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FROM THE CEO

TURNING THE CORNER ON ON-TIME PERFORMANCE

There is much to like about autumn, but it may be the relief from the heat and resulting speed restrictions that Virginia Railway Express riders and staff will appreciate the most. This summer’s weather has taken a toll on our on-time performance. From the beginning of June through the end of August, VRE trains have operated under heat orders on 61 percent of our service days. The afternoon speed restrictions, which require VRE to run trains 20 mph slower than normal, are simultaneously frustrating and necessary – necessary because safety is always paramount at VRE. High temperatures can cause rails to buckle and that heat (or sun) kink in the track can derail a train. Our host railroads constantly monitor the tracks and check for issues. Should a heat kink develop and not be detected, the lower speed allows an engineer to visually spot the kink and stop the train.

In addition to fewer speed restrictions as temperatures drop, the recent decrease in delays due to Positive Train Control (PTC), another important safety feature, leaves us optimistic about continued improvements in our overall reliability. VRE, along with host railroads CSX and Norfolk Southern, has worked diligently to ensure this federally mandated technology works as seamlessly as possible.

Despite our strong partnership with CSX and Norfolk Southern, train congestion is increasing in the corridor. That’s because VRE shares the rails with freight and Amtrak trains, and much like cars on the road, there continue to be more of them. VRE is analyzing its schedule and train interference data to see if there are ways to reduce these types of delays.

What also will help reduce congestion is increasing the capacity of the Long Bridge over the Potomac River. A draft environmental impact statement (EIS), evaluating the impacts of a second span of the Long Bridge, should be available in early September. The draft EIS is one of the most important steps in efforts to build this game-changing bridge, estimated to cost $1.6 billion. The new bridge will add capacity, allowing VRE to avoid some of the train interference as well as provide additional service. Publication of the draft EIS in the Federal Register in mid-September will kick off a 45-day public comment period, which will include a public hearing in late October. A final EIS should be available by May 2020, with a record of decision planned for June or July of next year. If all goes well and funding is identified, a new bridge could be in place in 7-10 years.

Given the youth of our locomotives and railcars, delays due to mechanical issues are few and far between. To ensure things stay that way, VRE will soon build a Lifecycle Overhaul and Upgrade Facility. The Spotsylvania County facility will allow us to move certain maintenance tasks inhouse in order to attain the highest level of reliability throughout the equipment’s life.

Throughout its history, VRE has taken great pride in getting passengers where they need to be when they need to be there. We realize the delays this spring and summer have been a major inconvenience to our riders, and we regret that. But be assured that whenever there is an opportunity to improve reliability, we seize it.

DOUG ALLEN, Chief Executive Officer, Virginia Railway Express

Cover image: VRE train crossing over the Rappahannock River in Fredericksburg.
SAFETY CAMPAIGNS

When we say safety is the top priority at VRE, we mean it. What’s more, our commitment to safety doesn’t stop at our passengers and staff ... we work with our host railroads (CSX, Norfolk Southern, and Amtrak), the Association of American Railroads, Operation Lifesaver (OLI), and law enforcement on campaigns intended for internal stakeholders and the greater public within our service area.

Periodically we accompany law enforcement to personally visit an at-grade crossing to educate passersby on the caution required when crossing the tracks. We stress the importance of never crossing the tracks unless the crossing gates are raised, as trains are quiet and can come from any direction at any time.

OLI communicates throughout the nation that walking on tracks is illegal and always dangerous. We echo OLI’s "See Tracks Think Train" campaign with items for events like Trunk or Treat and even our annual Santa Train event.

We encourage you to join us in spreading the word that caution must always be exercised around railroad tracks.

Image: At-grade crossing safety event

PTER TRAINING

Passenger Train Emergency Response (PTER) training is VRE classroom training and practical hands-on train equipment familiarization for emergency response personnel.

The classroom portion discusses rail incidents experienced across the country and what we can learn from them, as well as a VRE system and equipment overview. The instructor goes into detail about the hazards of being on or about the railroad and how to work with the railroad to stay safe when a responder must be on the tracks.

Attendees are then taken to a VRE train yard to see railroad tracks, railcars, locomotives and their respective emergency features in a safe, controlled environment.

Training is available to emergency response teams throughout the year, upon request.

Image: Chief Safety, Security & Compliance Officer Greg Deibler discusses exterior components of a VRE train.
VRE’s Safety and Security team frequently coordinates large-scale disaster drills with area first responders. These drills allow firefighters and emergency medical technicians to familiarize themselves with VRE trains and segments of our route within their jurisdictions.

Trains present obstacles which emergency workers may not otherwise face when responding to a crisis — including difficult terrain, tight interior spaces and unique equipment. Prior to each drill, VRE presents an overview of train access options, dangers associated with live tracks, and passenger and crew areas throughout a train set.

The conditions of the drills vary in severity from sunny daytime drills with easy access to a train, to night drills involving climbing over wooded hills to access a remote bridge.

"The first responders must learn the terrain in their respective areas, and sometimes that means covering some pretty rough topography," said VRE’s Chief Safety, Security & Compliance Officer Greg Deibler. "Our routes offer some nice remote views, but that unfortunately means some of these trainings require a harder workout."

Scenarios also vary to provide powerful, thoughtful training experiences. Drills have required responders to employ tools from pry bars to oxygen tanks.

Settings are as realistic as possible, often with real-life actors in need of rescue. The volunteer actors are surprisingly creative and challenge the first responders to think quickly as they navigate a train’s interior.

The drills also require coordination with the host railroads to ensure train traffic is held so our local heroes are in no true danger themselves.

"These men and women work very hard to learn about our equipment and our system," Deibler remarked. "We appreciate their time and commitment to supporting all our riders, not just their county or city residents."
NEW RIDER QUESTIONS, ANSWERED.

Q: Where should I sit?
A: VRE does not have assigned seats. Riders typically sit in cars that best align with a parking area or station exit. Some stations require passengers to move cars to detrain, and conductors will make announcements when approaching those stations with shorter platforms.

Q: It’s crowded. Am I able to sit on the stairs?
A: Safety is the top priority at VRE. We cannot allow passengers to sit on the stairs due to associated risks.

Q: Where are the restrooms?
A: Restrooms are available on every VRE train. Cars with restrooms can be identified by a unisex symbol on the train’s exterior. Once on the train, find the restroom by walking to the end opposite of the locomotive.

CLIFTON DAY CELEBRATES 52ND YEAR
2019 Festival Slated for Sunday, October 13th

One of Northern Virginia’s favorite fall events, the Clifton Day Festival, will take place on Sunday, October 13 from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. in the scenic town of Clifton.

Under the theme “Small-town charm, big-time fun,” the 2019 festival will feature a marketplace with around 150 artisans, antique dealers, vintage sellers and other vendors. Live music, children’s activities, pony rides, a beer and wine garden and other delicious food and beverage choices will add to the fun.

Clifton Day is the only day of the year when the train stops in the town. The Virginia Railway Express (VRE) will provide roundtrip train service to Clifton from all stops between Manassas and Rolling Road. The train ride to Clifton is free and the return trip costs $5 per person (children under age two ride free).

The Clifton Day Festival, hosted by the Clifton Betterment Association, arose from a 1960s revitalization effort for the historic town of Clifton, which had fallen into a state of disrepair since its incorporation in 1902. Residents decided to hold a festival in 1967 as a way to attract the public to the charming place they called home. The annual festival, now in its 52nd year, has been going strong ever since on the Sunday before Columbus Day.

Each year, Clifton Day raises funds for the Girl and Boy Scouts, Clifton Lions Club, Acacia Lodge, the Clifton Presbyterian Church and other nonprofit groups.

Sponsors for 2019 include Clifton Baptist Church; F.H. Furr Plumbing, Heating, Air Conditioning & Electrical; Norfolk Southern; Ourisman Fairfax Toyota; Peterson Companies; Topgolf; United Bank; Villagio Hospitality Group; and VRE.

Admission is free. Parking starts at $5 per car. For more information about Clifton Day, visit www.cliftonday.com or the festival’s Facebook page.
... And please remember, manners matter.

DO NOT
SPEAK LOUDLY
ON YOUR CELL PHONE
DO YOU RIDE FROM SPOTSYLVANIA OR BROAD RUN TO UNION STATION? WOULD YOU LIKE TO EARN A MONTHLY TICKET? VRE’S CONTRACTOR, KEOLIS, IS LOOKING FOR RIDERS TO ASSIST AS “SECRET SHOPPERS.” THESE MYSTERY RIDERS WILL BE ASKED TO COMPLETE A SIMPLE ONLINE SURVEY EVALUATING THE PASSENGER EXPERIENCE AND CREW PERFORMANCE.

If you are a monthly ticket holder and ride the entire Fredericksburg or Manassas line, please contact survey.vre@keolisna.com for more details.

VOLUNTEER FOR A FREE MONTHLY TICKET
THE EVOLUTION OF TRACK

Track and roadbed, the earliest aspects of railroad infrastructure, are still critical to operations today. Of course, production and installation techniques have evolved over rail’s 200+ year history – improving safety and increasing efficiency.

Tracks were first developed in England as wooden rail with flat iron attached to the top. Animals pulling carts with flanged wheels would work these “strap-iron rails.” However, this type of track proved dangerous with the conversion to trains, but remained in use as late as the 1840s until the introduction of the solid iron “T”-rail. While the T-rail profile is still used in modern times, its construction has progressed.

Iron was the primary choice for railroad track throughout most of the 19th century. Upon its introduction in the 1890s, steel began replacing iron as steel is stronger and more durable. Plus, while a more costly initial investment, steel delivers a longer lifespan.

It was not until the mid-1900s that track saw its next game changer: continuous welded rail (CWR). Also known as ribbon rail, CWR is laid in lengths of approximately a quarter mile, rather than older “stick” or jointed rail that is bolted together.

In addition to lowering maintenance costs and needs, reducing derailments, and offering a smoother ride, CWR resists thermal expansion and contraction. Once the benefits were realized, the industry quickly began replacing its most heavily trafficked segments. Most routes employed the new type of track by the 1970s, and today, virtually all main lines with speeds above 25 mph use CWR.

The one drawback to CWR is the risk of sun kinks. With the high heat and rapid temperature changes of summer, this risk can result in slow orders or even suspended movements until lower evening temperatures allow the track to settle back into place. Railroads must ensure the proper installation of CWR in warm enough temperatures to prevent kinking from occurring.

Early railroad track has given way to much heavier track – most often CWR – engineered for higher speed. Passengers may notice the difference in their ride as they move between stick or jointed rail and the smooth CWR.

For your chance to participate, contact:

survey.VRE@keolisna.com
Amtrak Step-Up tickets will remain $4 through September 30, 2019. As the Step-Up ticket price was lowered to entice longer-distance passengers to use Amtrak during WMATA’s partial shutdowns of the Blue and Yellow lines, the adjusted end date reflects WMATA’s minor construction delays.

The extension was made possible thanks to Amtrak and Virginia’s Department of Rail and Public Transportation (DRPT). Amtrak will continue collecting a lower amount from VRE for Step-Up tickets and DRPT will forgo some of the revenue that usually offsets its costs for intercity rail service.

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

Amtrak | 2019 Issue 4
RAIL TIME PUZZLES

ACROSS
1 Sound logical 6 World Cup org. 10 Lets time improve 14 Made a move 19 Sculpture at St. Peter’s 20 Nautical hail 21 Regarding 22 More austere 23 Two General Mills brands 27 Lionhearted one 28 Sounds like a well-tuned engine 29 Jazz singer Laine 30 Very tall tale 31 Venerable financial weekly 34 Not exactly, so to speak 36 Gardener’s device 38 Part of the psyche 39 Clear a hurdle 41 Leda, CA 43 Draw back 44 Three Generals of the Army 51 Percolates 52 Metal umbrella part 53 M _ mnemonic 54 Cookie made with cocoa 55 Market research activity 56 Beer named for a Bootsman 59 Stare down 62 Radioactive atom 64 Winglike 65 Word of regret 66 Bearded antelope 67 Three Attorneys General (since 2000) 74 Erstwhile global carrier 75 Certain native Canadian 76 Egyptian goddess 77 Rustic stopover 78 Long-grain rice from India 80 Extinct flightless bird 83 Frequent launchers 87 Island of western Alaska 88 Trusted expert 90 Slip _ (some shoes) 91 Staggers 92 Four UN Secretaries-General 98 One on the force 99 Religious assembly 100 Youngest Greek god 101 Grassland 102 Wharton, for one, for short 106 Liquid vaccine 108 Rectitude 110 Cry of recognition 111 Well-groomed 113 Rubs the wrong way 115 Subatomic particle 116 Three General Motors models 122 Law partner 123 Caesarian rebuke 124 Nobelist novelist 125 Inelegant 126 Comfy quarters 127 Size, as profits 128 Boundaries 129 County near London

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VRE

“All in favor of changing our name to the Justice League?”

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What's VRE doing to increase capacity and improve efficiency in the coming years? Learn about our Capital Improvement Projects:

vre.org/development