9.30 ... added to my $232.40 monthly VRE ticket ... added to more than $100 in monthly Metro fares ... my total is nearly $350.00 out of pocket and NO federal subsidy.

Maybe VRE should consider it’s “non-federal” riders’ out of pocket monthly commuting expenses and offer a discounted ticket specifically for these riders. We would certainly go to the trouble of proving that we are NOT federal employees ... our monthly checkbook balances certainly can substantiate that.

PLEASE, PLEASE consider those riders who are truly burdened by the costs of monthly commuting already and not approve yet another fare increase. In the alternative, if VRE intends to approve the 4% fare increase, then please pass this fare increase along ONLY to the “federal” employees who are receiving a subsidy towards their costs of monthly commuting.

Thank you,

Christine Franklin
Woodbridge, VA 22191

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Anna Gotthardt

From: Alexa A. French*
Sent: Wednesday, February 4, 2015 3:10 PM
To: PublicComment
Subject: Raising fares

I'm against raising fares, especially the increase in the Amtrak step up. Why are fares being raised when the fuel prices have gone down? I already pay $214.00 a month to get to Alexandria, that's only three stations. I sympathize for the Frederickburg riders.

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Hi,

I’ve been a VRE rider for more than 10 years. The service has improved greatly in reliability the past few years (since Keolis got the service contract) and I feel that I’ve gotten my money’s worth and then some, so I don’t object to the fare increase. I think it’s the best commuter service in the area. Keep up the good work!

I do have a suggestion, though, to keep costs down: forget about wifi. I notice every month, when VRE sponsors an online forum for questions, that riders ask/demand wifi. The thing is, by the time that would be implemented, there would be a new tech tool that would serve the purpose (and there are some even now). If VRE got into the business of trying to keep up with the new technologies, there’d be no end to what that would cost. Unless there is a safety issue with not having wifi that I’m not understanding, I don’t see any reason to spend lots of money on something that would mostly be used for entertainment. (When I walk down the aisle to exit my train in the evening, I see most people playing games on their phones and tablets and computers!) Riders can plan ahead to figure out how they want to spend their train time: read a book, magazine, or newspaper; download a video onto your computer; write a paper; plan your next trip; dream of better weather to come; think; sleep. It’s not that inconvenient.

Nancy Glover
Burke, Va
Anna Gotthardt

From: R. Craig Harman
Sent: Monday, February 23, 2015 4:55 PM
To: PublicComment
Subject: Fare hike comment

I was wondering if VRE has ever considered offering a one-way monthly fare, e.g. inbound or outbound only. I have a reverse commute that VRE doesn’t have an appropriate train to service in the morning (from DC to Alexandria at 8 am), so I take Amtrak; however, I ride VRE in the afternoon (both 336 and 338) and would benefit from a one-directional monthly pass.

Thanks for your consideration.

Craig Harman
Washington, DC
From: Zoe Heller <zoe.heller@vreb.com>
Sent: Wednesday, February 4, 2015 3:52 PM
To: PublicComment
Subject: Fare Increase

Dear Sir/Madam,

I am writing in response to the solicitation of public comment to the suggested 4% fare increase to take effect July 2015. I do not believe a fare increase is reasonable at this time. As noted in the recent commuter flyer distributed to riders, riders who receive travel subsidies through work with the federal government do not receive the same amount as those who park. As a result, commuters like myself are left with no option but to pay out of pocket for the difference in fare costs. The fare increases have not coincided with the changes made to the federal subsidy. Everyone is hopeful that the parking/train subsidy issue will be resolved in Congress shortly, but until it is, I respectfully request that the VRE not raise its fares at this time, and certainly not by 4%.

Thank you for your time.

Zoe J. Heller
Fairfax, VA 22030
Hi -

In response to the 4% universal hike... Why not just raise the fee on the F'Burg line as all the impact is there. New facility, New Trains for that line, increased fuel for longer ride and only real Amtrak "step-up" options. Since there is no change on the Manassas line, why punish the riders there? Raise the F'Burg line 5-6% and lessen Manassas to 2-0% increases.

James Henderson
Anna Gotthardt

From:  Matthew T. Keough
Sent:  Wednesday, February 4, 2015 10:00 AM
To:  PublicComment
Subject:  VRE Fare Increase

Hello,

I would like the board to take the following into consideration when deciding on any fare increase.

The pretax commuting benefit was lowered by the IRS to $130. This means commuters, like me, who go from Broad Run and Union station every day will have to pay more for their VRE ride. I would also note that the parking cap is still $250. This higher pretax benefit for parking along with the low gas prices may make some people decide to drive instead of paying a higher price to ride the VRE.

I understand that there is internal price increases for the VRE. However, from the riders perspective this fare increase would come with no additional benefits. Nothing would change before and after the fare increase except the fare increase.

This is in the context of the economy just now starting to recover from the biggest recession in anybody's lifetimes. It seems like even though the stock market has gone up wages have stagnated and prices have started to increase.

So from the riders perspective their wages have been stagnate, prices have risen, there has not been any improvements in the VRE service yet fares will be potentially going up. I would ask the VRE Board to take this perspective into consideration when deciding on any potential fare increase.

As a side note, it would be very beneficial and at least offset some of the pain of a fare increase if the online ticketing app was introduced ASAP and every train became equipped with WiFi. This would at least allow riders to cut down on their phone's data usage, which may enable them to save some money.

Thanks,

Matthew T. Keough
Bristow, VA 20136
Anna Gotthardt

From: Komarnicki Edward
Sent: Wednesday, February 18, 2015 10:22 AM
To: PublicComment
Subject: 4% fare increase

Importance: High

How can you increase fares 4% when my increase was only 1%? You must have saved many $$$ on recent fuel costs. You’re making me want to drive to Springfield and take METRO! I am against any increase in fares at this time.

Ed Komarnicki
Lorton to L’Enfant commuter

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Anna Gotthardt

From: Joe Krenzberger
Sent: Wednesday, March 4, 2015 3:45 PM
To: PublicComment
Subject: Against 4% Fare Increase

I am writing in opposition of 4% fare increase. I take this stand because I ride the Fredericksburg train 302. You took a car off the train which removed seating and caused crowding, poor customer service.

I think VRE should get a 1% fare increase, to match my pay rise for this year. Also I have gone without a raise for 4 years, so 1% increase seems fair.

Joe Krenzberger
Anna Gotthardt

From: Laura <[redacted]>
Sent: Wednesday, March 4, 2015 9:49 AM
To: PublicComment
Subject: VRE Fare Increase

Instead of a fare increase, stop giving every single employee their own hotel room every day of the week. It would be cheaper to rent an apartment. Only the Engineers need a room to sleep.

It's ridiculous we have to pay more and more money in order for the employees to lounge around all day and sleep.
Thank you for the opportunity to remark against the proposed fare increase.

VRE often justifies increased fares due to the need for capital improvements, the price of fuel, and CSX demands. I don’t follow the logic this time.

Judging by the most persistent comments to the monthly online forums, the introduction of wi-fi is likely the highest demand by riders. However, since we know that AmTrak found a technical solution, I’m not convinced that VRE is forthright in their effort to resolve the problem. Therefore, I don’t trust that VRE is prioritizing capital improvements according to customer requests.

Another justification for an increased fare is the new service to Spotsy. I disagree with VRE’s position that all fares should increase for the addition of this station, especially as I understand that the fare for stops in Fred and Spotsy will be the same amount. It is reasonable to me that the extension of service further south should result in a new fare zone. Therefore, riders ticketed for Spotsy should bear the burden of that bill.

The cost of fuel is substantially less than when VRE increased fares last time, an increase at the time justified by the high price of fuel. Fares have not decreased proportionately since oil bottomed out; yet, VRE seeks another increase.

I’m not convinced VRE is advocating for riders when facing-down CSX demands. We hear news of VRE intentions, but we’re not privy to the CSX side of the business. Without this transparency, I have little confidence that VRE is looking out for us.

Finally, while I appreciate VRE’s efforts to convey information and to seek public comment on the fare increase, I wonder of what good it is. Regardless, I’ll protest here and hope for the best.

Your loyal rider (but at what cost?),

David Mansfield
Fredericksburg
I am against the fare increase. The price of gas is low. No additional services are provided such as longer trains, more frequent trains, or late morning and late night trains.

In short, there is no reason a fare hike is warranted since the price of fuel is low and no extra perks are given to offset the fare hike.
I'm a contractor who has had to take several pay cuts in the last several years to stay employed. I work for a small business and I do not receive any assistance with the fair. Lately contracts go to the lowest bidder and may or may not be renewed annually. I'm always wondering if I'll have a job tomorrow. I'm paying the full fair from Broad Run to Crystal City each month. I'm not even able to use pre-tax dollars to purchase my ticket.

An increase would be a hardship for me, if fairs go up I'll start taking the bus from the Manassas Mall. Since the price of gas has gone down I might even try to find a car pool.

Sincerely,
Marypat
In view of falling oil prices a rate increase is hardly justified - in fact a rate decrease is in order.

Thank you

Paul Moog
Fairfax, VA 22030
Anna Gotthardt

From: Yvette Moore <yvette.moore@...>
Sent: Thursday, February 19, 2015 7:04 AM
To: PublicComment
Subject: No fare increase

I moved to this area almost 5 years ago and began riding the VRE. In that time I have seen at least 3 fare increases. Exactly what are we getting for this increase, we are not seeing better service, more trains or more convenient schedules.

While the VRE is convenient, it is also very expensive. This increase will cause unnecessary strain on federal employees that have only seen a 2% increase in salary and an even higher increase on the cost of living over the last 5 years.

I recently started taking the bus to work as it is cheaper and faster. I will think that more people will look for other ways to get to work if prices continue to rise.

Yvette Moore
Program Specialist
Country Development Officer - Lesotho, Namibia and Swaziland
US Agency for International Development

You must take personal responsibility. You cannot change the circumstances, the seasons or the wind, but you can change yourself.

~ Jim Rohn ~
I am unable to attend the open forums, but did want you to have my input to the fare increase. While I certainly sympathize with operating cost issues, I also have to evaluate convenience a cost of commuting.

At this moment I am right on the fence in riding VRE. I have loved the quiet commute, and being able to read or work instead of focusing on traffic. However, a 4% increase will put me over DOUBLE my commuting cost, when compared to driving. That cost evaluation is only if I purchase a monthly ticket. If I use the ten-ride pass, I end up at nearly triple my driving costs. This is just enough to push a long-time rider off the train. I suspect that I am also the type of rider you would want to retain, riding the lower traffic runs. I tend to ride the 322 northbound daily, and going home I am on either the 325, 327 or 337 runs. Also, I have based my calculations on 20-ride days average per month, but with that said, I tend to work at other agencies a couple days per month. I have to drive to them, so my true ridership is closer to 15-days per month.

I sincerely hope you have the ability to reconsider. Thanks for listening.

Respectfully,

Steven D. Mowery, PMP
PM, Infrastructure & Applications Management Branch (IAMB)
Office of Chief of Staff, Chief Information Officer
Department of Homeland Security

“When the winds of change blow, some people build walls and others build windmills.”

* Chinese Proverb
Anna Gotthardt

From: [Redacted]  
Sent: Wednesday, February 25, 2015 5:43 PM  
To: PublicComment  
Subject: Proposed fare hike

I understand there will be a need from time to time to raise fares.

I propose that you actually eliminate one particular fare option altogether; the Senior Fares. The reason discounts were created for seniors was to allow retired people on a lower fixed income the ability to still get out and enjoy themselves. Being that the VRE is a commuter train people that catch it have jobs. Occasionally in the summer months you get a few kids going into the city or someone heading to the airport but those instances are pretty rare. I don't think it's fair that a 66 year old making $150,000+ is getting half priced fares while a fresh faced 23 year old pulling in $45,000 if he/she is lucky is paying a full fare.

Kind Regards  
Sam Mudge  

Sent from my iPhone
Anna Gotthardt

From: [Harvesty Erich]  Cynthia Osband
Sent: Thursday, February 19, 2015 6:50 AM
To: PublicComment
Subject: Proposed Increases

Sir/Ma'am,

I read the newspaper article this morning regarding the Stafford public hearing regarding the VRE ticket rate increase.

Please do not mistake the lack of attendance for acceptance. In the 10 years my husband has been riding the VRE, each proposed rate increase has occurred as proposed, so is there really any point in attending a hearing?

Respectfully,
Cynthia M. Osband
Fredericksburg, VA 22405
VRE fares are too expensive - don't raise them at least not until the commuter subsidy goes back up.

People have expenses as well and some who may not get commuter subsidy cannot afford VRE's high fares. So, instead of putting the burden on your riders, put the burden on the jurisdictions.

VRE is my highest expensive and I don't like charging almost $200 to my credit card every month. The commuter subsidy is still down, only 1% pay raise and gas prices are down.

VRE needs to find other ways to lower and pay its expenses instead of asking riders for money.

--

Davin Peterson
From: Davin Peterson  
Sent: Friday, February 27, 2015 10:11 AM  
To: Gotrains; PublicComment  
Subject: Metro board rejects Fare Increase and so should VRE

Metro board rejects Fare Increase and so should VRE  
VRE's fares are already expensive and the subsidy is still $130  
So, not everyone can afford VRE high fares.  
VRE should find another way to make revenue and with additional train you'll have more revenue

-- Davin Peterson
All,

I'm sorry I couldn't make it to any of the public forums to ask these questions in a more constructive and perhaps less argumentative sounding way. Most of my comments aren't meant that way.

While I understand that your costs are continuing to go up, I urge you to consider reducing the fare increases, though I doubt that much will change in this mandatory public comment period.

Reducing the proposed fare increase by 1 or 2% would show that you take your riders' troubles seriously, and are able to adjust finances to meet a slight decrease.

Something doesn't seem right here. If these are estimated numbers, and especially since the charges you indicate are multi-year (capital improvements, PTC), then it would seem better to phase the fare increases in at a lower rate, and adjust fare next year if needed, and perhaps hold off on some of the FTE increases or projects that can push. Your estimates for fares in 2014 were off -- you brought in more than you estimated. The same could easily happen in 2016.

I'm particularly surprised by the $308,000 increase in executive management salaries. While I don't doubt that your staff deserve wage increases, and that another executive might be required, this and the $36,218 increase in management consulting since 2014 seem easy places to eliminate 1/3 of the amount you hope to recover with the fare increase.

$290,250 for operations. $134,000 for budget. $162,000 for communications/info tech. $103,000 for contracts. $90,000 for security.

Again, some of these are clearly justified, and clearly needed, and some are offset by decreases in a few areas. But $1,123,468 in personnel increases in one year?

If I took a request for that many FTE increases up to the Hill, I'd be fired. Over a few years, sure. This much of an increase (by percent and total dollars) over one year, for a negligible service increase? No way. Again, something doesn't seem right.

Your MD&A from the 2014 audit says "Operating revenues increased by 6.6 percent compared to the prior year...the result, in part, of a 4 percent fare increase at the beginning of the fiscal year."

So now we're doing it again? You haven't made a strong enough case that another substantive increase is worth what your customers receive for it. Add this to the disgraceful 2012 FBI investigation, and it's not clear if this cost increase really goes to service, or just executive salaries and further kickbacks.

Please consider reducing the sudden staff/project increases, and relieve what budget tensions you can from your riders.
Thanks to the staffer that actually has to read these.

Jeremy

Jeremy Pevner
Anna Gotthardt

From: Rebecca <rebecca@vre.com>
Sent: Wednesday, February 4, 2015 6:58 AM
To: PublicComment
Subject: Fare increase

Hello,

I would like for you to address this matter. I am interested in getting a full breakdown of "operations costs" along with the total dollar amount shortage VRE claims to have. I was hoping VRE would consider a decrease considering the cost decline of petroleum. How about management considering a reduction in salary instead to help cover these operation costs? I am not happy about this increase and expect VRE to see a decline in ridership.

Sincerely,

Rebecca
Rider since 7/2005

Sent from my iPhone
Anna Gotthardt

From: Richardson, Michelle R. <redacted>
Sent: Wednesday, March 4, 2015 3:55 PM
To: Public Comment
Subject: Increasing the Fares

Good afternoon:

I have been riding the VRE for at 4 years now and I will say that the VRE service has been wonderful. My commute is stress free (unless there or delays on the tracks). Over the years, I have seen an increase in ridership. Trains are constantly having standing room only (especially the early trains). I do not understand why there is a need for an increase in fares. The VRE is now competing with the HOT lanes. It is being reported that there is an increase in carpools because of the HOT lanes. I feel like an increase will not benefit the VRE because the price of a ticket will not be worth it. It would be cheaper for me to drive to work using the new HOT lanes especially with carpooling. Also, my commute, when driving, is shorter than the train. On the Fredericksburg Line, you are about to open two new stations which will increase my commuting time.

When I compare the MARC system to VRE, I am extremely disappointed. The MARC runs more trains and has cheaper tickets than the VRE. Sure, the MARC system does have some downsputs but so does the VRE.

I strongly disagree with increasing the fare rate. There are other costing cutting measures that the VRE could do without increasing fare rates to makeup the budget shortfall. An example is the magazine that VRE produces is a waste of money. When they are published I see more left on the train then I see individuals actually take them.

from the desk of:

Michelle R. Richardson

Administrative Officer, Office of the Chief
United States Capitol Police
119 D Street, NE, Room 708, Washington, DC 20510
Office: [redacted] Desk: [redacted]
Cell: [redacted] Fax: [redacted]

"Intelligence plus character - that is the goal of true education" ~ by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

"Strength of character isn’t always about how much you can handle before you break. It’s also about how much you can handle after you’ve been broken" ~ Robert Tew

"Nothing in all the world is more dangerous than sincere ignorance and conscientious stupidity." ~ by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

"Courage is not the absence of fear, it's the control of fear." ~ Dickey Chapelle, war correspondent
To Whom It May Concern:

I have been a faithful commuter train rider for more than 20 years on the following lines:
VRE-Manassas, 1994-1996
VRE-Fredericksburg, 1996-2002
MARC-Brunswick, 2002-2013
VRE-Fredericksburg, 2014-present

When I moved from Berkeley Co., W.Va., in December 2013, I was paying $200/month to ride MARC's Brunswick Line from Brunswick, Maryland, to Union Station, D.C.

Upon moving to Fredericksburg, I began paying $287.40/month to ride from Leeland Station in Stafford Co., Va., into Washington, D.C.

The two trips are of comparable distance -- perhaps a few miles further from Brunswick, which lies at Milepost 55 of the C&O Canal. Generally speaking, the consist (equipment) for VRE is a little nicer and newer than the MARC consist. However, monthly ticket prices for a comparable trip are more than 40 percent higher on VRE than MARC.

Now, there is a proposal to increase VRE ticket prices 4 percent, which would boost my monthly ticket price to $298.90 -- nearly 50 percent higher than MARC.

I simply ask that ticket prices be reined in to be more comparable with MARC -- unless there are hidden VRE costs or compelling reasons for a fare increase that riders are not being made aware of.

Sincerely,
Brad Rippey
Fredericksburg, Va.
Quoting from the VRE annual financial report:

“No general fare increase was budgeted for fiscal year 2015, following a fare increase of 4% the prior year.”

Looking at the declining ridership numbers, I would fully expect VRE and its oversight team recognizes the pattern that will continue here. You will not see the revenue increase anticipated; it will have the opposite effect—and you already are seeing softer demand as fuel prices hold low levels and workplace flexibility increases (remote/telework).

Unabated price increases are unacceptable. VRE’s rider base is inherently linked to the federal workforce. My family continues to limp along with no salary increase or a tiny 1% increase—insufficient to cover broad price increases in food, taxes, housing, and other essentials. We deserve full transparency on VRE’s spending priorities, including salaries, marketing, fuel, and office equipment. VRE is spending cash like it has no limitations and then soaks its riders, facing an austere decade, for massive fare hikes. Where are the cost savings initiatives and deferment of wage increases and hiring?

You will lose my business with this approach. I can commute many other ways and VRE will not be one of them.
To Whom it May Concern,

I understand the need to increase fares based on operating costs. You certainly need to cover expenses, and make profit. I have two questions:

1. Is VRE lobbying to bring back an increase in Federal benefits to help offset this cost? I think a majority of your clients are Federal workers, and would not mind as much if the Federal Government increased benefits to help cover this gap. It would also be nice to see that you are making an effort to push this, so we won't be as affected.

2. Don't you think it is bad form to place an article about spending money to put plaques with Board Members names on the trains a page prior to discussing a fare increase? I understand you want to honor those that are important to your organization, but if you need to hike fares to cover budget, why are you spending funding on this unnecessary expense? I know in the whole scheme of things, it probably isn't a huge expense, but it just doesn't look really good to your riders faced with a fare increase.

Thank you for taking the time to consider these points.

Sincerely,

Stefan Rohal

Sent from my iPhone
Dear VRE,

I know everything has gone up including the VRE Services, Metro has increased their rates as well and there is really nothing we the consumer or passengers can do about it. I attended one fare increase hearing way back when. I started riding VRE in 1992 when the Monthly Ticket to Union Station was $132.00. Which at the time was expensive, I would love to have that price again. Anyway, since the fare increase I have not been a faithful rider of VRE – I see what my budget looks like and decide what options will best fit my purse. A 4% increase means I will take VRE less in 2015 than I did in 2014. For the month of January I used VRE for two weeks; and it looks as though I will be using VRE for two weeks in February as well since I didn’t purchase a monthly ticket or maybe not at all.

I think VRE can and will raise themselves out of business, VRE is not like the MARC trains that have runs on the weekends and throughout the day it is basically for commuters during rush hour, other alternatives exist and I will exercise those alternatives.

Thank you for offering a forum to vent, I know rates will raise, the hearings are nice to have but I will not be attending.

Thanks,
Norma
A former faithful rider.

Norma M. Sapp
Office Manager
Public Justice
1825 K Street, NW Suite 200
Washington, D.C. 20006

PUBLIC JUSTICE
RIGHTING WRONGS

Are you with us? Click HERE to donate now!
I am deeply opposed to the proposed 4% fare increase. Government workers, who are the bulk of your passengers, have not received pay raises sufficient to keep up with inflation for more than five years. In effect, we have been receiving cuts in our pay year after year. This is on top of the growing gap between federal employee salaries and the private sector. According to a recent Federal Employee News Digest, "federal employees overall still currently earned 35.18% less than private sector employees performing similar work." The VRE needs more money? Get it from the federal and local governments who tax us more and pay us less each year!

Sincerely,

Mark Taylor
Federal Trade Commission
Bureau of Competition
Anticompetitive Practices Division
Anna Gotthardt

From: Thomas, Duncan SL OASN(FM&C), NCCA
Sent: Wednesday, March 4, 2015 8:19 AM
To: PublicComment
Subject: Fare Increase

While I understand the need for capital improvements, a 4-percent increase seems excessive when you consider the recent - and unexpected decrease in fuel costs. Can you provide specifics as to what percentage fuel is of your operating budget - AND - can you provide VRE's actual fuel expense for the past three years? I have talked to other riders and overheard conversations on the train about the fare increase and everyone is questioning this because fuel prices have dropped so dramatically. Transparency on this issue would help everyone understand why the drop in fuel prices may not cover the gap in your budget.
I oppose the proposed fare increase for VRE users. Not everyone receives a government subsidy to assist with the cost of commuting, and continued fare increases are unwelcome. With growing ridership bringing additional revenue, why increase rates? The price of fuel has decreased dramatically, bringing down operating costs. Also, competition for passengers by the newly-opened I-95 express lanes should be motivation to keep VRE fares low and retain ridership. The cost savings from upcoming transition to TVM vs. paper tickets should be substantial. What is VRE doing to cut costs? Every effort must first be made to keep fares low.
Hi VRE,

4% increase in fare is unacceptable and unreasonable especially when lot of is do not get the federal subsidy.

Currently the step up ticket is approximately $2 and increasing it by $2 makes a 100% increase in fare which is completely wrong and preposterous by all accounts.

With crowded trains and people not getting seats every single day toss increase in fare is ridiculous.

I am opposing this increase in fare on all counts and please count this email as my vote in opposition to the fare increase.

If this continues or the fare is increased I see VRE losing its dedicated riders.

Thank you,
Dedicated VRE rider.
This past issue of "Ride," VRE's magazine, highlighted a proposed fare increase of 4% in order to offset costs of business. I would like to leave my comment against this action.

First and foremost, it seems as though the financial choices of the VRE is, at times, suspect. About 3 years (August 16, 2012) ago the Washington Post ran a story highlighting that FBI was investigating if a former employee of the VRE had steered the railway into accepting a five year, 2.6 million dollar deal for landscaping, trash removal, and other maintenance work.

A year later, fares were increased.

In the same issue of "Ride," the VRE highlighted that the board had approved a new "Board Member Recognition Program," in which it would be placing nameplates commemorating long serving or early board members. It would be easy to assume that these name plates are not free. I find it very difficult to understand that if the VRE is so strapped for cash that it must raise fares on its riders in order to stay afloat, that it somehow found the money to add name plates to the front of it's engines. These nameplates will not save of fuel costs, will not make the trains go any faster, and will have absolutely 0 impact on riders. Let's be bluntly honest here, their only purpose is to give a pat on the back of the VRE's own board, who at the same time is patting themselves on the back, are raising fares on their riders.

Further, on February 9th, the VRE posted a position on it's facebook page for a director of IT, who's salary would be in the $104,850 - $155,000, though I don't object to a decent wage for this particular position, it does make me wonder how much the CEO, COO, CFO, Chief of Staff, and Chief development officer are all getting paid. Perhaps if the VRE needs to close a spending gap, a cut back in the top level salary should be examined.

One final note, with the expansion into Spotsylvania cited as a reason for raising rates, I can't help but ask, ist it really necessary that the VRE expand into to Spotsylvania at this time? If the increase in ridership can't offset the costs of expansion, then, simply put, the VRE should not expand. Period.Ether the VRE is healthy enough to expand, or it is not.

-Andrew Whitesell
Bryan Jungwirth

From: Autumn's Mom
Sent: Sunday, January 18, 2015 9:26 PM
To: Gotrains
Subject: comment on 4% rate increase

I will not be able to attend the public comment meetings, but wanted to speak up.

We as a society need to start paying what things really cost. I understand that no one wants to pay more for transportation, but if more money is needed to make the system work then current users need to foot the bill. If we do not pay what things truly cost today we are just pushing off the cost onto our children and grandchildren. This is wrong.

I see that the price of step-up tickets is going to go up from $3 to $5. If this is appropriate then it is appropriate that commuter rates go up the same amount. You are talking about a 4% increase for commuters, and yet the step-up rate is going to go up close to 100% increase! Why are we even talking about the 4% increase?

If the system needs more money then all users need to equally foot the bill, which unfortunately probably means a rate increase.

Ms. Shojinaga
Anna Gotthardt

From: Brett Creech <bccensored@
Sent: Wednesday, March 11, 2015 6:26 PM
To: PublicComment
Subject: Fare increase

If you are going to raise fares can’t you at least add more trains. I would love to have at least one later Manassas train in the morning since my core hours don’t begin until 10 at work. At least make the train times more convienent. I love the vre but would like more flexibility and I know you can make it happen. No excuses.

Brett Creech
Hello,

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the proposed fare increase.

I am an occasional rider. I typically ride only when I think traffic will be bad, such as on Fridays during the summer or the day before major holidays. I am grateful to have the option of riding the train, but I do so infrequently because it typically takes me longer than driving and also costs more than the gas required to drive.

For comparison, on a good day, it takes me approximately one hour door to door to drive into work, and it costs me between $11 ($2.20/gal gas) to $17.50 ($3.50/gal gas) to drive my roundtrip commute of about 100 miles getting 20mpg in my Ford pickup. For the train, it takes me 25 minutes to drive to the station, 5-10 minutes to walk to the track from the parking lot, 1 hour on the train, and then a 20 minute bus ride, totaling to nearly two hours.

I did not include depreciation of my vehicle due to mileage, or other costs associated with ownership, such as taxes or insurance, as these are sunk costs--I would own my vehicle regardless of whether I commuted in it or on the train. The increased maintenance costs on my truck due to mileage are not significant enough for me to notice--I change the oil every 10,000 miles (3 times a year) and buy tires every 70,000 miles (about every two years). I don't flip my vehicles every few years; I keep them for typically a decade, making me insensitive to high mileage depreciation.

In my view, for the train to be competitive and incentivize me to ride, it would either need to be shorter in duration or cheaper than my driving. It is neither. With the exception of those preholiday days or heavy traffic days in the summer, such as Fridays, it is consistently faster and cheaper for me to drive, especially now that I have the express lane option that provides me with the freedom to ride in the HOV lanes whenever I choose to pay the toll. My commute driving is now more predictable and no longer restricted to when I can ride in the HOV lanes by myself.

As such, this fare increase adds to the list of reasons of why I do not regularly commute in the train.

Sincerely,
Dr. William Gardner
Fredericksburg, VA
I have been a commuter on VRE and Amtrak for over 20 years and each and every fare increase hits those of us that commute end-to-end (and frankly have less alternative options) far harder than those that ride from locations closer in to DC with other options for their commute to work. I would strongly recommend that the fare increase be structured that way.

While I use and enjoy the service and believe the service has improved over the years – the issues that prompted the original decrease in the Amtrak step up fee have NOT been addressed – namely train crowding and the lack of additional cars on the VRE for the over-capacity crowds as well as expanded hours of service, therefore I believe the step up should remain at $3.00.

Finally, I don’t know anyone who gets a 4% increase in their salaries every year – I wish I did – but these yearly increases will be unsustainable.
Ann Gotthardt

From: Ledbetter, Donna M  CIV US ARMY Sold HQ INSCOM (US)
Sent: Friday, March 13, 2015 1:31 PM
To: PublicComment
Subject: Proposed 4% Fee increase for the VRE

Mr. Bryan Jungwirth,

Due to other commitments yesterday, I was not able to attend the town hall. Reference the proposed 4% fee increase for the VRE. I have been a VRE rider for eight years. I have been riding Fredericksburg train 308 in the morning and 305 in the afternoon. I board the train at Leeland Station to Franconia Springfield. Over the past year with the crowding on train 305 has increased tremendously, I stand every evening from Franconia Springfield to Woodbridge or Rippon before a seat is available. With the lateness of 308 in the morning, especially the past few weeks, and standing in the evenings, it is hard to understand why they want to raise our fares when the quality hasn’t changed or gotten worse. If additional cars were going to be added, than I would understand the fare increase.

Thank you for taking the time to read my concern.

Concerned Passenger,
Donna Martin Ledbetter
Anna Gotthardt

From: Steve Petersen
Sent: Thursday, March 12, 2015 9:38 AM
To: PublicComment
Subject: Opposed to Large Fare Increase

To Whom It May Concern:

I am writing, as a fairly new VRE user, in opposition to a 4% rate increase in July. I don’t know what’s driving the request for such a large increase all at once, but the average rate of inflation over the past several years has been effectively under 2 percent.

In addition, the price of oil, diesel and gasoline has dropped significantly this past few months; surely that has lowered the diesel costs used by the engines.

I know that fares can’t stay static forever and there must be periodic adjustments.

But I really oppose a 4% jump all at once when, as I said earlier, the cost of living index has not jumped that much.

If a fare increase is warranted at this time, it should be 2% or less.

Thank you,

Steve Petersen
Warrenton, VA 20187
We have had several rate increases over the years and the biggest factor regarding increases is the cost of fuel. The cost of fuel has drastically decreased during the last few months that should result in a significant savings in fuel costs for the VRE. Additionally, ridership continues to climb adding to profits. I have been riding the rail since 2007 and while I have seen many improvements in service and reliability, I have also seen close to a 20% increase in the cost to ride. If the primary reason to raise rates is the cost of fuel, ticket prices should also be reduced when there is a significant reduction in fuel prices.

r/s

John Sherry
I wanted to comment on the proposed 4% fare increase and the step up increase. As a federal employee who hasn’t been getting much, if any, locality increases for the past several years and has been a loyal VRE patron now for the last 4 years, I have to say that a fare increase, especially at 4%, is likely to cause me to have to find a cheaper alternative of transportation. I and probably many others, just won’t be able to keep up the costs with bare minimum raises that aren’t keeping up with cost of living increases, and the slashing of the transportation subsidy a few years ago, which now pays for less than half of a VRE monthly ticket. I rarely use step up, but wouldn’t be able to afford an increase in that if I’m not even able to afford the proposed fare increase. Help your patrons some by canceling the glossy, color newsletter that is put out monthly. I know printing costs, and for something that fancy looking, especially in color and glossy, you’re probably paying a decent amount for it, and I rarely, if ever, see anyone reading it. It may not help much, but it isn’t a necessity. Thank you for allowing me to put my 2 cents in. Here’s hoping I’ll be able to remain a VRE rider for a long time to come.

Tiffanie M. Smith
Stafford, VA
From: MICHAEL STYLIANOS
Sent: Wednesday, March 11, 2015 11:58 AM
To: PublicComment
Subject: Comments on Proposed VRE Fare Increases

To Whom It May Concern:

Regarding proposed 4% fare increase:

Understand that there are times when ticket price increases are necessary to offset expenses, particularly when there are actions ongoing to expand service range (i.e., Spotsylvania).

That being said, VRE should consider survey to determine the extent to which this could affect ridership given recent lower fuel prices, new HOV/HOT lanes, and other available commuting options (vanpools, sluggings, etc) that may be more cost effective. If the metro transit benefit subsidy does not also increase beyond the current $130/month, VRE could potentially lose existing customers past the point of diminishing marginal returns.

If there is a fare increase without a change in the transit subsidy, there should be some corollary improvements in VRE services, such as the addition of WiFi capability to the trains.

Thanks.

Michael Stylianos
Anna Gotthardt

From: Susan Ward, Educational Issues  
Sent: Thursday, March 12, 2015 12:15 PM  
To: PublicComment  
Subject: Proposed fare increase

I vote NO to your proposal. You need to present a better budgetary plan. It is unrealistic of you to continually demand increases from your riders on an annual basis.

- 4% is a large number for a lot of people to cover; my monthly ticket will be $3 short of $300.
- The improvements you state should have been included in the budget from the previous years' increases.
- Spotsylvania should be covering the cost of building their station, not ALL riders.
- The increase in ridership should cover your newfound expenses.
- The new trains? What happens after the so-called full year has expired? Another increase for the lowly riders?

While you are busy adding to the list of what you need, what has happened to the Meet the Management sessions? To much spent on the cooking and coffee is my guess.

Very disappointed in this new management. Seems a bit greedy to me.

Sad Rider.
March 12, 2015

Jerry Van Winkle
Fredericksburg VA 22407

RE: Fare Increase

I am writing this letter to air my views on the upcoming fare increase the Virginia Rail Express is requesting starting in July 2015.

First, I want to disagree with you on your comment that the fare has not gone up in two years. Granted I’m getting older but if my memory serves me correctly I was paying $297 last year and now paying $305 for a monthly thru Zone 1 - 9. And several people on the train have confirmed my memory.

With that said, I have been riding the VRE since my transfer in 2006. The VRE has raised the rate every year except one, and that was 2009 when VRE raised it twice since the transit subsidy doubled.

I understand why VRE did that BUT what goes up shall come down. It did come back down and the subsidy has remained the same.

Here are some of the concerning/questions/decisions I have regarding the fare increase.

1.) Fuel prices have declined significantly.
2.) Ridership is very high and appears the increase will continue unless VRE prices themselves out of the commuter market.
3.) Vanpools charge $175 ($130 + $45).
4.) Hot Lanes are done and the travel times to Fredericksburg are improving.
5.) Travel time in vanpools are one-hour and fifteen minutes to one-hour forty-five minutes.
6.) With the Spotsylvania Station and the new Station between Rippon and Quantico coming on line in the near future it will push my travel time well past 2 hours.
7.) Yes, I-95 can be tricky and issues arise. But that can also be said about the VRE because of freight traffic, switching issues, speed restrictions and heat restrictions.

I started riding the VRE in 2006 and the fares have gone up every year for commuter service (2x in 2009). The rate increase of 4% will push the monthly fare from $305.90 to $318.14 ($12.24).

At some point commuters will have to ask themselves ---

$318.14 - $130 = $188.14 per month OR $45.00 per month (better commuting time)
Yes, we will lose the comfort of a train, the leg room, rest room and the ability to get up and walk around but at some point the costs will not justify the comfort.

One last thing needs to be said here. Yes, a lot of the commuters work for the federal government. Some agencies are very good at providing the full $130.00 subsidy. However, some Agency’s budget cannot absorb the full subsidy so their employees take an additional hit. And VRE cannot overlook the private sector folks that do not receive transit subsidies at all.

At some point the VRE needs to find ways to cut costs in lieu of the easy approach – raising the fares every year. Civil servants did not get a raise for three years and people in the private sector cannot remember what the term “raise” means. But these people managed their budgets.

I know people have suggested inside and outside of the VRE ways to reduce costs or streamline them. I think advertising on the train is a good start. Since the windows seem to heat the trains with the summer sun (blinding too) and during the chilly season the windows ice over because of outside temps and inside body heat we think you should place advertising window tint on them.

Not only would it provide better window insulation but also a great marketing tool (look at buses). The advertiser would pay for the window treatment and the VRE could charge per mile or a monthly rate. Easy way to offset costs.

Sincerely,

Jerry Van Winkle