Virginia Railway Express (VRE) is committed to providing opportunities for meaningful public participation throughout planning processes undertaken for VRE projects, programs, and policies including fare increases, tariff changes, and facilities improvements. Public input makes a valuable contribution in the development and implementation of the final project, program, or policy. Public input also contributes to how these are evaluated and how decisions are made.

The VRE Public Participation Policy establishes processes and procedures for communicating with and obtaining input from the public during decision-making processes described above. The purpose of this policy is to set public involvement goals, and define when public hearings are required. The strategies and tactics outlined in the policy were updated in February 2015 to comply with the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) Circular 4702.1B, “Title VI Requirements and Guidelines for Federal Transit Administration Recipients” which became effective October 1, 2012. The updated policy includes the outreach efforts VRE will undertake to solicit public comment for the major service changes policy, disparate impact policy, disproportionate burden policy, and disparate impact threshold. It identifies specific efforts VRE will make to encourage engagement by minority and limited English proficient populations.

Goals and Objectives for Public Participation

Goal 1: Educate and inform the public, and provide opportunities for the public to present its views on proposed programs, projects, and policies, including fare increases, tariff changes, and facilities improvements, as required by federal and state statutes, regulations, and guidance so that these views can be taken into account by the VRE Operations Board prior to final action.

VRE will strive to:

- Provide the public with balanced and objective information to assist them with understanding the problem, alternatives, opportunities and/or solutions.
- Provide adequate and timely notice of public participation activities, use visualization techniques if appropriate, make information available in electronically accessible formats when possible, and hold public meetings at convenient and accessible locations and times.
- Coordinate as appropriate with state and local agencies on public involvement efforts.

Goal 2: Actively engage those traditionally underserved by existing public participation efforts.

VRE will strive to:
• Encourage active and representative public involvement from the community. Currently, a range of community members participate in the regional planning process by attending or serving on committees and contributing input to regional plans and studies.

• Identify where low-income, minority, and limited English proficiency populations are located using several data sources, including the U.S. Census, the American Community Survey, and VRE customer surveys.

• Provide mailings and/or announcements in appropriate languages, and develop outreach efforts that actively seek to engage minority and limited English proficient populations.

• Use the help of community organizations, including but not limited to non-profits, civic associations, faith-based organizations, and local boards and commissions, to assist with outreach efforts and to communicate with specific groups that may be under-represented in the process.

**Goal 3: Facilitate continuous, collaborative, and comprehensive public participation during the planning or decision-making process.**

VRE will strive to:

• Employ a range of traditional and innovative public outreach techniques, including mailings, public meetings/hearings, and social media, to achieve broad engagement with the public.

• Develop a forum for dialogue and collaboration as warranted by the outreach effort, including stakeholder groups, project websites, and social media discussions.

• Demonstrate consideration of public input received, provide responses as necessary, and provide additional opportunity for public comment when significant revisions are made to the originally published versions of plans or policies.

• Evaluate the appropriateness and effectiveness of the public participation procedures and strategies contained in the policy for use in specific projects or decision-making processes, and develop a plan that ensures a full and open participation process.

**Scope of VRE Public Participation Policy**

When VRE initiates development or updates to a project, program or policy that could be anticipated to have identifiable impacts on one or more populations in the VRE service area, public involvement will be carefully and systematically included as part of the decision-making process.

**Targeted Public Outreach to Minority and Limited English Proficient (LEP) Populations**

The public participation plan will comply with all applicable federal and state policies, as well as the VRE Public Participation Policy. The plan will incorporate strategies intended to
promote involvement of minority and LEP individuals in public participation activities, as appropriate for the plan, project, or policy in question, and be consistent with federal Title VI regulations, Executive Order 13166 on Limited English Proficiency, and the U.S. Department of Transportation LEP Guidance. At a minimum, the strategies will include holding public meetings in locations that are accessible to transit riders and people with disabilities, scheduling meetings at times that are convenient for members of the public, advertising meetings and hearings in English and Spanish, and providing notice of the availability of language assistance.

**Tariff Amendments or Major Service & Fare/Service Changes**

Any proposed amendment to the VRE Passenger Tariff involving an increase in fares or major change in service, as defined in the Major Service & Fare/Service Equity Policy, shall be open to public comment at a public hearing. Formal public notice of the public hearing shall be issued no less than 30 days prior to the scheduled date of the VRE Operations Board meeting at which the amendment will be voted on. Information collected at the public meetings will be collated and provided to the VRE Operations Board prior to the vote. Information regarding the proposed change will be posted on VRE’s website and comment will be received via email, public hearings, letters and faxes. At least one meeting will be held at a location on each Line.

In limited circumstances, such as changing market conditions, rapidly deteriorating service quality, significant disruptions due to construction or seasonal events, etc., VRE may implement temporary service modifications exceeding the thresholds described in the Major Service & Fare/Service Equity Policy without providing an opportunity for the public to seek a public hearing. Affected patrons will be given advance notification and VRE will advertise the temporary service modification. If VRE determines the need to make a temporary change permanent, VRE will advertise 30 days in advance, and then hold a public hearing, if requested, no later than six months after the temporary service modification was implemented.

**Advertisement of public hearing or the opportunity for public hearing**

a. Advertisements will be published at least once in general circulation newspapers within the VRE’s service area. The 30 days’ notice period shall begin to run on the first day the notice appears in any such newspaper.

b. Announcements will be made in VRE Operations Board Meetings (as information item) and on VRE’s web-site.

c. All affected VRE jurisdiction members will be informed.

d. Elected officials and pertinent state agencies/personnel will be informed.

e. A notice will be distributed on VRE rail cars, its monthly magazine, or via text or email messaging to VRE riders.

f. Private operators within the transportation district will be notified.

**Requesting Public Hearings**
A Public Hearing is mandatory for adoption of any proposed fare increase or a tariff change that increases costs. However, the public may seek a public hearing for those subjects where a hearing is not mandatory.

Public hearings will be held on weekdays (excluding State and Federal holidays), either during the mid-day or evening depending on the expected ability for affected citizens to attend. VRE will provide a minimum of 14 days from the date of first advertisement, for citizens to notify VRE of their desire for a public hearing. If no one requests a public hearing in situations where a public hearing is not mandatory, none will be held.

**Public Comment in the Event a Public Hearing is not Mandatory or Requested**

Public comments will be considered in written or emailed form when a public hearing is not mandatory or requested until as late as 30 days following the date that the advertised notice soliciting public comment appears in the general circulation newspapers as specified earlier.

**Evaluation of Public Comments**

a. Public comments received through various channels will be summarized and presented to the VRE Operations Board prior to its decision.
b. The VRE Operations Board and its parent Commissions will account for the public comment as one factor in the decision making process.
c. Staff will implement changes and modifications to projects, programs, or policies that have been successfully approved by the VRE Operations Board or the parent Commissions.