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P.S. Wish you were here.
In the last issue of the RIDE Magazine there was an article on page 2 discussing VRE’s recently completed System Plan.

I am a planner by trade and believe that the most effective way to improve the VRE System is accomplished through a well-developed and executed system and strategic plan. I want you, our riders, to know that VRE staff is working hard to improve your commute. We have listened to your concerns and comments, and know that additional cars, trains, longer and second platforms, and more station parking are needed to improve your commute.

We also know that third tracks and other improvements are needed to garner more capacity from our host railroads in order to operate additional trains. Our goal is to improve the VRE System, your safety and commute. We are working diligently to secure the needed resources to make these system improvements but as they say, everything worthwhile takes time. And that is especially true in the railroad business.

Thank you for being a VRE rider and supporting our plans to create an improved VRE.

Doug Allen
Chief Executive Officer
Virginia Railway Express
Whither We Are Tending

If we could first know where we are, and whither we are tending, we could better judge what to do, and how to do it.

- Abraham Lincoln

In last month's RIDE, we introduced you to the VRE System Plan that was adopted by the VRE Operations Board at its January 2014 meeting and subsequently approved by our parent organizations, the Potomac and Rappahannock Transportation Commission and the Northern Virginia Transportation Commission. The System Plan will serve as our roadmap for improving and expanding VRE service to meet increasing demands for ridership.

In this issue and the next few issues to come, we would like to share some of the details behind the plan and what it will mean to our riders.

VRE has experienced tremendous increases in ridership since service began in 1992. After an initial growth spurt in our first four years to 7,600 weekday riders, ridership proceeded to grow. We presently carry over 19,000 riders on a typical weekday with some days approaching 22,000.

While truly a success story, we are rapidly approaching the functional capacity limits of our three host railroads—CSX Transportation, Norfolk Southern, and Amtrak—to accommodate more trains, as well as our own constraints in terms of railcars, parking, and storage yards. Based on agreements with our host railroads and with the improvements presently included in VRE's FY2015-2020 Capital Improvement Program, analysis suggests that the current system will max out when ridership grows to about 25,000 weekday boardings.

One purpose behind the VRE system planning effort was to get a better understanding of where future ridership is tending so that we can judge what combination of projects will be necessary and how to best accomplish them in order accommodate growth beyond 25,000 boardings.

Not surprisingly, the conclusions of the system planning analysis indicate that by the year 2040 latent demand for VRE service would amount to at least 35,000 riders and might under the right conditions approach 48,000 riders.

A railroad cannot accomplish the changes necessary to accommodate a doubling or more of its ridership overnight. The VRE System Plan proposes a program of improvements to be carried out in a series of phases intended to first provide an immediate improvement in terms of reducing crowding and delays our present day riders sometimes incur, and then progressively add further capacity and performance enhancements that will ensure we are ready for the new riders when they come.

How VRE plans to accomplish this will be the subject of our upcoming RIDE articles.
J. Walter Tejada was just 13 when his family arrived in New York City from El Salvador.

Tejada knew nothing about the language or culture, he said, but America was a place of new opportunity where his mother could work and escape the economic hardships they faced in their home country.

Now, decades later, Tejada and his family are living the American dream. As an elected official, he hopes to help other immigrants realize that very same dream. “I actually lived the immigrant experience and have seen the rewards that come from hard work and participating in the great opportunities this country offers,” Tejada said. “Part of my desire is to leave this world just a little better than how I found it. The part of local government that is so rewarding is we can actually affect someone’s life right here in our neighborhood for the better.”

Tejada joined the Arlington County Board in 2003 and recently served as the board’s chairman. He is the newest member of the Virginia Railway Express Operations Board, taking over for Chris Zimmerman, who stepped down from both the Arlington and VRE boards in February.

Since joining the Arlington board, Tejada has focused his attention on issues like public safety, affordable housing and healthy living- keeping transportation issues, “at an arm’s length,” he said. But with Arlington working on a proposed street car plan and public transit becoming an increasingly important piece of the region, Tejada said he felt it was time to get more involved. And, VRE was a perfect way to do so.

“I am delighted to join the very talented board VRE has,” Tejada said. “I am impressed with their breadth of knowledge and their camaraderie. One of the things I like is we don’t get wrapped up in our party affiliations and really focus on the issues - that is one of the most attractive components that motivates me to serve on VRE’s board.”

Tejada has a unique position on the VRE Board. Arlington is the sole VRE member jurisdiction with no residents that ride the service. Instead, he represents a locality with one of the system’s busiest destination stations.

“About 4,500 people use the Crystal City station because Arlington is a job center,” he said. “It is a major destination and it is critical we have a voice in the funding, planning and operation of VRE.”

A proponent of public transit, Tejada said one of the first areas of VRE he wants to look into is public outreach and assuring everyone in the region is familiar with the system, particularly young adults and minorities. Manassas in particular has a high Latino population, he said, and a VRE station right in its Old Town area. Tejada said he wants to look into Public Service Announcements with Latino media, public forums or even marketing materials that are presented in multiple languages.

While Tejada wants to entice more people to ride VRE, he also recognizes the challenges VRE faces with growth.

“I think it is an enormously bright future for the VRE,” Tejada said. “On the one hand we want to reach out to as many residents as possible…but at the same time we need to be ready to handle the capacity.”

As a member of the VRE board, Tejada hopes to help address issues like parking shortages at certain stations and limited storage space for additional train cars. He also wants to improve the actual stations, making the overall experience better for riders.

While Tejada may be new to the VRE board, he has had years of experience serving on other boards both across the region and the state. Under former Gov. Mark R Warner, Tejada served as the first chairman of the Virginia Latino Advisory Commission.

Currently, he serves on the Virginia Association of Counties’ Board of Directors, the board of directors for the Latino civil rights and advocacy organization the National Council of La Raza and on the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments’ Human Services and Public Safety Policy Committee, to name a few.
New Bus - Crystal City to Courthouse

Have the Blue Line Blues?

Traveling between Crystal City and Courthouse?

Take ART 43 instead!

Starting March 31 you have a new option to get you from Crystal City to Courthouse -- ART 43. This new bus route will run every 20 minutes during morning and evening rush hours from 5:55 am – 9:32 am and 3:20 pm – 7:17 pm.

The route will have a limited number of stops to make travel time even faster. Stops are the Crystal City VRE Station, Crystal City Metro, Rosslyn Metro and Courthouse Metro. Visit arlingtontransit.com to view the ART 43 schedule and learn more.

Traveling to Rosslyn?

Metrobus will also be introducing two new routes on March 31, the 10R and 10S, which will travel between Crystal City and Rosslyn.

Between the ART 43, Metrobus 10R and 10S, service from Crystal City to Rosslyn will be provided, on average, every 10 minutes.

Visit wmata.com to view the 10R and 10S schedules.

Hop on a bus and enjoy the scenery as you travel to your destina-
How to Build a Bluebird Nestbox

Here’s What You’ll Need:
One 4-foot 1-inch x 6-inch rough cedar board,
One 10-1/2-inch x 10-inch rough cedar board,
2-inch finishing nails, 1-5/8-inch galvanized deck screws,
8 feet of ¾-inch conduit and two screws.

Recommended Tools:
Table saw, Power drill

1. Use a full width of a 4-foot 1-inch x 6-inch rough cedar board. Drill a 1-1/2-inch entrance hole in the front piece with a spade bit. In areas where mountain bluebirds reside, drill the entrance hole 1-9/16 inches. Center the hole about 1-1/2 inches from the top of the board.

2. Starting about 1/2 inch below the entrance hole, make three shallow cuts about 1/4 inch apart on both sides of the front board. On a table saw, set the blade at 1/8 inch deep and use the saw’s miter gauge to cut the notches. Flip the piece over and make identical cuts on the other side. If you want the front board to fit flush with the roof, cut an optional angle along the top edge by tilting the table saw blade 12°.

3. Position the sides flush with the top of the front board. Fasten the right side to the front with two 2-inch finishing nails. Fasten the left side to the front with a 1-5/8-inch deck screw near the top (drill a pilot hole first). Be careful not to overtighten this screw because it will serve as a hinge for the side door.

4. Cut an optional 12° angle along the top edge of the back piece if you want it to meet flush with the roof. Then place the assembled front and sides on top of the back piece, leaving the top of the back board 1/4 inch higher than the sides. The space provides ventilation. Turn the box over and attach the back to the left side of the box (the one with the “hinge”) with a 1-5/8-inch deck screw. Drill a pilot hole first directly opposite the screw on the front (this ensures proper hinge action) and fasten with a screw. Again, don’t make it too tight. Secure the other side to the back with three 2-inch finishing nails.

5. Cut about 1/2 inch off each corner of the floor to provide drainage. Position the floor 1/4 inch up from the bottom of the nest box. (Recessing the floor helps keep the box dry.) Attach the floor with 2-inch finishing nails on the front, back and right side. Do not use nails through the side door closed. Align the roof flush with the back and attach with 1-5/8-inch deck screws (drill pilot holes first).

6. Drill a hole on the hinged side 2 inches up from the bottom and 1/2 inch in from the side. Drill at a slight downward angle, going through the front of the house and into the side. Make the hole large enough for a double-headed nail to slip in and out easily. Insert the nail to hold the side door closed. Align the roof flush with the back and attach with 1-5/8-inch deck screws (drill pilot holes first).

7. The nest box is ready to mount. Keep the entrance hole about 5 feet above ground. The Bluebird Society recommends attaching it to a smooth round pipe, rather than on a tree or fence. Face the box away from prevailing winds and towards a tree or shrub.
For Joyce Rose, the most frustrating part of her work is knowing the number of people being killed by trains is increasing.

According to the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA), railroad trespasser deaths climbed 18.7 percent during the first 10 months of 2013 compared with the same 2012 period. Although the FRA’s Office of Safety Analysis isn’t expected to report 2013’s total number until March, the trend for 2013 doesn’t look good. There were 426 trespasser fatalities from January through October 2013, compared with 428 for all of 2012.

As president and chief executive officer of Operation Lifesaver Inc. (OLI), Rose leads the national office of the nonprofit organization whose mission is to end collisions, deaths and injuries at highway rail crossings and on rail property. Rose can’t say for certain why fatalities are on the rise. Part of the reason could be that there are more trains on the move, with freight railroads serving a recovering economy and passenger trains transporting riders in record numbers.

What Rose does know for certain is that she and Operation Lifesaver have their work cut out for them. To that end, Operation Lifesaver officials hope to turn up the volume on the rail-safety message this year through “a very big,” national public-safety advertising campaign that will use television, radio, billboard, print and social media to get the word out on rail safety.

OLI has partnered with the Association of American Railroads (AAR) to present the campaign, which Rose anticipates will kick off in early spring. The organizations began collaborating on it last summer because of the “stubbornness of the trespassing problem,” she says.

The campaign’s “See tracks? Think train!” catch phrase will alert people to stay off rail property. Although the message will target the general population, the campaign will have its own dedicated website and be “very social-media oriented” in an effort to appeal to younger people, she says.

The national campaign also will be a departure for Operation Lifesaver, which historically has relied on grassroots communications via volunteers giving face-to-face presentations to community groups, schools and emergency response personnel. Those grassroots efforts continue, but will be reinforced by the national campaign.

The effort is OLI’s latest attempt to increase the ways in which it spreads the rail-safety word. Since Rose took over as its top executive in December 2013, OLI also has made progress in stabilizing its funding, and recruiting and educating a new crop of volunteers.

"We are encouraged by how many new people who weren’t associated with the program have gone online to become an Operation Lifesaver Authorized Volunteer,” Rose says. "We're getting younger people to volunteer and expand our ranks.”

Moreover, OLI has stepped up its use of social media, with profiles on Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest and Instagram.

"Our Facebook 'Likes' are over 6,000 — and we were over 3,000 in 2012, so we've doubled. And Twitter, which we started new in 2012, went from a few hundred to over 2,000 followers," she says, adding that many state Operation Lifesaver chapters have increased their use of social media, as well.

Another way OLI educates the public on rail safety is by discouraging photographers, advertisers, television programs and other forms of media from using images that show trespassers walking or standing on railroad property.

"I write a lot of letters," Rose says.

One of her latest targets is Kiloo Games, the Denmark-based maker of "Subway Surfers," a video game app in which cartoon characters surf on railroad tracks and try to dodge oncoming trains. Rose has written to Kiloo officials, asking if they would consider modifying or taking down the app. The company has not responded to her request, she says.

Not all of Rose’s letters go unanswered, however. OLI recently entered into an agreement with the Professional Photographers of America (PPA) to inform photographers about the danger associated with taking photos on railroad property without the railroads’ permission.

"We have a real problem with photographers on rail rights of way," she says. "People love to take a selfie on a railroad track. Or, we'll see a professional photographer take photos of families, high school classes — even a baby in a basket — on the track.”

OLI’s other accomplishments in 2013 included an increased role in the transit-safety arena. Rose served on a committee to advise the Federal Transit Administration on proposed new transit-safety rules.
Kari Anne Brewton, her husband Andrew M. Brewton and their son Justin Brewton have utilized the train for the last six years.

Kari works at MCJROTC, in Quantico VA and at the Pentagon and commutes from Fredericksburg/Leeland Road to Quantico and Crystal City.

“My entire family has benefited from the use of VRE and my six year old son loves the Santa Train every year. I get to relax and I don’t have to worry about I-95 traffic and most of the time the trains are very dependable. VRE provides those who do not want to brave the traffic on I-95 to get up north and also for tourists that might want to visit north of Fredericksburg and not drive.”

www.VRE.org
Commuters on I-395 and 95 now have a new web tool designed to make their daily trips a little easier. The Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT) recently launched new features for commuters on its 511 mobile app and website at http://www.511virginia.org/nova.

Users can click the direct link or the "Northern Va. I-95/395" tab from the main page to see:

* Current travel times in the HOV lanes versus the regular lanes
* Park-and-ride locations, number of spaces and by what time a lot is typically full
* Schedules and bus stops for PRTC buses
* Real-time travel information for VRE routes
* Whether the HOV lanes are open to traffic or closed

The enhancements are part of VDOT's program to ease congestion during construction of the 95 Express Lanes. The new web tool is Virginia’s first integrated corridor management (ICM) initiative - technologies used to enhance multi-modal transportation operations in the I-95/395 corridor - to launch.

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