RIDE Magazine | October 2016

25 YEARS AND COUNTING

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Reflecting on our Past, and Looking to the Future.

This year marks our 25th year of service. It is this type of milestone that prompts us to reflect on the incredible progress we’ve made as a leading public transportation solution in the region, as well as our place in the greater picture of US railroad history.

VRE’s history began long before the first trains pulled into the stations at Fredericksburg and Broad Run in the summer of 1992. Dedicated local and state officials struggled to overcome a number of hurdles that spanned decades – they were visionaries who understood the immense impact a commuter rail system would have in the Northern Virginia area. Without their efforts, VRE would not have been brought to life. In this spirit of railroad history, this issue of RIDE dives into a piece of railroad past … one that shares ties to the Richmond, Fredericksburg and Potomac Railroad.

In our first year of service, approximately 5,800 riders per day utilized our system. Some of those early adopters remain with us, and to those of you, we offer a special “thank you.” Over the past two months, we have enjoyed hearing stories from many long-time riders who have witnessed the fleet nearly double and the ridership increase to an average of 20,000 passengers daily. Our riders share in our past, present and future – making them an integral part of VRE’s overarching story. Please enjoy learning about one of your fellow passengers on page seven, Janice Tessier, a long-time rider and friend-to-many.

Over the past two and a half decades, our team has diligently worked to expand service, acquire new equipment, improve on-time performance, and support the needs of a growing ridership. Some of our major accomplishments include:

- The Quantico Creek Bridge in 2007 which added a second track and the capacity for a third track – eliminating a single-track bottleneck
- The purchase of new locomotives in 2010 that greatly increased reliability and improved fuel efficiency, and allowed us to sell and plan for the retirement of the older locomotives
- Coordination with local jurisdictions to provide additional parking at VRE stations, notably with the Manassas and Burke Center garages
- The Spotsylvania station opened in November of 2015, and provides greater accessibility for riders at the southern end of the Fredericksburg line as well as eases parking and traffic at the Fredericksburg station

As we approach our 25th anniversary, we not only look back to where we were, but also to what we will be 25 years from now. We pride ourselves on forward-thinking and detailed planning. Though a number of our projects span several years from inception to completion, we are making tremendous progress. Our System 2040 Plan guides us in the decisions and work necessary to achieve the growth needed for future VRE system demands.

We hope you join us in our 25th anniversary celebration this year by following the upcoming historical stories in RIDE and stopping by to see us at our Meet the Management events.

Sincerely,

DOUG ALLEN
Chief Executive Officer
Virginia Railway Express

Access RIDE online at www.VRE.org/RIDE

PLEASE RECYCLE THIS MAGAZINE
Several important factors go into our budgeting environment. Since VRE is a government service and not a for-profit business, we don’t “make a profit.” We rely on government funding (Federal, State, and Local) to assist with capital costs as well as about half of our operating costs. As we budget for the upcoming fiscal year, we follow a policy established when VRE was created, in which VRE riders pay for at least half of the cost to operate our service. So as operating costs rise, it is necessary to increase fares to maintain this ratio.

**Fare Increase and Budgeting FAQs:**

Q. Why are operating costs going up for the same amount of service?

A. The cost of operating our trains is tied to several contracts and agreements that naturally include annual adjustments. These contain costs for operating and maintaining the trains; maintaining the stations and parking lots; and access fees to the host railroads for use of the tracks and train dispatching services. Each of the contracts for these services has annual increases built into them (based on CPI or other similar inflation indexes). Because of these higher contracted rates, it costs us a little more to provide the same level of service each year. To continue to meet this need, and our obligation to cover at least half of the costs with fare revenue, the Operations Board has set a policy of considering fare increases of 3% every other year, which averages about 1.5% per year. In the alternate year, they also have a policy of considering a jurisdictional subsidy increase of 3%, although for FY17 the jurisdictional subsidy was increased by 5%.

Q. Fuel prices are low. Why hasn’t that decreased your operating expenses?

A. The cost of fuel is a relatively small part of our operating costs. In fact, it only accounts for about 6% of the Operating Budget.

Q. Ridership is up. Why isn’t the extra fare revenue enough to cover any increases in operating expenses?

A. Over the past several months we have seen an increase in ridership. As you can imagine, we attribute most of that to Metro’s SafeTrack surges. The SafeTrack program is nearing completion, and while we expect some folks who tried VRE during this period to continue riding, it is likely that overall ridership may go back to pre-SafeTrack levels during FY18.

Q: Why are Amtrak Step-up ticket prices increasing by $2?

A. VRE currently pays Amtrak for each Step-up ticket per the terms of our Operating Access Agreement with them. The terms of that agreement will increase our payment to Amtrak by $2 per ticket in the upcoming fiscal year.

**Public Comments & Presentation to Operations Board:**

As we conclude the public comment period for the proposed fare increase this summer, we want to thank everyone who took the time to attend one of the public meetings or send in a comment. We will compile all comments and provide them to our Operations Board before they deliberate on the fare increase proposal. If you were not able to attend one of the public meetings, you can find the presentation materials at: vre.org/service/fares.
RAILROAD HEAT RESTRICTIONS: MINIMIZING THE RISK OF SUN KINKS

If you ever wondered why trains have heat restrictions, it’s because steel rails expand and contract as temperatures rise and fall.

Track inspectors are sent out when temperatures rise very quickly or when temperatures become extreme, which can cause the rail to rapidly expand. These inspectors look for signs the track is under extreme compression and in danger of kinking out to the side. Signs include wrinkles in the track and disturbances of the ballast. If warranted by the inspection, our host railway companies will lower speed for trains, whose heavy weight can set the steel molecules in motion and increase the potential for “sun kinks.”

Additionally, when an actual “kink” or extremely high tension is found in the track, that section is taken out of service, repaired, and then put back in service. That is why there are times we are limited to one track during the summer as repairs are made.

At VRE, safety is our highest priority. VRE trains must follow the lower speeds when heat restrictions are in place. If hot or severe weather is in the forecast, please keep in mind that your commute may be affected. Keep up-to-date with service alerts from VRE through Train Talk, www.vre.org and through VRE’s Twitter and Facebook pages.
Though we live in an area rich in American history, many of us have become so accustomed to walking by century-old buildings every day that we rarely stop to appreciate the stories they each have to tell. On the way to their cars each evening, Fredericksburg station riders pass the single-story brick building that is 406 Princess Anne Street and now home to the offices of George Washington Regional Commission: FAMPO, GWrideConnect, and FRCoC. Have many noticed the unique shape of the building, or wondered about its close proximity to the tracks?

Fredericksburg originally served as a frontier river port for the 18-century settlers of Spotsylvania County and their neighbors to the west. During the Industrial Revolution, the Richmond, Fredericksburg and Potomac Railroad (RF&P) was chartered, and provided the area with railroad infrastructure by early 1837. The original Fredericksburg train station was a ground-level stationhouse, and the area adjacent to the tracks was once Fredericksburg’s industrial and commercial corridor.

Concerned about rapid and safe transport of goods during World War I, the Federal Government established the Railway Express Agency (REA) in 1917 to utilize existing railroad for small package and parcel transit. The REA expanded rapidly with small offices across the country, and with railroads as a catalyst for then-modern concepts like standardization of time through time zones and accelerated delivery, many came to depend on the REA for their shipping needs.

The Fredericksburg REA office was constructed around 1927, replacing a two-story wood frame American Railway Express Depot structure and taking on an odd shape as a result of a spur line that branched off the main rail line. Fredericksburg’s REA office, or better known as the “Railway Express Depot,” used the nearby RF&P tracks until REA dissolved in 1975.

The “Fredericksburg Railway Express Depot” is one in a series of railroad buildings that represents an era of unprecedented national interconnection. The RF&P railroad company buildings in Fredericksburg – both the passenger and large freight station constructed in 1910 – included architectural detailing reflecting the prosperity and dominance of the railroad in the national economy. The Railway Express Depot however was more utilitarian and traditional for a train/warehouse district, although the building exhibits excellent brickwork. The exterior of the building remains relatively unchanged, and the interior has been renovated within the city’s historical guidelines.

The Railway Express Depot is recognized as a contributing building to the Fredericksburg Historic District. The Fredericksburg Historic District is listed on both the Virginia Landmarks Register and the National Register of Historic Places. VRE not only shares a connection with the building through our friends at GWrideConnect, but also through the railway line. RF&P was chartered to run from Richmond via Fredericksburg to the Potomac River, and grew to stretch 113 miles with branches in Richmond, Louisa, and Rosslyn. RF&P was succeeded by CSX after the RF&P ceased operating in 1991.
COMMUNITY EVENTS

**Hometown Thursday Concert**
May 4, 6:30pm - 8:30pm
**Old Town Square**
The first in a summer series of shows by local bands. Free event for all ages. For the full schedule with links to the bands, visit: fairfaxva.gov

**Manassas Airshow**
May 6, 10am - 4pm
**Manassas Regional Airport**
Skydivers, helicopters, jets, and aerobatic aircraft. Free admission. Donations accepted to support the airport’s three charities.
Learn more: www.manassasairshow.com

**Revolutionary War Weekend**
May 6 - 7
**George Washington’s Mount Vernon**
One of the largest Revolutionary War re-enactments in the region. Battle re-enactments and themed activities. Plan your trip at: mountvernon.org

**Art After Hours**
May 11, 6pm - 8pm
**Belmont**
Free. Music on the lawn and free gallery tours. Beverage tickets and food purchases extra.
Additional information at: tourstaffordva.com

**Virginia Renaissance Faire**
Weekends May 13 - June 11
**Lake Anna Winery**
Visit a charming country village with nobles, fools, merchants, peasants, minstrels and dancers. Entertainment, food, and vendors. Visit varf.org for more.
SPOTLIGHT ON JENNIFER YOUNG
COMMUNICATIONS SPECIALIST

Ever call VRE for assistance? Now you can put a face to the friendly voice on the other end of the line. Meet Jennifer Young. Jennifer has been in customer service for 15+ years, and 13 of those years specifically in the transportation industry. Prior to joining VRE four years ago, she assisted travelers at Washington Dulles International Airport. “We had frequent flyers at the airport, but we have far more regulars at VRE – some dating back to the beginning of service 25 years ago,” said Jennifer. “You develop a rapport with many. It’s great being able to develop those connections.”

Jennifer handles incoming calls, reduced fare applications, mobile app questions, and walking riders through SmartBenefits allocation. “Recently I spoke with a woman whose employer didn’t give much guidance about SmartBenefits. I ended up helping her with a reduced fare application, SmartBenefits allocation, and the mobile app. It can be very complicated, but that’s what we’re here for.” She went on to say, “I enjoy helping people in general, but of course it’s especially nice when people make you feel appreciated. The woman actually went the extra step and sent me a thank you card!”

She is a former Manassas line rider, and she adds her experience riding the train to a long list of things she loves about VRE. “I can honestly say that I love my job. I love helping our riders, and there’s something different every day. Plus, the environment and co-workers are great,” she told us happily. Often handling upwards of 40 calls a day, she turns her phone on at 6:00 am. She smiles from the time she begins handling those early morning calls until she is wrapping up for the day.

In addition to her love for her work, Jennifer is also passionate about cooking. She doesn’t like following recipes, and would rather experiment. When asked what she would make for a dish named after the VRE, she said, “I would make a jambalaya, because it’s a great mix of seasoned and sweet … and it’s a whole lot of fun!”

A proud single mom of 15-year-old twin boys, she proclaimed of her Taekwondo-loving household, “A family that kicks together, sticks together!” She herself is a first-degree black belt, and her sons are second and third-degree respectively. In fact, her parents will even be testing for their second-degree in May.

This disciplined martial arts mom is ready to help you with any VRE questions you may have. She asked that we print her number and encourage people to call her for step-by-step instructions on allocating SmartBenefits or just with general inquiries. Expect her to be patient and cheerful throughout your conversation.

Contact Jennifer: 703-838-5446 • jyoung@vre.org

BOARD VOTES TO ADVANCE GHX ALTERNATIVE
BROAD RUN TERMINUS EXPANSION ALTERNATIVE TO MOVE FORWARD

The VRE Operations Board unanimously voted on March 17th to advance the Broad Run Terminus Expansion alternative of the Gainesville-Haymarket Extension Study. This alternative was recommended by the VRE staff and endorsed by the Prince William County Board of Supervisors.

Based on the in-depth Gainesville-Haymarket Extension (GHX) study Phase A analysis, Alternative 1 (Broad Run Terminus) was determined to be the most cost-effective means on a cost-per-rider basis, and able to meet ridership growth on the western end of the Manassas Line. In 2040, this alternative will yield about 5,100 more daily passenger trips compared to a “no-build” alternative. It also will allow for capacity expansion along the Manassas line by expanding storage at the Broad Run train yard, and potentially realigning the current station and adding new parking at the Broad Run station.

VRE Chief Executive Doug Allen stated, “I am pleased VRE conducted a thorough technical analysis with robust stakeholder involvement to provide the Operations Board and Prince William County with the information they needed to reach their conclusion.” He added, “With the decision, the Board demonstrated its vision to ensure VRE remains a critical component of the Northern Virginia transportation system well into the future, while at the same time being committed to ensuring investments provide the most value for the taxpayers’ dollars.”
RIDER SPOTLIGHT: JANICE TESSIER
PURVEYOR OF THE VRE "HAPPY HOUR"

Although her trip is only 50 minutes each way, Manassas Line rider Janice Tessier fondly calls her VRE commute her “happy hour.” Janice gave over 100 reasons why riding the VRE is the best part of her day, all related to the relationships developed with other passengers. An array of sugary treats from homemade apple pie to Japanese Banana Twinkies often set the stage for countless conversations between these friends. “Home remodeling, dating, pets, music, apple picking, wineries, museums, the opera,” she listed. “Births. Birthdays. BBQs. Weddings. Deaths. Retirements. Farewells. We share it all.”

On a single train ride, Janice may have more than 10 friends gathered. One thing that particularly brings them together, is the VRE book club Janice helped bring to life by first trading thoughts on the ending of Gone Girl with Jessica, a fellow rider. Soon their chats expanded into other Jillian Flynn books, and then to other passengers and about other authors.

Her circle of VRE friends is not limited to just riders. “I’m not really sure I remember the events leading up to Ben, our conductor, warming his way into our commute and our lives. Some say he shared with us his favorite book, others say it was just a natural progression,” commented Janice. “Either way, if you know Ben and his big cheerful personality, you know how he loves his passengers and how you are instantly drawn to him.” She also shared a memory from an afternoon years ago, when she told her boss she couldn’t work late as she had to catch the 3:57 train. Her boss asked if there was a later train, to which Janice replied, “Yes, but today’s my conductor’s birthday and I have a present to give him.” She laughed and added, “If my boss knew Ben, he would’ve joined us in celebrating.”

It is almost difficult to count the total number of Janice’s train friends. When Meet the Management came to Crystal City one afternoon, she walked up to the table and announced, “You’re not going to believe this, but my train friends who get on down there (pointing to DC) put in orders for cookies.” The VRE rep then handed her a full box of cookies and said, “For your train friends and more.” Janice proceeded to walk up and down the train car offering cookies, compliments of Meet the Management, to everybody who would take one.

“For a single girl living more than 400 miles away from her closest relatives, VRE has been a very special part of my life,” Janice said sincerely. “You’re not just train friends, you are my train family. I would love to expand my VRE family, but please, save me a seat!”

Janice’s shout outs: Beverly, Terry, Jessica, Dayton, Van, Michael, Luke, Will, John, John, John, Dave, Dave, Dave, Rick, Mark, Mark, Tuck, KC, Sandy, Nancy, Tammy, Leslie, Carol, Amber, Maria, Susan, Susan, Bob, Bob, Kevin, Karen, Steve, Ed, Tim, Tim, Billy, Tom, Homer, Donna, Dale, Pat, Pat, the Good Looking ‘Silver-Haired Man,’ and of course, Roufis and Ben, and even Ron, and Phil. And many whose names she doesn’t know yet.
COMING SOON: MEET THE MANAGEMENT 2017

Each spring, VRE management visits several stations during the evening service. This event series – or “Meet the Management” – is our annual in-person display of appreciation for our riders, and as such, we will be supplying refreshments and small take-aways. We invite riders to engage in an open dialogue of comments, questions, and even complaints.

We will be celebrating VRE’s 25th anniversary this year, as well as designating a staffed table on the platforms to specifically discuss pertinent topics. Stop by for a small treat and stay for the constructive conversation.

2017 MEET THE MANAGEMENT SCHEDULE

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<td>L’ENFANT</td>
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<td>CRYSTAL CITY</td>
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<td>MAY 31</td>
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<td>JUNE 7</td>
<td>FRANCONIA/SPRINGFIELD</td>
<td>WI-FI ON TRAINS</td>
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In addition to our Meet the Management sessions, we are also planning small platform events this summer to discuss station-relevant subjects.

ADDITIONAL PLATFORM EVENTS

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