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Normally this time of year, things slow down a bit. Schedules are more flexible, offices are a little quieter and many opt to take some vacation time. The summer slowdown typically means a drop in commuters across all transportation modes including VRE. This summer, however, is far from typical.

The week of July 11, VRE broke two very big ridership records. On Tuesday, July 12, we experienced our highest single-day ridership when we counted 23,319 individual trips. As a reference, VRE carried 18,959 riders on the Tuesday of the first full week after the July 4th holiday (a good comparison) last year. In addition to the single-day ridership record, VRE hit a weekly ridership milestone. For the first time ever, VRE topped 100,000 trips in one week.

This massive week for VRE occurred during Metrorail’s Safety Surge #4, which shut down a segment of the Blue and Yellow lines between Reagan National Airport and Pentagon City. Fortunately, VRE parallels those Metro lines, allowing for an easy transition for commuters. We saw many who normally take Metro’s Blue line from Franconia-Springfield instead hop on a VRE train there. Yellow (and Blue) line riders were able to transfer to VRE at our Alexandria station, located right next to Metro’s King Street station. Many of these new riders were utilizing our smartphone app, VRE Mobile, to navigate the system and buy their tickets, as we experienced a jump in downloads.

We are pleased so many new riders are able to try out our service. We expect most Metro riders will resume their usual commute once SafeTrack surges in their area subside, but welcome those that integrate VRE into their commutes when it works for them. We fully support Metro’s work to improve safety and reliability along their system and we are glad to assist in moving people around the Northern Virginia/D.C. area. After all, we are all part of the same regional transportation system.

While work on Metro’s Blue and Yellow lines has subsided for now, Metro’s efforts are far from over. There are 15 planned surges that will run well into next spring. We will continue to update riders prior to each new surge on our website, via social media, and through our Train Talk alerts and let you know how that surge will impact commutes.

We have focused a lot on new riders over the past couple weeks, but I would also like to thank our long-time riders, who have been patient with us and helpful to new riders. We understand the influx of passengers has sometimes impacted your commute. But we are proud to hear stories of our veteran riders, along with our fantastic conductors and customer service staff, helping new riders with things such as ticket purchases, using the mobile app, learning VRE schedules and ticket validations. I am proud of the kindness shown by our riders and believe it is that kind of “esprit de corps” that helps make our service exceptional. As always, it is a pleasure to have you aboard.

Thank you for riding. Enjoy the rest of your summer.
VRE SMASHES RIDERSHIP RECORDS WITH HELP FROM METRO RIDERS

As most Northern Virginia and D.C. area citizens will attest, schedules lighten up a bit in the area during the summer. But for VRE, this summer has been anything but slow. In fact, July boasted some of the busiest days in the history of VRE service.

On Tuesday, July 12, VRE experienced its highest single-day ridership with 23,319 individual trips. The uptick in single-day trips continued through the week, as the following day, (Wednesday, July 13) saw 21,935 trips, which is the system’s second highest single-day total. Another record was shattered in regards to weekly ridership, as VRE topped 100,000 trips that week, the first time VRE has hit that number.

This ridership surge can be linked to the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (WMATA) SafeTrack program. Beginning July 5, WMATA’s SafeTrack Surges #3 and #4 closed sections of Metrorail’s Blue and Yellow lines in Northern Virginia (the closure ran through July 18). Those Metrorail lines generally parallel VRE’s rail lines and serve many of the same destinations, allowing Metro riders to easily transition to VRE.

“It’s been exciting to introduce a whole new group of people to VRE and to get their feedback on our service,” said VRE Director of Rail Operations Chris Henry. “We’re pleased to hear their satisfaction with our on-time performance, railcar restrooms, helpful staff and the comfortable, safe and easy ride to and from work, because that’s what we strive for every day.”

Many of these new VRE riders were able to take advantage of the VRE Mobile app, which experienced a spike in downloads during the last month. Last year, VRE became the first transit system in the greater Washington area to offer such an app, which allows customers to plan their routes and purchase their tickets directly on their smartphones. They are also able to validate their tickets and completely bypass the need to visit a Ticket Vending Machine adding more convenience and flexibility. In addition, riders can set up and utilize SmartBenefits for their fares with the app.

And while many of those who tried out the service during SafeTrack work may eventually go back to their old commute, momentum from the record-breaking week continued past the Blue and Yellow line shutdown. On the last day of Surge #4 and the day after the surge was over and Metro service resumed normal operations, daily ridership topped 20,000, still more than usual.

“We’re happy we got to show more people what VRE is and the quality of service we provide,” Henry said. “We hope that some of these riders continue to use VRE in their regular travel routine.”

Metro’s SafeTrack program is schedule to continue through March of 2017 with work on all six lines, though the majority of the work will be single-tracking events with just two more line segment shutdowns. To find out how any particular surge might impact your commute, visit www.VRE.org.
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PRIORITY RAIL PROJECTS RECEIVE BOOST THROUGH ATLANTIC GATEWAY PROJECT

Last month, Virginia Governor Terry McAuliffe visited Alexandria Union Station, a busy stop for Virginia Railway Express, to hail a major federal grant that will move forward several important projects across the state, including some top priority rail projects that will benefit VRE.

That $165 million FASTLANE federal grant will be combined with other funding for a total of $1.4 billion, which will be used to address some of the worst bottlenecks along the I-95 corridor in Northern Virginia. The entire plan, titled the Atlantic Gateway Project, encompasses mainly rail and highway projects.

“Winning this significant federal grant will allow Virginia to move forward on a project that will transform travel conditions and stimulate economic growth across our Commonwealth,” McAuliffe said in a statement. “Our administration worked with federal, state, local and private sector parties to submit a package of transportation improvements that will have far-reaching benefits for everyone who travels the Commonwealth, whether by car, bus or train.”

The Atlantic Gateway plan greatly impacts VRE and its riders, as it calls for the construction of 14 miles of new rail track to boost reliability and capacity for commuter, passenger, and freight rail service. Eight miles of this will add a fourth track between the Potomac River and Alexandria Union Station. Further south, another six miles of third track will be built between the Franconia-Springfield station and the Occoquan River.

Another project receiving a lot of attention through the Atlantic Gateway plan is the Long Bridge, which brings passengers and freight alike across the Potomac River between Virginia and Washington, D.C. The Long Bridge is a major rail bottleneck on the East Coast. The Atlantic Gateway project will advance the engineering for adding two additional rail tracks.

“The projects outlined in the Atlantic Gateway plan are important for VRE and we are pleased these vital rail improvements are now moving forward,” said VRE CEO Doug Allen. “Our riders deserve and expect top-notch commuter rail service. These projects will help to ensure we can continue to provide that excellent service as we move into the future.”

In addition to the rail projects, the Atlantic Gateway Plan also addresses several roadway priorities including extensions of the 95 Express Lanes to the south and the 395 Express Lanes to the north, a new southbound bridge on I-95 across the Rappahannock River, a reinvestment in expanded bus service, the building of pavement for autonomous vehicle enhancement (to test and deploy driverless cars) and the addition of new commuter parking along the I-95 corridor.

“Transportation leaders came to the table with one clear goal: improve travel in the most heavily traveled corridor in the Southeast by investing in road and rail improvements to move people and commerce more efficiently, not only through Virginia, but also from Florida to New York,” McAuliffe said. “The Atlantic Gateway will create jobs and contribute to our efforts to build a new Virginia economy, and we could not have moved forward without this important federal funding.”

Since much of the environmental and engineering work is already underway or has been completed on many of these projects, the program will move to construction in phases beginning as early as 2017.
Fairfax County 4-H Fair & Carnival  
**Thursday, Aug. 4—Sunday, Aug. 7**  
2709 West Ox Rd.  
Herndon, VA 20171

The 68th Annual Fairfax County 4-H Fair and Carnival is old-fashioned country fun with carnival games, rides, animal shows, 4H exhibits, live entertainment, fair food and more. Enjoy a free concert Thursday, the Big Truck show on Friday, and the Tractor Pull on Saturday. Admission is free but there is a parking fee of $7 on Saturday and Sunday.

www.fairfaxcounty.gov

Manassas African American Heritage Festival  
**Saturday, Aug. 6 (noon to 6 p.m.)**  
Metz Middle School  
9950 Wellington Rd.  
Manassas, VA 20110

Attend the Manassas African American Heritage Festival for family friendly celebration of African American arts and culture. Over the past 24 years, the festival has grown to include more than 125 exhibitors, including arts and crafts dealers, retailers, youth groups, colleges and schools and food vendors. Also included are a business and job expo, a health fair, and a classic car show. The event is free.

www.ManassasAfricanAmericanHeritageFestival.com

Friendship Firehouse Festival  
**Saturday, Aug. 6 (9 a.m. to 2 p.m.)**  
107 S. Alfred St.  
Alexandria, VA 22314

The Friendship Firehouse Festival is a family event held each summer celebrating the role that firefighters have played throughout history. The festival features antique fire apparatus, craft booths, and displays by Alexandria merchants. Children receive free fire helmets and balloons and are treated to supervised visits where they can become “co-passengers” inside the City’s fire trucks. Admission is free.

www.alexandriava.gov

Workhouse Brewfest  
**Saturday, Aug. 13 (10 a.m. to 6 p.m.)**  
9601 Ox Rd.  
Lorton, VA 22079

Taking place on the historic campus of the Workhouse Arts Center, the Workhouse BrewFest features craft beer-focused exhibits, gourmet food trucks, workshops and interactive displays. Among the Festival’s highlights are more than 20 performances and demonstrations on 3 stages, with an exceptional line-up of popular regional performers, 45+ craft breweries, cideries and wineries and engaging programs like the Fairfax County Best Local Brew Competition.

www.fxva.com

Metropolitan Washington Restaurant Week  
**Monday, Aug. 15—Sunday, Aug. 22**  
Washington, D.C. Metro

Participate in the 2016 Summer Metropolitan Washington Restaurant Week. Book dinner at a new place or return to one of your favorites for just $35. You can also cash in on participating restaurants for lunch at just $22. Check out a list of participants, read over some special menus and don't forget to book a reservation if necessary.

www.ramw.org/restaurantweek

The Big Day – Special Event & Bridal Show  
**Sunday, Aug. 14, 2016 (11 a.m. to 4 p.m.)**  
Fredericksburg Expo & Conference Center  
2371 Carl D Silver Parkway  
Fredericksburg, VA 22401

Planning all the details for a major event can lead to a big headache. Skip all the hassle and head to the Fredericksburg Expo Center for the Annual Big Day – Special Event & Bridal Show. Here you can interview photographers, caterers, DJs, bakeries, event sites and everyone else you’ll need to connect with for your big day. Tickets are $12 at the door or $10 in advance.

www.bigdayspecialeventshow.com

J. Brian’s Tap Room Golf Tournament  
**Friday, Aug. 26 (1 p.m. to 6 p.m.)**  
Fredericksburg Country Club  
11031 Tidewater Trail  
Fredericksburg, VA 22408

Is your golf game up to par? Then join a doggone good golf tournament put on with the support and sponsorship of our friends at J. Brian’s Tap Room and benefits the furry friends at the SPCA. Tickets are $100 per player or $400 for a team of four (which includes green fees, a golf cart, a sponsor gift and a post-tournament party).

www.visitfred.com

Civil War Weekend  
**Friday, Aug. 26 and Sunday, Aug. 28**  
The Manassas Museum  
9101 Prince William St.  
Manassas, VA 20110

The popular annual event features living history, a re-enactment of the 1862 burning of Manassas Junction, and fun for the entire family. Don’t miss keynote speaker John Hennessy, Chief Historian at Fredericksburg and Spotsylvania National Military Park, and the Civil War mourning exhibit. Events at the Manassas Museum and at Liberia Plantation. Schedules are available online.

www.manassasmuseum.org
SPOTLIGHT ON VRE

MEET NAQUANA JENKINS
SENIOR COMMUNICATIONS SPECIALIST

If you’re a rider who has called into VRE headquarters to ask about train routes, ticket purchases, the lost and found, or any number of things related to VRE service, chances are you’ve had a conversation with this month’s “Spotlight” employee.

Naquana Jenkins began her career at VRE three years ago. Originally from New Jersey, Naquana has prior experience in transit, as she spent more than three years with New Jersey Transit as a ridership survey agent, conductor, and, before those positions, a Diversity intern.

AT VRE, Naquana spends much of the day on the phone fielding rider questions and multitasking. You might say she knows everything VRE-related, since she can answer just about any question thrown her way. But Naquana is not one to sit back or rest on her laurels. She is always looking to get more involved in other ways beyond her immediate job description and is the definition of a true team player.

“I like that VRE is a smaller organization where I have the ability to get involved in other areas/departments that may not be a direct job responsibility,” Naquana said. “I enjoy responding to the needs of VRE and helping out wherever I can.”

And help out she does. Those who follow VRE’s social media accounts may also know about Naquana’s life-saving abilities. All VRE employees are required to participate in CPR and AED training, though not all find themselves in the position to use it. In early June, however, Naquana was working in the VRE communications room when a co-worker began choking on food. It soon became clear to Naquana that her co-worker couldn’t breathe or cough and she had to step in. She performed the Heimlich maneuver while 911 was called and successfully cleared the obstruction for her co-worker. For her harrowing efforts, Naquana was honored with a Certificate of Commendation at the June VRE Operations Board meeting by Chairman Gary Skinner and VRE CEO Doug Allen.

Naquana received a bachelor’s degree from Old Dominion University in Sociology/Criminal Justice and is currently working towards a master’s degree at George Mason University in Transportation Policy, Operations, and Logistics. In her spare time, Naquana enjoys going to amusement parks and participating in water sports, as well as volunteering, especially with seniors.

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- The ability to purchase tickets at your convenience, then validate them directly from your smartphone before boarding

LEARN MORE AT VRE.ORG/MOBILE
KNOW THE VRE BIKE POLICY

Throughout the year, especially during the summer months, many VRE riders enjoy bringing their bikes along their daily commute. After all, many commutes continue after they depart their trains. While VRE conveniently drops off passengers at popular destinations like Union Station and L’Enfant each weekday morning, some riders must trek a bit further to reach their journey’s end. Adding a bicycle into the mix allows VRE riders to finish that last part of their morning commute (and first part of their evening commute) conveniently and on their own schedule. To accommodate these commuters, VRE has a few rules that help guide the process.

Collapsible bikes are allowed on all cars of all trains. Riders who bring along these bikes must completely fold and store these bikes in the overhead luggage racks, under a seat or in any other area that doesn’t inconvenience other riders.

Regular full-size bikes are permitted but have additional guidelines. For example, they are only allowed on certain trains: the last three northbound trains in the morning, the last three southbound trains each afternoon, and mid-day or reverse-flow trains.

Additionally, full-size bikes may only travel on one car of those specific trains. Riders with full-size bikes must use the first car when the train is going north and the last car when going south. They must also secure that bike at the southern half of the car where the four folding seats reside. If unsure where to board with a full-size bike, ask a conductor where to go and where exactly to secure the bike inside the train. Bike owners are also responsible for securing their bikes to the bench seats with a bungee cord. If riders are sitting in the bench area reserved for bikes, they may be asked to vacate the seat, as it is the only reserved area for bikes. Only two bikes may be in this area at a time, so if a rider wants to bring on a third, they must wait for the next train. For the safety and convenience of all, riders with bikes should both board and exit the train after all other riders at that stop have done so.

Some VRE riders believe more space should be designated for bikes on the trains. However, at this time, there simply isn’t enough room to do so while still keeping passengers comfortable. VRE supports alternative and environmentally responsible transportation options and therefore will continue to allow bikes on board following these guidelines. VRE believes this compromise works for the vast majority of passengers.

Visit VRE.org for additional information on VRE’s bike policy.

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1-877-4VA-TIPS
LET YOUR VOICE BE HEARD – VRE NEEDS YOUR RIDE INPUT

Calling all RIDE readers! VRE needs your help.

Each month, VRE creates a new issue of RIDE. Each issue typically has a theme and includes a “From the CEO” on what’s going on at VRE, various articles, a calendar of local events happening throughout the month, a spotlight feature, and some entertainment in the form of puzzles and cartoons.

While all of those RIDE elements are important and will continue, VRE wants to add a little more to each issue and diversify a bit. After all, no two riders have the exact same interests and tastes. So to that end, VRE is now taking suggestions on how we can make RIDE better.

Do you enjoy in-depth features on events going on in your area? Would you like to learn more about transportation-related issues? Are you looking for a more visual magazine, something more photo-focused? Do you have a story you’d like us to considering including in an upcoming issue? Does a monthly spotlight of an area restaurant interest you? VRE is open to hearing all suggestions.

If you just prefer to see more articles, let us know what topics interest you. Now’s your chance to have a say in what appears in your RIDE magazine. After all, at VRE only want to make your ride (and RIDE) as enjoyable as possible and we believe that an on-board magazine can be something you look forward to reading each month.

If you have an idea for a story in RIDE or if you have a regular feature suggestion, email VRE at gotrains@vre.org. You may also submit ideas through VRE’s social media pages (Twitter and Facebook).

Whether you prefer in-depth features on local events or would like to learn more about transportation-related issues, now’s your chance to have your voice heard.

One thing that remains constant is the presence of advertising, which offsets the costs of producing RIDE. VRE is always looking for new advertising partners. If your business is interested in buying some space in RIDE, contact advertising@vre.org for options and rates.

Get Noticed With VRE Advertising

VRE carries 20,000 passengers every workday and 70 percent of passengers have an annual household income of more than $100,000.

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For more information go to www.vre.org/advertising or contact advertising@vre.org or (703) 838-5425.

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