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FROM THE CEO

PREPARING FOR WINTER WEATHER COMMUTES

To judge by the 2020 Farmers’ Almanac, “this winter will be filled with so many ups and downs on the thermometer, it may remind you of a ‘polar coaster.’” Cold weather presents VRE and our passengers with challenges, many of which we can anticipate and prepare for.

Well before the regional 3 a.m. conference call that normally takes place when snow or ice is forecast, VRE staff are in contact with our contractors and local jurisdictions to ensure that station parking lots, walkways and platforms will be cleared and treated. We connect with train crews, reminding them of our safety protocols and alerting them to any unusual situations.

In the early hours of the morning, we join a conference call with nearly 100 others, including representatives from the National Weather Service; Office of Personnel Management (OPM); departments of transportation for the District of Columbia, Maryland and Virginia; local jurisdictions; school systems; transit agencies; and our host railroads. We hear how things are shaping up for the morning and afternoon commutes, take note of any decision by OPM to delay opening or close for the day, and make our decision about whether to modify service. While we take OPM’s decision into consideration, it does not dictate whether VRE trains will operate. Recognizing that many riders are not federal government employees, we make every effort to offer “S” schedule service.

VRE posts its decision regarding service levels on our website and alerts riders by text, email, and social media no later 4:15 a.m. Passengers also can call VRE’s toll free number, 1-800-RIDE-VRE, or listen for updates on local television and radio stations.

When temperatures drop, it is important that passengers dress warmly. That includes footwear. Inclement weather can delay trains and riders may find themselves on the platform a few minutes longer than scheduled. While extremely rare, it is possible that a train may need to be evacuated. Shoes or boots that can hold up to the cold with VRE and make our decision about whether to modify service. While we take OPM’s decision into consideration, it does not dictate whether VRE trains will operate. Recognizing that many riders are not federal government employees, we make every effort to offer “S” schedule service.

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Appropriate footwear also will help when walking across our parking lots and on platforms. While we treat these surfaces, small patches of ice may remain. So, keep an eye out and use caution. And, please don’t run for a train. Better to miss it and arrive safely on the platform than to miss it due to a fall. Any passenger noticing a patch of ice or snow, should contact the conductor or email us at gotrains@vre.org and we will get it treated.

Those riders who leave vehicles overnight in a VRE lot should not be surprised to find their car, van or truck in a different location. In order to completely clear the snow, we sometimes need to tow vehicles from one spot to another within the lot.

The Farmers’ Almanac has been issuing weather predictions since 1818, but not always with the greatest accuracy. Rather than leave anything to chance and because safety is paramount at VRE, we choose to follow the Boy Scouts of America motto and “be prepared.” We trust our riders will too.

Rich Dalton, Acting CEO

Cover image: Fredericksburg line conductor waves to departing riders.
VRE UPDATE

COMING TOGETHER FOR SANTA TRAINS

VRE is a small staff, but we pull together each year to go above and beyond for Santa Trains! Employees across our organization volunteer to play the roles on each train and ensure a safe, fun ride for all. Rain or shine, staff dresses for their respective parts, braves the cold, and aims to make the second Saturday in December each year memorable for the families on board.

Staff and unpaid volunteers participate annually in the name of Operation Lifesaver, a nationally-recognized non-profit leading in rail safety education. Prior to and throughout the event each year, VRE echoes the importance of safety around railroad tracks. From printed materials for adults to coloring books for the kiddos, we stress that setting foot on railroad tracks is not only dangerous, but illegal.

For those of you that joined us this year on a Santa Train excursion – thank you! If you were unable to obtain tickets this year, we hope to see you next year. (Don’t forget to set up your account early if you plan to purchase online!)

SERVICE DECISIONS DURING INCLEMENT WEATHER

VRE never takes the decision to modify or cancel service lightly. However, we are an organization focused on safety, so at times, we have to make the decision to change service to best protect our riders as well as our staff.

In the event of an approaching snowstorm, discussions with regional agencies start early. Early in the morning on the day inclement weather is expected (3am), VRE participates in a conference call with the Virginia Department of Transportation, the Office of Personnel Management (OPM), local bus services, the host railroads, and more. We are updated on the road conditions and the expected conditions throughout the day. If we truly feel our riders cannot travel to the stations safely nor can we ensure our platform can be appropriately treated, we must choose to cancel service.

While not all of our riders are government employees, we do factor OPM’s decision in what we decide to do. If OPM says it’s unsafe to travel, we know 60% of our riders will not be joining us for the day.

Some riders are essential personnel for the Federal Government. In the event that we decide to cancel service, we encourage essential personnel and non-government riders who wish to work to consider taking an Amtrak Step-Up train if Amtrak is choosing to run. As the Amtrak trains are regional trains, they may be operating with different decision factors. We do however caution that if we have decided to cancel operations for the day, the roads and platforms are impacted. Like we do, please make your safety the number one priority.
There is no more generous group of donors to Toys for Tots in our region than VRE riders. Year after year, our passengers’ monetary and unwrapped-toy contributions top the Marine Corps’ charts. This year was no exception, as VRE riders filled a 15-foot U-Haul truck with toys, board and video games, puzzles, and stuffed animals, and donated more than $21,000 to the cause. VRE staff remain invested in the program, donating $3,000 this year and providing support for the collection effort.

VRE partners with Marine Base Quantico, home to a VRE station, to ensure that as many needy girls and boys receive a gift during the holiday season. Marines join VRE staff on the midweek collection day to offload gifts from the trains and then, on the following Saturday, return to ride our Santa Trains, where we also collect toys.

“The generosity of our riders, staff, and local Marines is heartwarming,” said VRE Acting CEO Rich Dalton. “There is nothing more satisfying than to see the face of a child, who might have gone without a Christmas gift, receiving a present courtesy of VRE’s collection efforts.”

VRE’s participation in Toys for Tots has grown significantly over the past years. Brenda Thompson, VRE’s point person for the program, coordinates with the Marines, and VRE conductors and staff, to ensure that passengers are aware of the collection efforts and can donate with ease.

A friendly competition between train crews often results in creative ways to elicit contributions. This year’s Fredericksburg Line conductors had a friendly competition when it came to the design of collection baskets. The 300 train was unique, using holiday themed birdhouses for passenger monetary contributions. Conductors on the 306 train received kudos on social media for Christmas carols sung over the public address system.

Founded in 1947, Toys for Tots distributes toys to children whose parents cannot afford to buy Christmas gifts. Over the past 71 years, the program has donated 566 million toys to 258 million children. Originally located in Los Angeles, Toys for Tots headquarters is now in Triangle, Virginia.

“Often we commuters don’t take time to enjoy the sights in this culturally rich and historical region in which we live. We encourage our riders when taking time off around the holidays, over spring break or during the summer, to consider VRE for day trips to Northern Virginia and D.C. with loved ones.

Many VRE stations have easy access to Metrorail and Metrobus, but riders may also pair a VRE trip with a water taxi ride, a city tour bus or walking excursion.

Just like you avoid the drive to work ... avoid the drive when sightseeing close to home.
Many riders have started to use the new 31-Day and 7-Day Passes. For those of you that haven’t, please read on to learn why we now offer these ticket types and why they represent added value.

**31-Day Pass**

The new 31-Day Pass is good for 31 consecutive calendar days after validation. Why is this more beneficial to you the rider opposed to the calendar-month Monthly Ticket? It’s because the 31-Day Pass:

- Adds value to Free Ride Certificates (FRCs). Monthly Ticket holders often find themselves unable to take advantage of FRCs. Now, riders may use FRCs before validating a new 31-Day Pass.
- Allows for scheduling around vacations. Passengers who go on vacation can time the validation of a 31-Day Pass to meet their traveling needs.
- Available for purchase and validation anytime. Unlike the Monthly Ticket, the 31-Day Pass is available for purchase and validation any day of the month.
- Positions VRE to participate in regional ticketing programs. By moving to a similar fare approach as MARC and DASH, we continue working together with our regional partners on a future shared technical solution for ticket purchases.

The cost of the 31-Day Pass is the same as the Monthly Ticket. The 31-Day Pass is available exclusively on VRE Mobile release 3.13, while the familiar Monthly Ticket is now available only as a paper ticket.

**7-Day Pass**

The 7-Day Pass is good for unlimited travel for seven calendar days from validation. The cost of the 7-Day Pass is the same as the 5-Day Pass, which is being phased out.

The benefits of the 7-Day Pass are:

- Eliminates confusion around 5-Day Pass rules. The 7-Day Pass will not skip holidays or weekends. As the 7-Day Pass will not skip days, we recommend purchasing a Ten-Ride Ticket as needed around holiday weeks.
- Positions VRE to participate in regional ticketing programs. Again, we aim for a common, shared technical solution in the future with our regional partners.

The 7-Day Pass is available on VRE Mobile release 3.13 and as a paper ticket.

**New Version of VRE Mobile**

The new version of VRE Mobile (3.13) is available, and we are encouraging riders to upgrade. Load times will improve once all users are moved to the upgraded version, and we’ve been able to work through the bugs identified during our soft launch in December.

What are the benefits of upgrading to the new VRE Mobile? Just to name a few:

- The new 31-Day and 7-Day Passes are available! Any active or stored tickets will carry over as well.
- VRE Mobile is now on a common app platform with regional transit agencies. VRE Mobile now shares an app platform with DASH and MARC. With a common platform, the developer can make improvements and introduce new functionality faster than before.
- New payment options include Google Pay and Apple Pay. Plus, you can now nickname payment options for a faster checkout.
COMMUNICATION SURVEY RESULTS

How and under what circumstances VRE communicates to riders has been a topic of discussion throughout 2019 as the challenges affecting On Time Performance (OTP) have generated a higher volume of passenger feedback. The results of the Customer Service Survey which was taken in May showed a clear decline in passenger perception of the frequency, timeliness and content of VRE’s passenger communications efforts.

On Wednesday October 30th, VRE solicited feedback from passengers on an abbreviated survey focused solely on communications. Passengers on the morning VRE trains were asked to provide scores and actionable feedback for several categories related to the timeliness and quality of VRE’s communications through email, the website, Train Talk alerts and Social Media.

4,583 of the 10,412 morning train passengers responded to the survey. While the scores were higher than those received on the Annual Customer Service Survey in May, the takeaway from this survey is the constructive, actionable feedback received which can be used to change how, when, and why VRE communicates with passengers.

We will be addressing each category and the comments received as we look to make changes to existing processes and procedures. We have already made some adjustments to how we handle the follow-up Train Talks and after action debriefs related to lengthy service disruptions. We hope you find the additional information helpful, though we would prefer to not have a reason for those follow-ups.

In this issue, we’ll address Crew Communications. The train crews traditionally receive the highest scores on all of our surveys related to professionalism, courtesy, knowledge, etc. The scores on communications, however, tend to be slightly lower. In this survey, the written comments proved to be very beneficial. While there were some comments about the timeliness of delay announcements and announcements about which cars will not be on platforms, most of the comments were about the sound quality and volume of the announcements.

We asked our mechanical crews to go through each car and confirm volume levels. These should be pre-set to the proper level each day. The conductors have the ability to change volume levels so we are also making sure any manual adjustments made are done correctly, and reported to mechanical so further adjustments are not necessary.

In addition, we will be working with the conductors through their ongoing training on how to properly speak into a microphone and keep messaging short and concise. Whenever possible, they should be utilizing the automated messaging system for guaranteed quality and accuracy.

Onboard announcements about delays should be made at the time of the initial delay, and at a minimum every 10 minutes, more frequently if additional information becomes available. If this does not happen, please let us know at gotrains@vre.org so we can address it with the specific crew.

Stay tuned to RIDE and our other forms of communication for additional information related to the results of this survey and the changes/improvements coming as a result.

UPCOMING PROJECTS

Comments like the ones shown in this issue help inform new approaches and upcoming projects like:

- New Mass Communications service coming as the engine for Train Talks, including features currently not available.
- New Variable Messaging System for platform monitors now being tested at Fredericksburg and Alexandria to include Amtrak train information and other transit data.
The majority of VRE riders reside in Prince William County (29%), Fairfax County (22%), Stafford County (18%), and Spotsylvania County (12%) while 19% of other riders reside in Manassas, Manassas Park, Fredericksburg, and other jurisdictions. The northern Virginia area served by VRE boasts a labor force of 1.14 million and the jurisdictions where most VRE riders reside (92%) are home to nearly 2 million people.

Data on population totals, composition, income, poverty, and much more come from the U.S. Census Bureau. Every 10 years at the start of each decade, the Census engages in a constitutionally mandated count of every person living in the United States on April 1, regardless of citizenship. Each decennial census determines the allocation of hundreds of billions of dollars in funding from federal programs, the apportionment of congressional seats by state, adjustments to legislative and congressional boundaries in ‘redistricting’ efforts, and data-driven decision-making for local services such as fire and rescue and business locations. Substantial amounts of Census-allocated federal funding impacts the most vulnerable segments of the population in northern Virginia region.

In FY2016, Census data helped allocate over $17.7 billion from 55 large federal spending programs to the Commonwealth of Virginia, which included over $4.5 billion for Medicaid, $2.9 billion for Federal Direct Student Loans, $1.7 billion for Medicare Part B, $1.2 billion for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), and $1 billion to Highway Planning and Construction.

Other Census-derived funding programs include Section 8 Housing Vouchers, Title I grants to schools, National School Lunch Program, Head Start, WIC, and programs for homelessness, foster care, and crime victim assistance. In Prince William County, federal funding allocated by the Census provided 2,121 families with rental assistance in FY2018, served 35,000 low income public school students with free or reduced lunches in the 2018-2019 school year and sent 834 children to preschool in the 2017-2018 school year as part of the Head Start program.

Census data also impacts public transportation. The Federal Transit Administration (FTA) uses Census population data in concert with transit service data to help allocate formula grants, which include funds for VRE capital projects, rail and bus state of good repair, rail flexed funds project, flex funds for bus projects, among others. The Potomac Rappahannock Transportation Commission (PRTC) manages federal funding from the FTA, which includes capital investment (section 5307) and equipment maintenance and upgrades (section 5337).

A mailed postcard will invite you to take the 2020 Census online in March and your response will shape the quality of life of those in the northern Virginia region and across the country, including the maintenance and timeliness of your VRE service. Your Census responses are strictly protected by Title 13 confidentiality laws of the U.S. Code. The 2020 Census survey will ask for the following information from each household:

- Number of people in household and relationship to main household
- Contact information of main household
- Home ownership status
- Name, sex, age, date of birth, race, and ethnicity of each individual

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VRE locomotive V54 now goes by a different name – that of former Operations Board Chairman and Fredericksburg Mayor Bill Greenup.

What’s in a (train's) name?

The tradition of naming trains is as old as the railways themselves, dating back to the 1820s. While many railroads use names that evoke a sense of speed (such as flyer, meteor and rocket); patriotism (think constitution, independence and capitol); or romance (like starlight, midnight and sunset) – here at VRE we use names that evoke a sense of commitment, perseverance and vision.

The naming of a locomotive after an Operations Board member is a privilege reserved for those who have played a key role in establishing VRE service and whose extraordinary efforts have contributed to the organization’s success.

How was the locomotive named?

This November, VRE staff hosted a locomotive-naming ceremony in Bill Greenup’s honor. Some 30 friends, family and local elected officials attended the event on what was a cold yet sunny morning.

When the name Bill Greenup was affixed to the front of a VRE locomotive, it was to honor a leader who was instrumental in bringing commuter rail service to Fredericksburg and the region. Greenup’s name joined those of 12 other current and former board members affixed to the front of VRE locomotives.

Greenup’s Importance to VRE

Greenup, who passed away in 2015, was instrumental in bringing commuter rail service to Fredericksburg and the region. His leadership and advocacy on behalf of VRE in its formative years helped lay the foundation for a commuter rail service that has become an essential cog in the region’s transportation network.

He served as an Operations Board member intermittently from the early 1990s to the mid-2000s and as the board’s chairman in 1996 and 2000. A VRE Operations Board member for more than a decade, he held every position on the Executive Committee, including chairman in 1996 and 2000.

Greenup’s tenure at VRE overlapped with a period of rapid growth. When he left the Operations Board, average daily ridership had grown more than 160 percent – going from nearly 5,600 in 1993 to 14,800 in 2006. His steady leadership was instrumental in turning a fledgling rail service into what is today the nation’s 12th largest commuter rail system.
PUBLIC COMMENT WEB FORM

Can’t attend a VRE Operations Board meeting? That doesn’t mean your voice cannot be heard.

We post meeting materials on vre.org one week prior to a scheduled board meeting. In those materials, we provide a link to a comment form that remains active until 9am the day before the meeting. Comments are then compiled and provided to the board – your elected officials – for review.

There are no email replies to comments submitted through the web form. Those needing responses should email gotrains@vre.org.

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

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PUZZLE SOLUTIONS

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PUZZLES & CARTOON
### RAIL TIME PUZZLES

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<td>27 Meredith who composed The Music Man</td>
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<td>28 Kevin Costner and Don Johnson, in Tin Cup</td>
<td>94 Composer for Fantastic Four</td>
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<td>30 Mayflower anchorage before Plymouth</td>
<td>97 Ending for pun or prank</td>
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<td>47 007 foe in Goldfinger</td>
<td>109 “Mental” asset</td>
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<td>52 Henry VIII’s sixth</td>
<td>111 Wallace Beery, in Billy the Kid</td>
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<td>55 Type of thin bread</td>
<td>118 Become bushed</td>
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<td>56 Video game giant</td>
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<td>57 Without a doubt</td>
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<td>127 Kids’ song conclusion</td>
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<td>70 Rear Window star, after</td>
<td>132</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>74 Shoo—(easy winners)</td>
<td>133</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
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<tr>
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<th>6 7 8 9 4</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6 4 9 5</td>
<td>7 2 8 3 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 3 6 1</td>
<td>9 4 2 1 4</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

| 6 4 9 5 | 7 2 8 3 6 |
| 5 3 6 1 | 9 4 2 1 4 |
| 2 3 6 9 | 8 2 4 9 6 |
| 3 8 9 6 | 5 9 2 7 6 |
| 4 5 9 6 | 1 3 2 8 4 |

### SUDOKU

![Sudoku puzzle image]

“Just once could we go someplace that’s not some little hole in the wall?”

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