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The start of VRE’s new fiscal year brings with it an increase in fares. Recognizing the potential impact on household budgets, we strive to control costs, keep increases modest, and avoid annual fare increases. Unfortunately, there are costs directly related to providing rail service, such as fees for track access, that escalate annually and must be reflected in our operating budget. Fares, jurisdictional subsidies, and state assistance combine to support VRE’s operations. Our budget assumes at least a 50 percent farebox recovery rate (the share of the operating costs paid by our riders), as required by the two commissions that own VRE. Our policy is to only raise fares once every two years to help us achieve that recovery rate. This year’s fare increase, which averages about 3 percent, is below the rate of inflation since we last changed the fare schedule in 2017.

The new fares are the result of a process that included public hearings and provided several options for public comment. Members of the Operations Board reviewed the comments as they considered how to cover the increased cost of operating our commuter railroad. In December the board approved the increase, effective July 1.

As we begin our next budgeting cycle this fall, we will again look closely at our projected costs to keep them in line with reasonable increases. We want to be sure we have explored all budget options before considering an increase in subsidies from the nine counties and cities that VRE serves.

Most of our monthly riders will not notice the change in fares until they buy their August ticket, as both paper and mobile monthly tickets for July were available for purchase before the new fares took effect. An updated fare chart, information about VRE’s budgeting cycle and a copy of the presentation given at last year’s public hearings are available at www.vre.org.

Sincerely,

DOUG ALLEN
Chief Executive Officer
Virginia Railway Express
Meet Sara and Chrome. You may have seen this friendly passenger and service dog team on your daily train or bus commute ... but this duo wasn’t always committed to public transportation.

Sara spent six years in a stop-and-go highway rut before trying VRE. After more than half a decade of the daily drive, she was surprised with how quickly she assimilated to life on the train. "I enjoyed the fact that I didn’t have to drive or worry about what condition 95 was going to be that day," she said. "I could just get on the train, read, listen to music, or just relax."

Sara found herself in need of a service dog after only a short time riding VRE, and gained a partner in a Boarder Collie/Lab mix named Chrome. "After I got Chrome, I wasn’t sure how he was going to do with the commute. Chrome didn’t have any experience with trains to that point," Sara confessed. She proudly continued, "When we went to the train station for the first time, he handled it like the true professional he is."

Like Sara, Chrome has since become an experienced commuter, lending a helping paw when needed. Now five-years-old, he has accompanied Sara on her commute for over half his life.

The pair takes a bus between work and their VRE destination station. "He gets what I call ‘happy feet’ when he sees the train and bus approaching. If only we could all be that excited to go to work on a Monday," Sara laughed.

In addition to their weekday VRE and bus travels, they take time to tour the world. Chrome has been to London, San Francisco, and Nashville – just to name a few. Chrome’s many adventures can be found on his Instagram page: @chrome_on_the_roam.
HOW VRE WORKED WITH OTHERS TO LOWER THE COST OF STEP UP TICKETS

Enhancing the passenger experience and expanding commuter options are priorities for VRE. So when word came that Metro would shut down six Blue and Yellow line stations this summer, VRE explored ways to help lessen the impact of displaced Metrorail riders on the region’s transportation network. The result was a lower-cost Amtrak Step Up ticket.

A Step Up ticket allows VRE riders, who use one of several multi-ride tickets, to take any Amtrak train listed on VRE’s schedule. These intercity trains, while operated by Amtrak, are funded by Virginia. VRE also pays Amtrak so that our passengers can ride these trains without paying the full fare.

Until recently, VRE reimbursed Amtrak $13 for each Step Up ticket redeemed, with the passenger covering $8 of that cost. During Metrorail’s partial summer shutdown, the price of the Step Up ticket has been cut in half, to just $4. The lower fare was made possible by an agreement between Amtrak and Virginia’s Department of Rail and Public Transportation (DRPT). Amtrak has temporarily reduced the amount it collects from VRE for Step Up tickets and DRPT has agreed to forego some of the revenue that usually offsets its costs for intercity rail service.

The price cut was designed to entice longer-distance passengers to use Amtrak, thereby freeing up space on VRE trains for Metrorail riders. Step Up ticket sales have been brisk. From Memorial Day to June 19, Step Up purchases were just over 9,000, compared to about 6,200 during the same period last year. That is a 45 percent increase. The lower-price Step Up ticket will remain in effect until Metrorail service south of National Airport resumes in September.

4 BUCKS TO STEP-UP

vre.org/Amtrak

Participating Amtrak trains will only accept Step-Up tickets along with a valid VRE TLC Pass, Monthly Pass, Five-Day Pass, or Ten-Ride ticket.
MONTHLY MEETINGS WITH THE KEOLIS TEAM

VRE operational management and Keolis transportation management are in contact every day. In addition to frequent verbal communication, Keolis submits detailed information to the VRE operational team after each service run ends.

Taking the coordination to a higher vantage point, a large group gets together once a month to analyze trends and identify opportunities for improvement. The group covers routine topics, briefs one another on recent events and discusses areas of concern. Together, the two groups talk about the observations and recommendations, and determine any necessary adjustments as a group.

Recent meeting agendas have included topics like Positive Train Control (PTC), questions and comments from the Online Forum, and feedback from the partial Metro shutdown.

VRE 101
FACTS ABOUT VRE FOR NEW RIDERS

- VRE is public transportation. Potomac and Rappahannock Transportation Commission or “OmniRide” is one of its two parent commissions. The second parent commission is Northern Virginia Transportation Commission.
- The Operations Board – consisting of representatives from the nine member jurisdictions that support VRE and from the Commonwealth of Virginia – is responsible for making recommendations to the commissions with respect to VRE’s management, financing, and acquisition of property.
- Management hosts an Online Forum the first Wednesday of every month.
- Website resources include a train status page (vre.org/status) and a blog (vre.org/blog).
- The Security Blanket program ensures if you take a VRE train that is scheduled to arrive 30 minutes prior to your daycare’s closing, we will get you to your station within 15 minutes of the scheduled arrival time or reimburse your daycare late fee.
- Wi-fi will not be available until cell phone towers are put in place all along our rail system so that riders have 100% connectivity.
- If a VRE train enters a station 30 minutes or more behind schedule, passengers detraining from that point forward are entitled to receive one Free Ride Certificate (FRC) good for a one-way trip on VRE. FRCs are distributed on the affected train the same service day of the delay.
- We have a team working on projects to lay additional track, add parking, and lengthen trains. Learn about projects at: vre.org/development
A series of old newspaper clippings, photographs and memorabilia lines the interior walls of the train station at Quantico showing the history of the Marine Corps Base, the Town of Quantico, and the significance of the railroad and station to both. The station building itself was renovated in 2005 with the support of VRE and Prince William County, and was funded in part through a federal grant.

VRE periodically hosts a class of Marines specializing in Civil Engineering to share not just the history of the building itself, but information on the current use as a joint VRE and Amtrak station.

With the most recent class, Chris Henry, VRE’s Director of Rail Operations, took the group through a safety briefing with specifics related to the station and building, and also shared general knowledge about safety around railroad tracks, at grade crossings, and how to contact the owner of the railroad.

Safety Fact: Each at grade crossing is assigned a specific number in a national database of rail crossings, and each crossing displays not only this number but also information on contacting the railroad to report issues at or near crossings, or with passing trains.

Questions from the group ranged from day-to-day railroad operations, the difference between commuter rail and transit, and the challenges of being a “tenant” railroad on privately owned tracks to specifics about the construction of the building, materials used, plumbing and electrical capacities, and potential strategic uses.

The class took photos, measurements, and copious notes as they would later give a presentation to their officers and instructors on what they learned and observed.

Chris also shared a rendering of the upcoming station improvement and discussed the third track project and some of the rationale of shifting most station activity to the south end of the building, away from the at grade crossing. To learn more about the Quantico station improvement project, visit vre.org/development.
Above all else, VRE and its host railroads value safety. Frankly, however, there are perks to track inspections beyond ensuring safety. Our host railroads, CSX and Norfolk Southern (NS), have a vested interest in keeping their tracks free of avoidable incidents and their freight trains on schedule — meaning VRE is not the only one that benefits when rail traffic continues to move.

**How are tracks inspected?**

CSX and NS perform daily inspections of their extensive rail networks. Engineering teams cover thousands of miles of track weekly, working around the clock to do so.

"We walk the track, we hi-rail over the track ... we have machines that go over the track to look for any abnormalities ... and then we walk it some more," said Phillip Merilli, NS’s recently retired VP Engineering. "We are constantly looking at the railroad."

The daily processes incorporate manual and automated tools. Manual inspections range from foot-by-foot analysis using hand-held instruments, to hi-rail vehicle on-track inspections using digital and ultrasonic technology. Automated inspections include sensors on both tracks and locomotives.

**Oversight**

The Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) closely monitors the inspection and safety programs of our host railroads.

"We comply with the Federal Railroad Administration regulations. There are certain frequencies set on how often a track must be inspected and we meet and exceed those regulations," said Ed Boyle, NS’s new VP Engineering. "We also have additional inspections that take place based on weather events. When there’s snowstorms, when there are hurricanes, when there are tornadoes, when there are blizzards, when the temperatures are too hot, when the temperatures are too cold ... our people are out here making sure we’re operating safely throughout our network."

**Training**

Both CSX and NS pride themselves on extensive employee training to not only keep the tracks safe for trains, but to keep rail employees safe near tracks. NS inspectors, engineers, supervisors, and track teams complete annual classroom and field training on track construction and renewals, maintenance practices, inspector qualifications, and record keeping. Additionally, all must renew FRA certifications annually.

Boyle added, "Folks in our communities that we run through should be very confident that we have a well-trained, highly professional team in place that can make sure that we operate safely through their backyards." Additionally, host railroad staff live in the communities in which they work — making them all the more dedicated to keep those communities safe.
CSX HISTORY & EVOLUTION: CHAPTER 1

CSX celebrates a rich history spanning nearly 200 years, and its website offers an interesting interactive timeline showing how it all began. See highlights from the online history book below, including horse-drawn rail cars.

The Birth of American Rail
(Late 1820s)

The CSX story began with America’s first common carrier, the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad. Originally powered by horses, the B&O set in motion the events that would lead to America’s most efficient means of transporting goods.

B&O began operations on May 24, 1830, as the first common-carrier railroad in the U.S.

The CSX family tree began on February 28, 1827, when the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad, America’s first common carrier railroad, was chartered. Its original line covered one state and 13 miles; today CSX covers 23 states on our 21,000-mile network.

When the B&O began operation in 1830, its trains were pulled by horses. Several years later, the term “horsepower” was created to convince potential buyers of the value of the steam engine by comparing it to the work done by horses. (Courtesy of the B&O Railroad Museum)
RELATED LINKS IN TRAIN TALKS

Have you noticed new links in the footer of our Train Talk emails? Those “Related Links” help answer rider questions like, “What happens if there’s a switch issue?” Or, “It stopped raining, why do we still have a flash flood speed restriction in effect?” ... and more.

Follow these new links to the Delay section of our blog. We’ll continue to add to the blog to better explain why we encounter certain delays, and how we work to mitigate impacts when possible.

Advertise with VRE

Reach our passengers with advertising opportunities on our platforms, in our trains and through our award-winning RIDE Magazine. 70 percent of passengers have an annual household income of more than $100,000.

For more information, visit: vre.org/advertising

Contact: advertising@vre.org (703) 838-5417

PUZZLE SOLUTIONS

Ideas, Likes, Critiques?
RIDE Magazine Online Survey:
vre.org/ridesurvey
RAIL TIME PUZZLES

ACROSS
1. Up to the task
2. Stone of La La Land
3. Sensory stimuli
4. Stroll with a swagger
5. Neighbor of Pakistan
6. Laugh-a-minute person
7. Subbleed
8. Sir Elton John’s instrument
9. We Bought a Zoo father
10. Father of the Bride (1991) father
11. Finest Hour (Churchill book)
12. Actor Maguire’s real first name
13. Sprinter’s assignment
14. Tomato often used for paste
15. Starter for bus
16. Middle of the 11th century
17. “Doggone it!”
18. Starfish ray
19. Kimono accessory
20. Rest against, with “on”
21. A Bobbsey twin
22. Some MIT grad
23. Naval officer
24. Violent outbreak
25. S&L window stat
27. Holden’s Catcher in the Rye brother
28. Country singer Steve
29. Painted canvas that rotates
30. Clumsy one
31. Slow exercise system
32. Motionless
33. Name on the cover of The Fountainhead
34. To Kill a Mockingbird father
35. Hosp. professionals

36. Woe for Woods
37. I, Robot author
38. Sound from a sheep
39. Brightly plumed birds
40. Through
41. Vocalist Ronstadt
42. Colgate competitor
43. Shattered glass
44. Baby buzzard
45. Wizard of Oz setting
46. Frequent st. crossing
47. Parked oneself
48. Grove element
49. Unaffiliated: Abbr.
50. The Descendants father
51. Workplaces for 73 Across and 121 Down
52. What Sondheim rhymed with “amigos”
53. Diminutive rascal
54. Indian flatbread
55. Trickle slowly
56. Leave or deduct, with “off”
57. A Bobbsey twin
58. “If any concern . . .
59. Holden’s Catcher in the Rye brother
60. Country singer Steve
61. Painted canvas that rotates
62. Clumsy one
63. Slow exercise system
64. Motionless
65. Name on the cover of The Fountainhead
66. To Kill a Mockingbird father
67. Hosp. professionals

76. Dow Jones fig.
77. Dramatizes, as an old battle
78. Church features
79. Tokyo-based watchmaker
80. Toasted sandwich, for short
81. Jaunty tune
82. Indonesian ape
83. On the dot
84. Campus officials
85. Sooner, affectionately
86. “That’s true, but . . .

87. Pointless to discuss
88. When many get lunch
89. Italian name meaning “beauteous ones”
90. Car wash worker
91. Soccer stadium cries
92. Accelerate, with “up”
93. Word hollered in . . . Streetcar . . .
94. Reach across
95. Ready to snooze
96. Scoundrel
97. Starter like mono-
98. Heavy weight
99. French-born designer
100. Harms severely
101. Rolls-Royce’s current owner
102. Belflute
103. Light sprays
104. Meet the Parents father
105. Without missing
106. Management level
107. Camel cousin
108. “And you believe that?”
109. The Godfather father
110. Cape, for much of the ’30s
111. Place to graze
112. Water near the Eiffel Tower
113. Reason to be bounced
114. Miles away
115. Deleter, with “out”
116. Advertising awards
117. Complained about
118. Sweeping story
119. Sitar selection
120. Something held in a pen
121. Songs of praise
122. Jogger’s gadget
123. Insole material
124. Bar array
125. Tokyo? No way! That’s my old stomping ground!

SUDOKU

3 4 5 2
5 1 3 4
9 3 1 7
2 7 5 1

9 2
3 8
5 7 1

6 7 5 9
9 1 2 6

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RIDE Magazine | ISSUE 3, 2019
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