To: Chairman Skinner and the VRE Operations Board
From: Rich Dalton
Date: March 20, 2020
Re: VRE Communications Plan for the Orange Line Shutdown

VRE is a vital component in relieving congestion on the I-66 and I-95 corridors. As such, VRE’s marketing program employs a number of strategies to boost new ridership and support passenger retention, helping to prevent the addition of single-occupancy vehicles on the region’s roadways.

Like our regional partners, VRE is preparing to support WMATA’s mitigation strategies for the Orange Line shutdown this summer. The communications plan will encourage displaced Metro riders to use an alternative form of public transportation rather than driving. Employing lessons learned from last summer’s Blue and Yellow line shutdown as well as embarking on new efforts, VRE plans to utilize a variety of communication platforms to reach Metro riders and educate them about using the Manassas VRE line. Metro Orange Line riders will be invited to use VRE’s Burke Centre station and select trains that usually offer more seats.

The communications plan for the Orange Line shutdown includes:

**Out of Home Advertising:** VRE will advertise on Metro trains and at Orange Line stations from the beginning of April through Memorial Day. The messaging will be collaborative in nature and promote taking a free Fairfax CUE shuttle to the VRE Burke station.

**Social Media Advertising:** Like last year for the Blue and Yellow line shutdowns, VRE will advertise on social media. Social media advertising is a low-cost way to reach a target audience and an easy way to gain visibility even among those that do not click an ad. For reference, the reach of VRE’s Facebook and Instagram Blue and Yellow Line Platform Improvement Campaign was almost 78,000, and the cost-per-click was only $0.44.
In addition to paid advertising, VRE will ask area partners to share our messaging with their social media followers. The campaign will “package” information (graphics and suggested text) and ask partners to post on their platforms as they see fit.

**Website:** Last year, VRE built a new website section to introduce Metro riders to our system. Between late February and the end of May last year, traffic on the website was up over 43 percent from the same period the previous year (740,498 sessions in 2019 vs 517,009 in 2018). However, only 3,500 sessions represent the traffic to the VRE for Metro Rider pages of the site during that period. Though most new sessions most likely resulted from unrelated Search Engine Optimization work, the new section of the VRE website still proved to be a resource for thousands of people in our area.

This year VRE will add new information to the website as it pertains to the Orange Line shutdown, including information on the Fairfax CUE shuttles to Burke Centre. Staff has also designed a map that shows the physical relationship between the VRE system lines and the impacted WMATA line. This visual representation of how the systems relate should aid Metro riders in their decision for alternative transportation.

**Transportation Demand Managers (TDMs):** VRE is reaching out to TDMs, offering to assist in providing new or existing materials. Reminders that support materials are available will be made through coordination calls and TDM group meetings.

**Onboard VRE and at VRE Stations:** Once displaced Metro riders arrive at VRE stations, staff will be present to assist them with what to do next. Signage and station announcements will play (on-screen and audio), letting these riders know how to begin their trips.

**Regional Coordination:** In addition to participating in WMATA-led coordination calls, VRE is proactively initiating efforts to leverage existing tools offered outside the WMATA website. Ideally, VRE will not just advertise for our service this summer but will be able to participate in a larger advertising campaign, pointing people to a shared intuitive trip planner that will make it easy to understand which transportation methods are truly the best options for each person’s individual needs.