ISSUE 5, 2019

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SUPPORTING OUR COMMUNITY

Doug Allen
Chief Executive Officer

Getting to meet our passengers and community members are among the things I enjoy most at VRE. While our May “Meet the Management” events allow me to speak with passengers about upcoming projects, new fare products, train schedules and such, it is the special events throughout the year that give me and my staff the chance to get to know members of the larger VRE community.

The winter holidays may be a few months off, but we already are planning for our annual Santa Trains. Recruiting volunteers from staff here at VRE is always easy, as the joy we get from portraying Santa, Mrs. Claus or an elf aboard our trains is practically unrivaled. It is such fun to see the children’s eyes light up and smiles sweep across their faces as we walk through the train. And there is something magical about riding the train in winter, especially if it snows.

For many of our young passengers, the Santa Train is their first ride on the rails, so we take the opportunity to promote rail safety. We also encourage riders to join us in supporting the Marine Toys for Tots drive by bringing gifts for a less fortunate child to our Santa Train stations. The Santa Train is by far our most popular excursion, so be sure to buy your tickets as soon as they go on sale at 9 a.m. on Monday, November 25. You can find details about the Santa Train at www.vre.org.

VRE also participates in two community events, the Manassas Railway Festival in June and Clifton Day in October. Manassas’ rich railway history makes the event such a delight to be a part of. Manassas Junction was the focal point of two historic Civil War battles and the site of the nation’s first military railroad. I and other VRE staff enjoy mingling with riders at the festival as they wait to board one of five hourly excursion trains.

I think we can all agree that it is the railroad tracks across Main Street, upon which dozens of trains travel daily, that add to Clifton’s historic charm. But it is only once a year, on Clifton Day, when trains stop for passengers in this quaint town on VRE’s Manassas Line. Because parking is a challenge in Clifton, VRE partners with the organizers of this local fundraising event to provide transportation from five of our stations.

VRE’s Firecracker Special provides transportation to one of the region’s most popular events, Independence Day on the National Mall. We can only run these excursions when July 4th falls on certain days. But when we do, the excitement is almost palpable aboard the trains – one each on the Manassas and Fredericksburg lines – as passengers anticipate the evening’s fireworks. The return trip is more subdued as riders relax, some nodding off and others quietly sharing highlights of the day’s events.

VRE has a long history of community involvement and support. We look forward to running these special trains and the interaction with our neighbors that their presence affords. If you and your family have not yet taken an excursion with us or used our trains to get to and from local festivities, I invite you to do so. Hope to see you aboard one soon.

Doug Allen, Chief Executive Officer, Virginia Railway Express
MOBILE APP REFRESH

A new, more intuitive version of VRE Mobile is coming ... and soon! We’re in the final rounds of development, and we’re confident the new app will improve the user experience. Preview just how easy buying and managing tickets will be.

Manage your payment methods prior to or during a purchase. Nickname credit cards to easily switch between saved cards at checkout.

Familiar selection options to buy a ticket – line, origin station, destination, and ticket type.

Easily navigate with three buttons along the bottom representing the main sections of the app.

Simplified quantity adjustments for ticket purchases or validations.
The ability to collect and verify fares is critical to the success of the VRE operation. While VRE is a subsidized system, we have a mandate to cover at least 50% of operating expenses through fare revenue. Making sure every rider has paid their fare reduces the burden on the jurisdictions for the subsidy they provide to support VRE, and helps keep the need for fare increases to a minimum. Keeping the process of collecting the fare and verifying payment as simple and convenient as possible, while being cost effective, has always been our goal.

The current primary fare collection system, which consists of the platform Ticket Vending Machines (TVMs) and the vendor location machines, was put into service in 2002. This paper ticket system utilizing magnetic stripe encoding has been upgraded at different points, most recently in 2010 and 2011 when the internal computer and the pinpad were upgraded to comply with the Payment Card Industry (PCI) data security standards for the protection of cardholder information. We now have an upgrade underway which will effectively replace every major component in the system, leaving just the stainless steel cabinets from the original system. This upgrade includes:

1. New touch screens to replace the existing optical sensor touchscreens, which have become obsolete. This should eliminate the calibration issues which cause the current screens to not react properly when touched. The current monitors can be affected by small dust or dirt particles which block the optical sensors. The new technology is more like current cell phone screens, not relying on optical sensors.

2. New pinpads for entering debit pin numbers. The upgraded system will comply with the latest Europay Mastercard Visa (EMV) standards, utilizing the embedded chips in the cards for greater security.

3. New, more reliable credit card reader.

4. New computer with upgraded software and operating system, making the system more stable and dependable.

5. New magnetic stripe read/write head and ticket printing mechanism. This component alone should reduce the current issues of improperly validating tickets, capturing tickets, or the issuance of Validation Error Receipts.

6. Pre-configuration for contactless payment types. While not immediately available, the upgraded system will be expandable to allow for contactless payments which could include Apple Pay and Android Pay.

7. Audio jack for the vision impaired so headphones may be utilized in conjunction with the audio commands.

We have three upgraded TVMs in service currently. Installation throughout the system is expected to be complete by the end of the year.
USB TETHERING

Tethering allows you to use a phone’s mobile data to access the Internet on a laptop. You can tether using a Bluetooth connection, however, USB tethering is faster and more effective.

Depending on your mobile provider, there may be a flat fee for tethering a laptop to your phone. Check with your provider if you’re concerned about added costs.

The process for setting up USB tethering on newer devices is fairly standard:

1. Connect your phone to your laptop with a USB cable. For many Android phones, you will need a USB-to-Micro USB cable. You will need a lightning cable for an Apple phone.

2. Go to your phone’s settings. Then, access your Wi-Fi/Network settings. Then ...
   - For Android, select Settings, tap More Networks and then Tethering.
   - For iOS, select Settings, and choose Personal Hotspot.

3. For Android, select the checkbox for USB Tethering to enable it. For iOS, toggle the Personal Hotspot option.

4. Check your Network Settings on your laptop. In the available networks, you should see “Remote NDIS based Internet Sharing Device,” or the name of your phone. Now try accessing the Internet on your laptop.

If you need to troubleshoot, start by updating the operating systems on your phone and laptop to the latest versions. Also try a different USB cable or port.

Remember – as is the reason we do not offer Wi-Fi – cell signals along our route vary and will impact your ability to connect to the Internet in some areas.

LET’S COMMUNICATE

The graphic to the right is an overview of how VRE receives and disseminates information. We encourage new riders to review the various ways we communicate, and we also ask long-term riders to remember we strive for a two-way dialogue.

To learn more, visit vre.org/communication.
COMING THIS FALL ...

7-DAY AND 31-DAY PASSES

Convenient, flexible and economical, two new fare passes are designed with the rider in mind. The 7-Day and 31-Day Passes give passengers the freedom to validate tickets as needed. As their names indicate, the new passes, which go on sale later this fall, will be available for seven or 31 consecutive calendar days.

7-DAY PASS
The cost of the 7-Day Pass will be the same as the current 5-Day, which is being phased out. The 7-Day Pass will be available on VRE Mobile and as a paper ticket. This new pass is intended to eliminate confusion around the current 5-Day Pass rules, and will not skip weekends or holidays.

31-DAY PASS
The cost of the 31-Day Pass will be the same as the Monthly Ticket. The 31-Day Pass will be available exclusively on VRE Mobile, while the familiar Monthly Ticket will be available only as a paper ticket.

THE BENEFITS TO THE RIDER
The cost savings associated with a 31-Day Pass stem from its flexibility. Monthly pass holders often find themselves unable to take advantage of Free Ride Certificates. By delaying the validation of a 31-Day Pass, riders may use the certificates. Passengers who go on vacation could time the validation of the 31-Day Pass to meet their traveling needs. The change also opens the possibility of joint fare products with regional partners.

Additionally, the move to the new passes will not adversely affect riders’ use of transit benefits. Riders wishing to purchase a 31-Day Pass when their transit benefits become available can do so and wait to validate the pass until they need it.

LONG BRIDGE PROJECT UPDATE

The Long Bridge Project aims to provide additional railroad capacity as well as improve the reliability of rail service in our region – making the project a vital component of VRE’s long-term operational and expansion plans.

The project consists of potential improvements to the Long Bridge and related infrastructure located between the Rosslyn (RO) Interlocking near Long Bridge Park in Arlington, Virginia and the L’Enfant (LE) Interlocking near 10th Street SW in the District. The Federal Railroad Administration, the District Department of Transportation and others have reached an important milestone, and are pleased to announce the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS), Draft Section 4(f) Evaluation and Draft Section 106 Programmatic Agreement (PA) is available for public review. Visit longbridgeproject.com to review the Chapters and Appendices.

The public hearing for the DEIS, Draft Section 4(f) Evaluation and PA is scheduled on October 22 at DCRA Building, Room E200, 1100 4th St. SW Washington, DC 20024. Public comments will be accepted until October 28, 2019.
Q #1. **What do you do at VRE?**

A. My team and I lead the safety, security and risk management programs for all of VRE’s organization. It’s a broad area, I know. But if it contributes to making sure my friends, neighbors, family or anyone — for that matter — leave VRE in the same shape, or better than when they arrived, I’m all in.

If a fire or police department located along our routes wants to get rail safety training or experience practicing with our onboard emergency features, we dedicate classroom and field training tailored to their schedule.

When contractors perform work for us, we make sure they comply with a strict series of rules and standards established by us, our host railroads, Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) and the Federal Railroad Administration.

And, when we see an area where people are illegally trespassing on the railroad, we work with those communities, neighborhoods, police and others to educate the locals about the dangers of being on the tracks. There’s quite a bit more as well.

Q #2. **What about security?**

A. Obviously security is critically important. We work extensively with the police jurisdictions along the routes, the Transportation Security Administration and the Federal Air Marshals Service.

We have spent the past two years deploying some amazing facility access control and camera/analytics technology throughout the VRE territory and we have been working with our Office of Development to ensure station rehab and new builds undergo a thorough series of design certifications to ensure we don’t build in hazards like blind corners or unlit/dimly lit areas of public facilities.

One of our best resources is the Association of American Railroads (AAR). Our industry’s trade and standards-setting association has coalesced the physical security leaders and railroad police department leaders from railroads all over North America (including our hosts Amtrak, CSX and Norfolk Southern). Intelligence and best practices are shared constantly amongst ourselves and with government counterparts. It’s incredibly useful to be able make or receive phone calls from colleagues at places like Canadian Pacific Railway in Calgary or Union Pacific in Omaha to discuss situations or intelligence.

Q #3. **Risk Management?**

A. A fancy word for an incredible amount of paperwork and the management of a complex environment of insurance policies. VRE, like any organization, has to be insured against loss. We also have to insure our parent organizations, host railroads and jurisdictional partners against losses associated with our operations, should they arise.

There was a time in my life (in the distant past) when I thought insurance was the epitome of boring, but once I got into the process, concepts and how the underwriting and reinsurance marketplace works – I find it fascinating. VRE has a layered tower structure for liability insurance, which means that a lot of underwriting entities sign on for various levels of financial risk and we have to work extensively and collaboratively with underwriters all over the world to make sure we show that we do all we can to minimize the likelihood of their financial liability to pay out for losses so we can secure competitive premiums.

During a visit to the Lloyd’s insurance market in London, our brokers showed us documentation on display from the insurance perspective of the loss of the Titanic. As a history aficionado, it was interesting to see how Lloyds and its community of underwriters really pushed hard and invested heavily in early Transatlantic telegraphy so they could be notified as soon as possible of losses or successful ocean crossings. It was a double-edged sword, however because one of the first messages Lloyds received after learning of the iceberg incident was that Titanic was in tow to Cape Race, Newfoundland and marine insurance rates temporarily stabilized before the truth got through and rates skyrocketed on so much loss having to be paid out.

Q #4. **If you could change public perception about anything, what would it be?**

A. This is a big question for me. I want to say “stay off the tracks and never ignore warning devices at crossings.” There are so many needless fatalities. But I think that issue rolls up to a bigger one, which is that the public just doesn’t have a clear sense of what the
According to Greg Deibler, VRE’s Chief Safety, Security & Compliance Officer, automation and route consolidation have minimized the public’s view of the railroad and so it doesn’t get fully appreciated for the economic marvel that it has become since the dark days of its near collapse in the 1970s. But, for this: stay off the tracks!

**Q #5. What are some of most unique experiences you’ve had at VRE?**

A. They always seem to involve weather. I volunteered to get snowed in at a hotel during one of the Snowmageddon events to make sure our backup generators and other systems were working properly and have spent my share of time helping transfer passengers from the trains to buses when things didn’t go as planned. One of my projects several years ago was to design and fabricate steel storage cabinets for all of our platforms to hold emergency and bus bridge supplies. These have helped us manage unexpected situations and minimize at least a few inconveniences for passengers when things like this occur.

**Q #6. What’s the strangest experience you’ve had at VRE?**

A. Not too many days are alike. Probably the strangest are the noises you hear in the woods when you are out in the silent pitch dark middle of nowhere with an unannounced rules compliance testing team. We may have a Sasquatch in Northern Virginia. But, as long as it stays off the tracks, it can throw rocks against trees all it wants.

**Q #7. You are a history buff with a collecting habit. What does that involve?**

A. I’m into a bit of everything. I jump from subject to subject. Right now, I’m really into the early freight canals that crisscrossed the northeastern US – particularly the Anthracite coal regions of Pennsylvania. Interestingly enough, a lot of them were purchased by the earliest railroad companies to make use of the towpaths as railroad track beds since the property acquisition, leveling and grading was already taken care of.

I have a lock tender’s key from around 1865 marked for the Pennsylvania and New York Canal Company and enjoy heading up north into the hills to hit the auctions occasionally to see what surfaces from attics and basements. I’ve found some interesting things. My wife begs me to decorate our living and dining room with my rusty treasures.

**Q #8. Speaking of canals and history, when you are old, what do you think children will ask you to tell stories about?**

A. Probably about the old days when humans operated trains, or how we managed to survive without seamless Wi-Fi, or what it was like being the last generation to grow up without the Internet. I’ll exaggerate a bit, naturally. I’ll tell them that we used to scrimshaw political memes on stone tablets around our primitive tungsten filament lightbulbs and pass them around while we waited for our VHS tapes to rewind lest we face steep fines of non bitcoin money.

**Q #9. What was the hardest job you’ve ever had?**

A. When I first started out on the railroad as a freight crewmember, I had a pretty low seniority date - which is your ticket to everything in a unionized railroad environment, so I would get called for some work that was pretty unpopular. Probably the hardest was one particular assignment at a small switching yard in upstate New York. We would have to make up an outbound train with around 150-300 cars heading west to all sorts of places. The cars would have to be classified, or grouped together by six common destinations and we only had three tracks in the middle of nowhere to accomplish this. So it would take between 9-12 hours of moving back and forth, kicking out single and multiple cars and arranging the cars like a giant puzzle and keeping it straight in your mind. All this while it would be pitch dark, and the winters were the worst ... the frigid upstate New York winters or the endless rain. The only lights were flashlights and we had to keep our paper list of the train cars and where they were heading in empty ice bags to keep them dry. That was pretty tough and while I’m glad I don’t have to do that any more, I appreciated the experience and respect the railroaders who have done that on the ground work for ages.

**Q #10. Alright, tough to top all that, so let’s wrap this up with one more question. This is going into RIDE magazine and our passengers are going to read this. If you could have coffee with our passengers and share something with them about VRE, what would it be?**

A. Well, a lot of them have been with us for a long time. I constantly talk to people who say they’ve been riding for 10-20 years, some even since the first day in 1992. So I think most people have a real strong sense of who we are and what we are. They’ve been with us through our ups and downs.

In terms of sharing something ... hmmm, tough one .... It sounds like a corporate sanctioned answer, but it would probably be anecdotes about how committed personally and how serious a lot of us behind the scenes take this stuff. Delays or other disruptions have a lot of attention and we spend a lot of time together and individually, working over the problems during and after the event.

Many of us ride the train; I ride the train, a lot of my neighbors ride the train and my wife used to take VRE before we had kids – so things that I can do to help improve the experience is also a personal motivation. For example – I got tired of dim platform lights at L’Enfant and Manassas and so I worked with our finance, procurement and facilities teams and went through the steps necessary to replace the old lights - things like that, and not just me. A lot of us are VRE addicts.
REAL-TIME STATUS ON GOOGLE TRANSIT

Our schedules on Google Transit are getting an upgrade!

In addition to Google Maps displaying the next scheduled VRE train time, you will also see real-time delay minutes (if applicable) related to any relevant trains in service.

Users should understand that delay minutes will fluctuate as they do in our tracking system. Often trains are able to make up time en route, and as such, we do not advise arriving late to a station.

Ideas, Likes, Critiques? **Tell us!**
RIDE Magazine Online Survey: [vre.org/ridesurvey](vre.org/ridesurvey)
RAIL TIME PUZZLES

ACROSS
1 Thin sprays
6 Radio button
10 “Too rich for my blood”
15 Fish Nash rhymed with “meals”
19 Obliterate
20 Bring up
21 Designer Kamali
22 Home to 4+ billion
23 Certain American accent
25 World’s largest landlocked nation
27 How some prefer peanuts
28 Reach in total
30 Friend of Piglet
31 Hoodlum
32 Cash in Cancun
33 Final Four org.
34 Was mentioned
37 Winter driving hazard
38 One way to cook
39 One way to cook -gare
42 -garde
43 Is distinctive
45 Finch family creator
46 Shipping city
47 Myers’ spouse in Shrek
48 Innermost area
49 Comedian Carrey
50 Space saving abbr.
51 Large diving ducks
55 More admirable
56 Instill with new energy
58 Bret of gold rush stories
59 They’ll slow you down
60 Abodes
61 Sources of wise advice
62 Swedish money

63 Common Facebook posting
65 Street urchin
66 Came forth
69 Racing sleds
70 Blockbuster boasts
72 Cats monogram
73 Mideast airline
74 Stoker of Dracula
75 Crew team members
76 London art gallery
77 YMCA class
78 Inflexible, as a rule
82 Moved along a curve
83 Homie
84 Word of regret
85 Belfast-born
86 Reduces, as intensity
87 HS auxiliaries
88 Cube-hopping video game
89 Palm tree berry
90 Oscar actor Brody
93 Jazz pianist Blake
94 Making possible
98 Venice’s watery “Main Street”
100 What you shouldn’t oughta use
102 Stood up
103 Conjure up
104 Salt Lake City team
105 Dolphins’ home
106 Starters on menus
107 Ltr, enclosures
108 Fellow of refinement
109 Felling fellows
121 Outdoor blackboard info
2 Caspian sharer with 25 Across
3 Fresh talk

4 Certain ID checker
5 Smash of a show
6 Tolkien half-elf
7 Honey beverage
8 Devotee
9 Clue suspect
10 Very tense, so to speak
11 Defensive rings
12 Pasta in minestrone
13 Ulla in The Producers
14 Parting words
15 Stress-free course
16 This: Sp.
17 Contradictory shout
18 Well-grounded
24 Type of car roof
26 Courage
29 “New to you”
32 Tollbooth arrangement
33 Closes in on
34 Crime story plot
35 Put to... (decide on democratically)
36 Russian-born artist
37 Fend (off)
38 Piped up
39 Fighting force foray
40 Name that means “born again”
41 Rather long time
43 Renders a number
44 S&L customers
47 Isn’t daunted
49 Mythical hunter
51 The Plague author
52 Pretenses
53 Quit trying
54 Battlefield
55 Battle line
57 Concierge employer
58 Battle bosses
61 Actress Hayek
62 Target rival
63 Sack time
64 Sooner State city
65 Tall flowers, for short
66 Online payment option
67 Big name in blush
68 Realty documents
70 Omne tapestry
71 Barbecue, say
74 Amounts outstanding
76 Hiker’s nosh
78 Couldn’t take
79 Noshes
80 A third of a noun
81 Arsonist
82 Where the Finches live
83 The Lion King villain
87 Cone holders
88 Seismic episode
89 Unsettling state
90 Taj Mahal’s home
91 Minimal moisture
92 Frog-in-throat sound
93 Grandson of Eve
94 Biblical utopia
95 Mosque leader
96 Designate
97 Pleased expression
99 Director DuVernay
101 Downed, as a donut

SUDOKU

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4 7 1 6 5
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2 1 9 8 4

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