



2024 MARKETING & ENGAGEMENT REPORT



VIRGINIA RAILWAY EXPRESS
A Better Way. A Better Life.

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VIRGINIA RAILWAY

As we reflect on 2024, VRE's marketing strategies continue to exemplify our commitment to growth, innovation, and community impact. This year's marketing engagement report offers a comprehensive overview of our programs, initiatives, milestones, and results across various campaigns, emphasizing our mission to connect with riders and stakeholders in meaningful ways.

Virginia Railway Express

1500 King Street, Suite 202
Alexandria, VA 22314

The Virginia Railway Express (VRE), a joint project of the Northern Virginia Transportation Commission and the Potomac and Rappahannock Transportation Commission will provide safe, cost effective, accessible, reliable, convenient, and comfortable commuter-oriented rail passenger service.

The foundation of VRE's success lies in the strength and diversity of our programs and initiatives, each tailored to meet the unique needs of our audiences.

Programs & Initiatives

VRE Cares: VRE Cares aims to leverage staff resources and expertise to address community needs. Initiatives may include organizing food, clothing, and blood drives and partnering with schools, businesses, and non-profits to support their charitable efforts.

VRE VIP: VRE VIP is an exclusive initiative of Virginia Railway Express, crafted to enhance the passenger experience and strengthen community engagement.

Tour de VRE: To honor the late wife of one of VRE's current employees, the Tour de VRE raises awareness and funds for the Triple Negative Breast Cancer Foundation. It fosters community and encourages everyone to have fun. By promoting bike-train integration, the Tour supports a vibrant cycling culture.

Campaigns & Promotion

This report examines the performance of our social media campaigns, which have been a cornerstone of our engagement strategy. From targeted paid campaigns to organic content, VRE achieved notable increases in follower growth, click-through rates, and overall engagement metrics. Key trending topics and conversations on platforms further underscored our ability to engage authentically with our audience. Simultaneously, VRE ran radio ads to increase brand awareness and recover ridership.

Recognizing Excellence

VRE enhanced its visual storytelling throughout 2024 with more videography and higher quality photography for campaigns, education, initiatives, and events. As a testament to VRE's dedication to creative excellence and storytelling, the Marketing team received a Viddy Award for Non-Broadcast Creativity.

Another milestone in 2024 was the initiation of a comprehensive brand refresh, aimed at updating our visual and messaging guidelines. This fresh approach is designed to modernize our identity, improve brand consistency, and enhance our connection with both current and prospective riders.

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VRE Cares

In February 2024, VRE launched *VRE Cares – Compassion through Community*, a new outreach initiative leveraging staff resources and expertise to address community needs. In its first year, VRE Cares partnered with organizations like **Project Be the Good, Lasagna Love, and Meade Memorial Episcopal Church**, hosting events such as a canned food drive, back-to-school drive, and a bagged lunch program. Through these efforts, staff donated their time, resources, and support, making a meaningful impact on the communities we serve.



Canned Food Drive

VRE Cares launched in full swing in March 2024 with its first initiative in partner with the **Be the Good Project** in Alexandria, VA. The nonprofit addresses hunger, homelessness, and food insecurity across the DMV through programs like meal preparation, care packages, and free little food pantries—like free little libraries. VRE collected over **100 non-perishable goods and stocking 10 pantries across Northern Virginia and Maryland.**

Meals for Those in Need

Building on its first initiative and embracing the spirit of giving, VRE Cares partnered with the global nonprofit **Lasagna Love** in June. Delivering 3,500 meals weekly across three countries, Lasagna Love connects neighbors through homemade meal delivery with no judgment or strings attached. VRE staff prepared and provided **four pans of lasagna to families in Northern Virginia and D.C.** This efforts aided families facing challenges such as loss, foster care, emotional struggles, or simply feeling overwhelmed. With each meal delivered, VRE Cares spread kindness and support, one lasagna pan at a time.

Back-to-School Drive

In August 2024, VRE Cares launched its largest initiative, partnering with **four schools in Spotsylvania and Washington, D.C., and Northern Virginia** Family Services to support students in our community. Donations poured in from passengers' onboard trains, by mail to headquarters, and through monetary contributions on [vre.org](https://www.vre.org). Thanks to this collective effort, VRE Cares collected **over 800 supplies, including backpacks, stationery, classroom decorations, and teacher resources**. This incredible success was made possible by the dedication of VRE staff and the generosity of our community.



Heart & Hands with Meade Memorial

Wrapping up the year's initiatives before the busy holiday season, VRE Cares partnered with **Meade Memorial Episcopal Church** in November to support their Grocery & Bagged Lunch distribution. Over three days, VRE volunteers handed out sandwiches, pizza, fruit, and pre-bagged groceries to community members in need. This daily initiative, led by the church and supported by local volunteers, continues even through the holidays, providing essential care to those facing food insecurity. VRE volunteers also **contributed administrative support, furthering the program's impact** and reinforcing VRE Cares' commitment to the community.



VRE VIP

VRE's Very Important Passenger (VIP) communications program was launched in 2023 in tandem with that year's Meet the Manager event series. VRE VIP includes a social media engagement, a monthly newsletter, and a microsite.

Microsite

The VRE VIP microsite (vip.vre.org) hosts blog posts, including customer write-ups, event recaps, and notes on celebrations. In 2024, the microsite garnered **1,500** visits.

Newsletter

VRE VIP News engages our customers monthly with a message from VRE Chief Executive Officer Rich Dalton, scheduled service updates, information on programs and new initiatives, blog promotions, and deals and discounts from businesses near VRE stations. In 2024, the open rate from VRE VIP news was **52.1%**.



1.5K
website visits

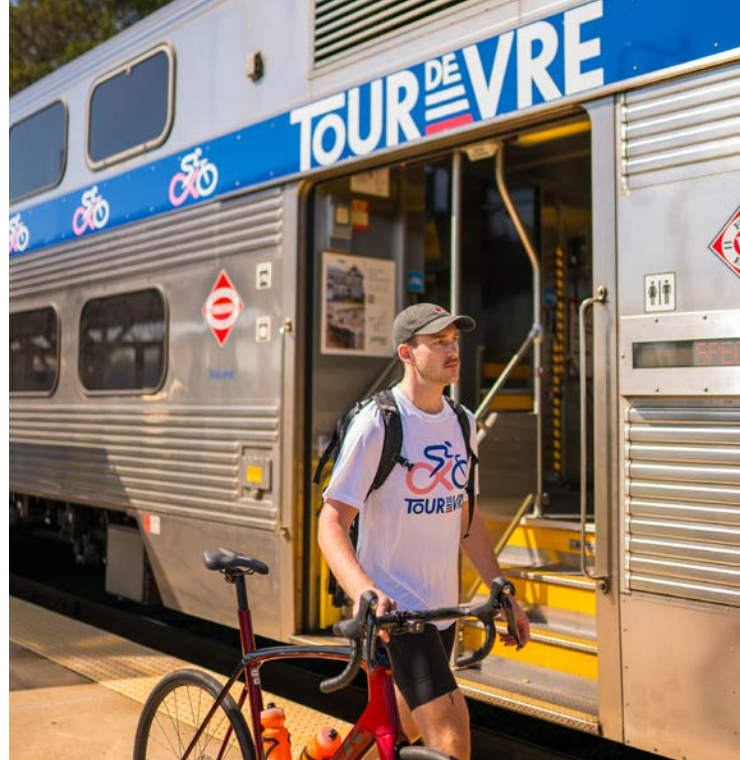
52.1%
newsletter
open rate

Tour de VRE

The 4th Annual Tour de VRE, held on October 5, 2024, was the first year the event was open to the public and saw participation double to over **150** riders. The event raised more than **\$5,000** for the Triple Negative Breast Cancer Foundation. A Tour de VRE logo decal was also applied to a VRE railcar for the first time ever, boosting awareness of the Bikes on Trains initiative. Social media engagement around Tour de VRE was strong, generating **38** mentions, **46.83K** reach, and **149.28K** impressions.

150+
riders

\$5,000+
raised



Social Media

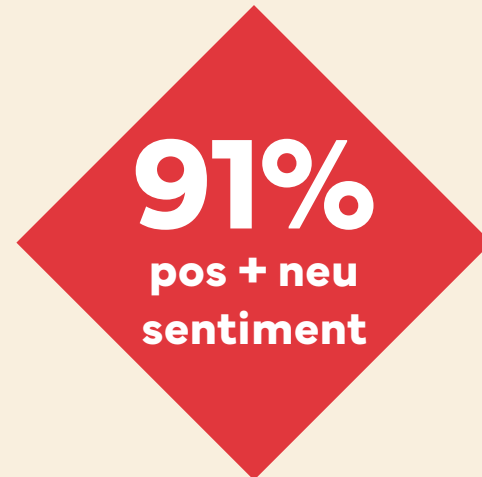
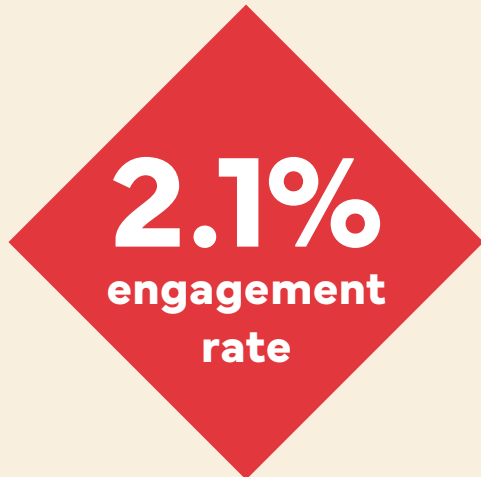
Social media has become a cornerstone of VRE's engagement strategy. VRE's focus on real-time updates and rider engagement drove strong Instagram growth, reinforcing it as a key platform for visual, timely content. X/Twitter also saw engagement rise, proving that concise, high-impact updates resonated even with fewer posts.

Facebook remained VRE's most active and engaged platform, with the highest post volume, engagement, impressions, and followers across all networks. LinkedIn's rising visibility suggests an opportunity to expand professional outreach through informational content.

With timeline posts leading engagement, content centered on service updates, train alerts, and commuter perks. Frequent embedded links reinforced a rider-first approach, keeping audiences informed.

In 2024, VRE published **655** pieces of content and achieved the following...





From service inquiries to messages of support and enthusiasm, responses varied by platform...



VRE's Facebook presence remains dominant, serving as the primary platform for rider feedback, service discussions, and real-time inquiries, reinforcing its role in customer service and community dialogue.



X/Twitter continues to be a hub for immediate service updates and rider emotions, with frequent mentions of @VaRailExpress signaling real-time concerns.



Instagram fosters lighter, more casual engagement, with conversations centered on travel experiences, scheduling, and general enthusiasm rather than service issues. While not a key space for customer support, it strengthens VRE's brand identity through visual storytelling.



LinkedIn presents an opportunity to broaden professional outreach, with engagement driven by congratulatory messages, corporate milestones, and partnerships—ideal for thought leadership and employer branding.

Across platforms, service updates, train alerts, and commuter perks remain the most engaging content themes.

What do commuters, outlets, and partners talk about when discussing VRE?

Infrastructure & Expansion

Infrastructure discussions frequently center around service expansions, funding, and long-term improvements

Weather & Disruptions

Frustrations with transit times and weather-related delays are common, with riders comparing VRE to alternatives

Community Updates

Community updates are mostly news-driven, with publications informing residents about holiday schedules and public services

Partnerships & Service Announcements

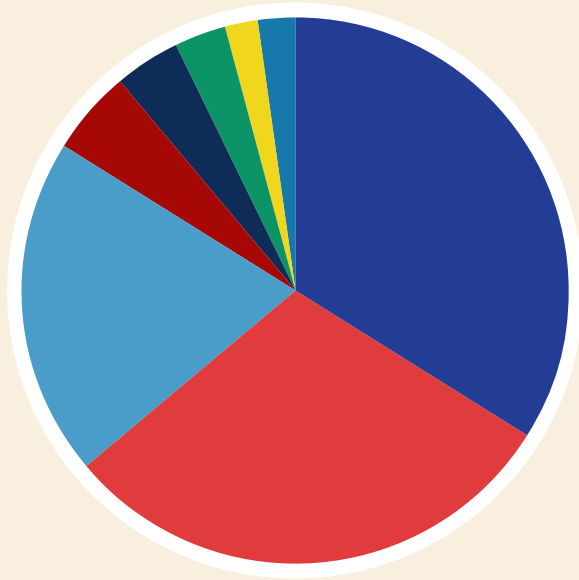
Transit accounts promote partnerships and service integrations; riders often engage with these updates

Rider Experience

Real-time commuter frustrations often focus on delays, service reliability, and customer service responsiveness

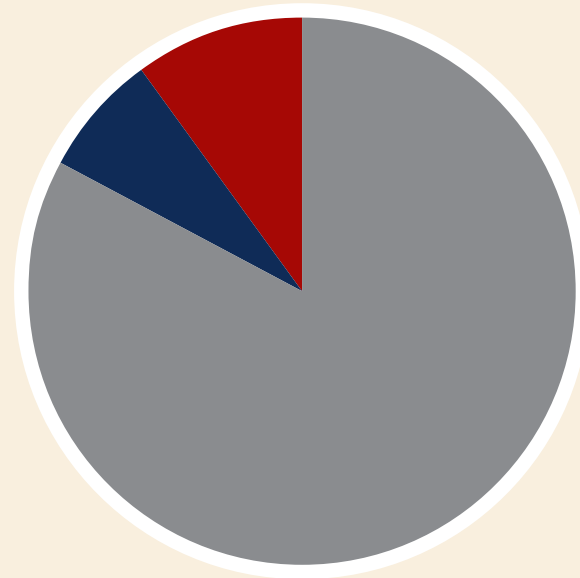
Where is VRE discussed the most online?

- News (34%)
- X/Twitter (30%)
- Reddit (20%)
- Blogs (5%)
- YouTube (4%)
- Instagram (3%)
- Facebook (2%)
- Forums (2%)



What is the tone and sentiment of organic VRE conversations?

- Positive (7%)
- Neutral (83%)
- Negative (10%)



Positive sentiment is driven by official announcements, partnerships, and future plans for service improvements.

Neutral sentiment comes from news updates, weather reports, and general information-sharing.

Negative sentiment largely stems from real-time commuter frustrations, delays, and lack of reliability.

Real Riders

The Real Riders campaign wrapped up in October 2024 with a final on-site photography project at Spotsylvania Station, completing a series of photo-ops that began in June 2023 at Burke Station. Designed to celebrate the authenticity and diversity of VRE riders, the campaign captured everyday moments on the platforms—reading, listening to music, chatting with friends, studying, and simply embracing the rhythm of their commutes.

In total, the campaign featured **24** posts across platforms, garnering **618** engagements, an average engagement rate of **2.83%**, and **23,478** impressions. Each post and strategy were rooted in one goal: fostering more ridership by connecting with both current and potential passengers. Our brainstorming consistently focused on this core question: How can we reach more riders?



The Real Riders campaign stood out by celebrating the beauty in the mundane—the quiet moments that define a commuter’s day. It invited viewers to step into the shoes of our passengers: waiting on a crisp morning next to someone holding a bouquet of flowers or sharing a bench with someone savoring a falafel from the station’s nearby spot. It offered an authentic glimpse into the experience of riding VRE, a refreshing approach in a media landscape often dominated by polished AI and generic advertisements.

The Real Riders campaign enriched VRE’s visual storytelling—capturing **over 100 candid photos of riders alongside branded images of stations, trains, and conductors**. These photos not only expanded the marketing image library but also deepened our appreciation for the vibrant rhythms of early-morning and late-evening commutes.

Highlights of the campaign included highly engaged posts showcasing cheerful riders waving or posing with their scooters. Captured through creative angles—parallel to the train or framed through a train car window as if saying goodbye—these moments resonated with viewers and reflected the human connection at the heart of our services.

With its authentic storytelling and strong engagement, the Real Riders campaign succeeded in spotlighting the beauty of our daily commutes and inspiring others to make VRE part of their journey.

24
posts

618
engagements

23K
impressions

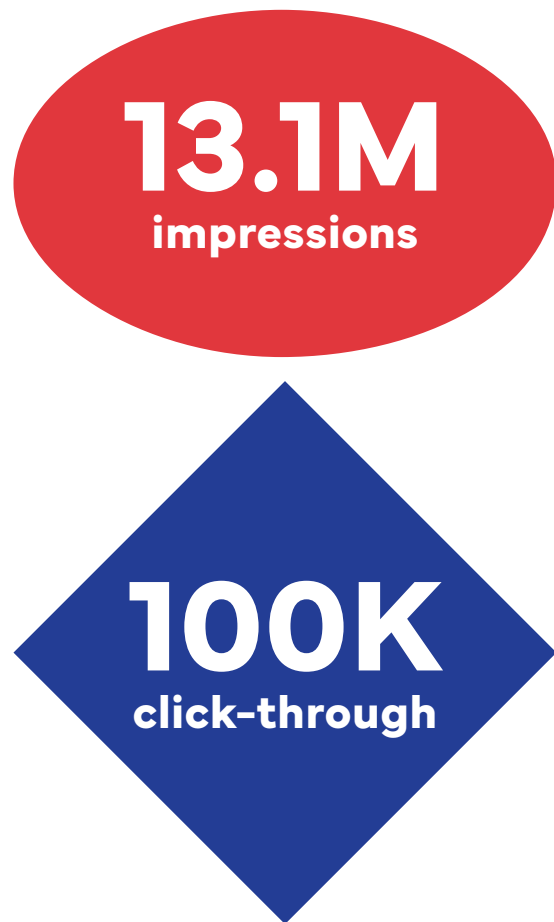




Radio Ads

Throughout 2024, VRE ran radio ads to increase brand awareness, recover ridership, and inform customers and potential customers of new initiatives and programs.

These ads achieved an impressive **13.1 million** impressions and generated over **100,000** link clicks. The success of these ads showcased the effectiveness in broadening our reach with our 35+ year old audience.



Viddy Award

VRE's Marketing team won the **2024 Viddy Award for Non-Broadcast Creativity** for our video: *Tour of the LOU Facility*. This achievement is the culmination of our efforts to enhance visual storytelling with more videography and higher quality photography and our commitment to creative excellence.

For the past 30 years, the Viddy has recognized excellence in the way video is created, produced, and delivered. It is one of the oldest, largest, and most respected awards programs in the video industry.



Brand Refresh

Honoring Progress and Ensuring Cohesion

The VRE brand refresh reflects a pivotal moment of growth and modernization for our organization.

Drawing inspiration from the striking new locomotive paint scheme (*being rolled on in 2025*), this update captures the spirit of innovation, reliability, and forward momentum that defines VRE. The updated design is more than an aesthetic change—it's a visual representation of VRE's commitment to enhancing passenger experience and staying ahead in a dynamic transportation landscape.

The locomotive paint scheme, with its bold lines and fresh color palette, embodies energy and precision. It serves as the foundation for this refreshed visual identity, creating a seamless connection between the trains passengers see and the materials they interact with daily. By aligning our branding with this design, VRE reinforces a unified message of professionalism and progress.

Why Updated Brand Guidelines Matter

Updating brand guidelines is essential to ensure that every touchpoint—whether it's a ticket, a social media post, or station signage—communicates VRE's identity with clarity and consistency. Here's why these updates are crucial:

- **Cohesion Across Platforms:** With refreshed guidelines, VRE ensures that its brand voice, visuals, and messaging remain unified, whether in print, digital media, or physical spaces.
- **Stronger Recognition:** Consistent use of design elements tied to the locomotive scheme strengthens VRE's presence, making it instantly recognizable to riders and stakeholders alike.
- **Adaptability for Modern Needs:** New guidelines incorporate flexibility for today's diverse media formats, ensuring VRE's brand is future-proofed for evolving communication channels.
- **Enhanced Trust and Professionalism:** A cohesive look reassures passengers, partners, and the public that VRE is reliable, modern, and excellent.

This refresh isn't just a facelift; it's a thoughtful evolution that builds on VRE's legacy while positioning the brand for continued success and excellence. By weaving the locomotive design into the broader brand identity, VRE stays visually aligned with its core values and its mission to be a top-tier transportation service provider.



VIRGINIA
RAILWAY
EXPRESS

*A Better Way.
A Better Life.*

6.3 GRAPHICS

VISUAL GUIDELINES | FALL 2024

VRE Express

Our new innovative paint scheme for 2024 and



VISUAL GUIDELINES | FALL 2024

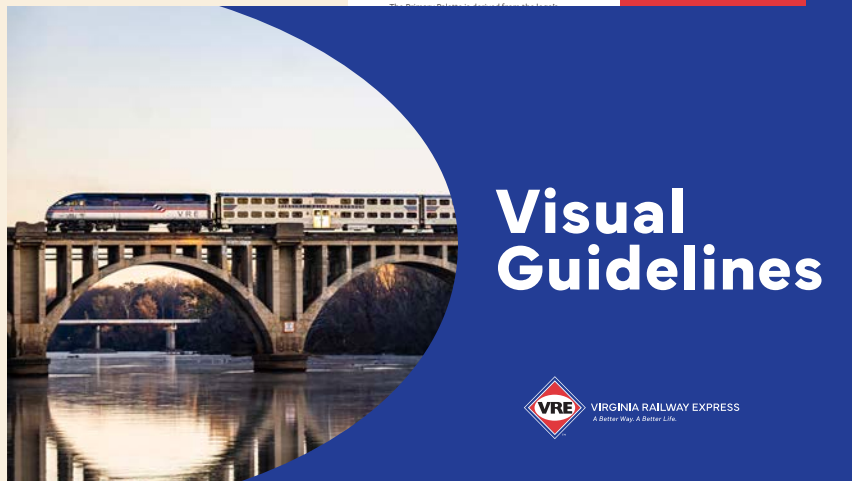
2.1 COLOR

Color Palette

PRIMARY



28



Looking Ahead

This report reflects VRE's collective dedication, innovation, and pursuit of excellence.

As we step into 2025, VRE remains committed to building on these successes. With plans to enhance our digital presence, expand programs and initiatives, and leverage new technologies, we are poised to set new benchmarks in marketing excellence. We're excited to continue this journey, delivering exceptional value to our riders and communities in the years to come.







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Follow us on all our social media platforms to stay up-to-date with everything VRE.



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