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Grins that stretch from ear to ear is pure Americana. That's exactly what you'll find at our Shores Club, just 30 miles from DC. Come discover the riverfront community with award-winning homes, golf, hiking and biking trails, an upcoming VRE train stop, future schools and a big rec center that families will absolutely love.

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In the Northern Virginia/Washington, D.C. area, we have a variety of transportation options. Commuters can take VRE, drive, carpool, bus, bicycle, use Metrorail, or, like in so many cases, utilize multiple modes of transportation to get to work during the week. And even with so many options at their disposal, commuters across our region are particularly savvy at finding the option (or options) that works best for them. Once in a while, however, events require commuters try something different. That is certainly the case for many people this summer with the arrival of the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority’s “SafeTrack” program, which aims to improve Metrorail safety and reliability along the system through “Surges” of intense rehabilitation work along each line.

During the first SafeTrack surge, which focused primarily on the Orange and Silver lines, VRE experienced a roughly 6 percent overall ridership increase, including a one-day bump of 9 percent. The third and fourth surges, scheduled to occur July 5-18, impact Metrorail riders on the Blue and Yellow lines who travel between Northern Virginia and D.C. because of service shutdowns between Braddock Road and Reagan National Airport and then again from Reagan National Airport to Pentagon City.

Whether you are a regular rider who has enjoyed VRE for years or a new customer who discovered VRE during Metro’s SafeTrack work, I am pleased to have you aboard and invite you to learn a little more about (or refresh your knowledge of) our service. You can find train schedules, the answers to our most frequently asked questions, daily performance stats, on-board policies, safety information, and much more information at VRE.org (a mobile version of the site is also available on your smartphone). One of our top priorities at VRE is to provide up-to-date service information to our riders. To get this information, sign up for our Train Talk alerts and follow us on Facebook and Twitter. Additional information on all these platforms can be found in this issue of RIDE.

Lastly, both new and seasoned riders should be sure to look into VRE Mobile, which allows customers to buy and utilize VRE tickets right from their smartphones. Using the mobile app allows users to bypass ticket vending machines entirely to purchase any kind of ticket they’d like at any time and validate those tickets within the app. Users may split payment between two separate sources (two credit cards for example) for greater flexibility. You can even apply your SmartBenefits to your fare via the VRE Mobile app and store your information there for future purchases.

Thank you for riding VRE. We hope you enjoy the service and continue your journey with us.
LEARN THE ABCs OF VRE

Whether a long-time VRE user or a customer trying the service out for the very first time, there are always new things to learn about VRE. And while it isn’t possible to cover everything within one issue of RIDE, here is some useful background information about the service and how it operates today.

WHAT IS VRE?

VRE is a joint partnership of the Northern Virginia Transportation Commission and the Potomac Rappahannock Transportation Commission and is overseen by an Operations Board. The Operations Board consists of Commission members from each jurisdiction that supports VRE, as well as a representative from the Commonwealth. The Operations Board oversees the management and operation of the service and acts as an advisory board to the Commissions.

RIDERSHIP

Total VRE ridership has tripled since its inception in 1992 and grown by a third over the last decade alone, averaging close to 19,000 trips per day. VRE attributes this growth to strong on-time performance (VRE held a 91 percent on-time performance last year), excellent customer service, and new and reliable equipment. Continued growth is expected for these reasons as well as population increases in the areas served by VRE, a strong regional economy and increasing highway congestion.

TRACK OWNERSHIP

The railroad lines on which VRE operates are actually owned and maintained by three entities referred to as “host railroads”: Amtrak, Norfolk Southern and CSX. VRE has agreements with these host railroads to run commuter service during specific windows of each weekday. This means VRE service has to be closely coordinated with other freight and passenger trains running on the same tracks.

COMMUTER RAIL SERVICE

Because VRE service is geared towards commuters, VRE trains mostly run northbound in the mornings and southbound in the evenings. VRE runs two separate lines—the Manassas Line runs between Bristow, Virginia (at the Broad Run station) and Washington, D.C. (running parallel to I-66). The Fredericksburg Line starts in Spotsylvania in the morning, also taking passengers to D.C., and returning them in the afternoon and evening (mimicking the path of I-95).

EXPANSION PLANS

Since VRE ridership has grown so much over the last couple decades and more demand is projected in the future, VRE has produced a long-range plan called VRE System Plan 2040. Some of the priority projects for VRE are expanding the Long Bridge across the Potomac River and completing the third track on the Fredericksburg Line. VRE is also currently studying enhancements to the Manassas Line service that include a possible extension to the Gainesville–Haymarket area of Prince William County. Other projects to help increase capacity and efficiency include adding station platforms and improving existing ones, adding parking at stations and expanding storage yards.

TRAIN OPERATORS

Since 2010, VRE has contracted with Keolis to maintain and operate VRE trains. Just last year, VRE extended its contract with Keolis for five more years (with an additional option for another five years after that).

MISSION STATEMENT

The Virginia Railway Express (VRE), a joint project of the Northern Virginia Transportation Commission and the Potomac Rappahannock Transportation Commission will provide safe, cost effective, accessible, reliable, convenient, and comfortable commuter-oriented rail passenger service. VRE will contribute to the economic development of its member jurisdictions as an integral part of a balanced, intermodal regional transportation system.

Be sure to visit VRE.org for additional information, including the VRE System Plan 2040 which reports where VRE stands today and how it plans to address future needs through various projects.
YOUR TICKETS ARE JUST A TAP AWAY
The free VRE Mobile app makes buying and using VRE tickets and passes easier than ever. Download it for iPhone® or Android™ today, and you can enjoy all this:

- No paper tickets to keep track of
- Single-Ride, Day Pass, Five-Day, Ten-Ride, Monthly and Amtrak Step-Up Passes delivered and stored straight to your smartphone
- No need to stop at a vendor location, ticket vending machine or wait to receive your tickets or passes by mail
- Pay with a credit card, PayPal®, or SmartBenefits® with the ability to split payments
- The ability to purchase tickets at your convenience, then validate them directly from your smartphone before boarding

LEARN MORE AT VRE.ORG/MOBILE

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VRE UPDATE

Riders should start saying their goodbyes to VRE’s decades-old legacy cars over the course of the next few months.

VRE has been working hard to update its fleet in recent years. Just last March and April, VRE put seven new Gallery IV cars into service, allowing VRE to phase out more of the old legacy cars which currently run on Fredericksburg Line train sets 312, 314, 313 and 301. The new cars aren’t just pretty—they allow for greater reliability and more comfort for riders.

Nippon Sharyo, the company that is manufacturing these new railcars in Rochelle, Ill., has been hard at work to have the next five Gallery IV cars delivered right on schedule in February 2017 and in service for riders to enjoy shortly after that. These new cars will allow VRE to retire the remaining legacy cars from service, giving all riders the same high-quality experience during their commutes. Each new car features 132 seats, a restroom, an automated announcement communication system, a wheelchair lift, and is ADA-compliant.

On a regular service day, VRE utilizes 13 locomotives and 84 passenger cars to operate 13 trains of varying lengths for a total of 32 revenue trips (those carrying passengers). Currently, VRE’s fleet consists of 20 MP36PH-3C Locomotives, 86 Gallery IV cars, two Gallery I cars and five Gallery II cars (these Gallery I and Gallery II models are the legacy cars). All Gallery IV cars are relatively new, as the oldest of this model was put into service in 2007. The useful life of these cars is 20 years.

And while next year’s delivery allows VRE to retire the remaining legacy cars from service, there won’t be a break from new car production. In fact, VRE exercised an option to purchase nine additional Gallery IV cars scheduled to arrive in 2018 and 2019. Once completed and delivered, VRE will have an even 100 Gallery IV cars in operation. Those cars will be used to lengthen some of VRE’s shorter trains, adding additional capacity.

There’s still some time before the new cars are delivered, but by the look of things, riders should be prepared to wave goodbye to the last of the legacy cars by early spring.
An open letter for railroad safety

Dear Community,

I'm a railroad locomotive engineer by profession so I often get to hear discussions about walking or photography on the tracks. It invariably grabs my attention because I see it happen day after day.

So, for the sake of those of you who may not have met me or heard my take on this, I want to share a bit because the topic is so important. I'll try not to leave out the usual arguments so let's run down the list of some that I've heard:

You're young, free, daring, edgy and making a (tired) visual statement. Yeah, that's you alright. "YOLO" - you know. Risk is what you do when you're young and nothing can interrupt that.

You're a 'professional' photographer and you "know how to do this safely." You say you'll hear the horn or "feel" vibrations? Uh huh.

"Didn't you ever do anything stupid when you were young?" - Nope, never heard that one before. Of course I did crazy things when I was young. We all do. That's how a smart, strong and wise adult is created. But did I fool around on train tracks? - No! Did I throw stones at a grizzly bear? - Not likely! Did I play with loaded firearms? - Not at all! It seems like there should be some lessons you don't need to learn the hard way just because you're young.

But, you know what? Because you are young, beautiful and living on the ragged edge of adventure someday I might have to watch that wonderful, meaningful self you're so proud of die right in front of my office chair. Yeah, right where I work...

Somebody with so much to offer the world and so much yet to discover disappears from sight under the nose of my locomotive. All that you are and everything you can be, disappears. And all of those you know and love are left to wonder why.

You'll have a great memorial. People will cry inconsolably at your premature death and the loss of such a talented, bright young person. And they'll be right. But us train crews will see your face for the rest of our lives.

It's not a mystery to us. Trespassing on tracks is surely more dangerous than a great many things out there. It is, in fact, always against the law.

And, while it's true that there are always certain risks inherent in anything and everything, the difference is, and this is the important part; you have to willingly put yourself in harm's way to be killed by a train on the tracks. That's why we never call them accidents and I never call them victims. They choose to be there.

So in the meantime, please stop believing I'll be able to stop in time or that you'll hear the train coming, or that you can get past the gates before the train comes. Understand that to me it's like putting a bullet in the cylinder and giving it a spin before you put the barrel to your head...

And making me watch.

This letter was written by Harold Brill, a veteran railroad locomotive engineer and committed volunteer for Operation Lifesaver Inc. (OL)

OL is a national volunteer-based organization committed to railroad trespass prevention and grade crossing safety.

For more information, visit www.oli.org
SPOTLIGHT ON VRE

MEET MAGGIE KASPERSKI
MARKETING AND STRATEGIC COMMUNICATIONS ADMINISTRATOR

Maggie Kasperski always knew her passion for writing and relationship building would lead her to a career in communications and public relations. But if you’d told her 10 years ago that she would develop a passion for transportation that would mold her career, she would never have believed you.

Beginning her position at VRE just last month, Maggie is responsible for VRE’s communications and marketing efforts including RIDE Magazine, VRE’s monthly CEO reports, social media, blog postings, news releases and other forms of outreach. And while she’s only been in the position a few short weeks, she is already excited at the opportunities she sees to connect with the public in her role.

“One thing I’ve already noticed is the high level of engagement with VRE riders,” Maggie said. “I’m excited to get the chance to grow that relationship and bring them the information they want and need in a clear, fast and creative way.”

VRE isn’t Maggie’s first transportation-related position. She spent nine months staffing a congressman who served on the House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure and spent three years as a communications specialist at the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials. Her most recent position was a departure from transportation, as she worked as a media representative at the National Association of Realtors®.

“I found that while I was very happy where I previously was, I missed dealing with transportation issues,” Maggie said. “That realization was big for me and brought me straight to VRE.”

Maggie’s favorite day on the job thus far was the day she toured the system.

“Checking out our mid-day storage situation, looking at some of our stations, and riding the train all the way down to Spotsylvania with VRE operations staff was so incredibly helpful,” Maggie said. “After all, I had better know this system inside and out if I’m going to be writing about it and answering rider questions on social media.”

Maggie holds an M.S. in public relations and an M.A. in international relations from Syracuse University as well as a B.S. in public relations from the State University of New York at Fredonia. Outside of work, Maggie enjoys spending free time with her family and friends and exploring Northern Virginia and D.C. Originally from the Buffalo area, she is an avid Buffalo Bills fan and catches every Syracuse basketball game she can.

SAVE TIME & AVOID HASSLE WITH VRE MOBILE

A little over a year ago, VRE became the first transit system in the greater Washington, D.C. area to offer a mobile app that allows customers to pay their fares and skip a Ticket Vending Machine (TVM) altogether, providing greater flexibility and convenience for riders.

VRE Mobile, a free download from the iTunes App Store and Google Play, allows VRE customers the ability to map out their trips and purchase whatever ticket option works for them, whether they need a monthly pass or a ticket for a single ride. Utilizing the tool allows VRE customers to purchase tickets at their own convenience and save time by completely bypassing station TVMs. The app gives users the option to use two different payment options, such as splitting the cost between two different cards, and can use a rider’s SmartBenefits.

To date, the app has been downloaded more than 22,000 times on Android and iOS systems.

Aside from ticket purchase, VRE Mobile comes in handy when it comes time to validate a ticket. Validating a ticket, the process of applying the value of one ride from a ticket to that current trip on a train, is mandatory before starting a trip. When in a rush to catch a train, it can be difficult to stop at a machine to validate that ticket. Failure to do so, however, could result in a summons to court and a hefty fine. With VRE Mobile, riders can validate right on their smartphone, again bypassing the TVM altogether. Riders who buy and validate tickets via VRE Mobile then need only show the conductor their phone upon ticket check.

Learn more about VRE Mobile and all you can do with the app at VRE.org/mobile.
Summer Fest 2016
Saturday, July 16, 11 a.m. to 10 p.m.
Adventure Brewing South
3300 Dill Smith Dr.
Fredericksburg, VA 22401

Adventure Brewing South is kicking off its new location (the former home of Blue & Gray Brewing) by hosting Summer Fest 2016, which features live music, outdoor-themed vendors and exhibitors, craft brews and ciders, and a silent auction that benefits Fredericksburg-based watershed advocacy non-profit Friends of the Rappahannock.
www.fredericksburg.com

9th Annual Del Ray Music Festival
Saturday, July 23, 3 p.m. to 8 p.m.
Pat Miller Neighborhood Square
Corner of Mount Vernon Ave. and Oxford Ave.
Alexandria, VA 22305

The 9th Annual Del Ray Music Fest will feature local musicians including Anthony Pirog, Wanted Man, Jack Kilby & The Front Line and Elroy Jenkins. Musicians will perform on two stages at Pat Miller Square right in the heart of Del Ray.
www.visitalexandria.com

Ghost Hunting 101
Friday, July 30, 7 p.m. to midnight
Ben Lomond Historic Site
10321 Sudley Manor Dr.
Manassas, VA 20109

Ben Lomond Historic Site is partnering with East Coast Research and Investigation of the Paranormal (ECRIP) to host a paranormal seminar and investigation. Participants will first attend a seminar with discussions about various theories and current techniques. Afterwards, participants will work alongside members of ECRIP in a paranormal investigation. Space is limited and reservations are required.
www.pwegov.org/history

Annandale’s National Night Out
Tuesday, August 2, 6 p.m. to 9 p.m.
Annandale Shopping Center
7042 Columbia Pike
Annandale, VA 22003

Annandale will celebrate National Night Out with a free outdoor movie and popcorn, glitter tattoos, refreshments, martial arts demonstrations, raffles and children’s activities, all to promote community involvement in crime prevention and neighborhood camaraderie. All attendees need to bring is a lawn chair.
www.fxva.com

RIDE SAFELY ALL SUMMER LONG

Now that summer is in full swing, many people may change their regular commute and travel patterns, which makes it an even more important time to stay aware of your surroundings.

While traveling during the summer, be on the alert for any suspicious behavior or bags. This may include loose-fitting clothing, sweatshirts, vests or jackets in hot weather conditions.

Suspicious objects may include aerosol spray cans, anything emitting a strange smell or gas, or carry-on items such as large backpacks. Report any bags, boxes, or packages left unattended – especially if partially hidden or in unusual locations. It’s also worth noting any gym bags or luggage that seem to weigh more than normal, or if anyone places a package in one compartment, and then leaves for another.

If you see something, say something.™

It can be difficult to know what something suspicious looks like, but trust yourself when something doesn’t feel quite right.

Notify a police officer or transit personnel or call the police at either 1-877-4VA-TIPS or 911.

Save your local police phone number into your contacts for quick future reference. For more information about how to ride safely all year long, visit SecureTransit.org.

This ad was purchased with funds provided by the US Department of Homeland Security.
n a perfect world, commuters would never have to think about emergencies, service disruptions, or other unpleasant issues pertaining to their daily travels. Unfortunately, it is important to prepare for those instances because they do happen. That is why it is vital for Virginia Railway Express riders to know where to get the most accurate and up-to-date service information.

One fast and convenient way to get information and updates is to sign up for VRE’s “Train Talk” alert system, which sends messages directly to your phone and/or email. To sign up, visit VRE.org and click “Train Talk” from the homepage. From there, users may select the specific news they would like to receive. For example, riders may only want messages that pertain to their particular VRE line or the stations they pass through. Others may want non-urgent information on a regular basis, such as upcoming planned schedule changes or event information.

Another way riders may get information is to connect with VRE via social media. Utilizing Facebook and Twitter allows VRE to not just send out important service information but also directly communicate and interact with riders.

On Twitter, VRE sends out urgent alerts, highlights any news that pertains to the service and its riders, connect with riders who might have shared something with VRE’s account (tagged VRE in a photo of their commute, for example), and answer questions related or directed to VRE. These messages are always short, however, as Twitter only allows for 140-characters per tweet. Follow VRE on Twitter (@VaRailXpress) to be a part of the discussion.

Facebook is another platform that allows customers to interact with VRE, although it is not limited by a character count in the way Twitter is. VRE uses Facebook to provide more in-depth information about the system. VRE’s Facebook page (@RideVRE) currently provides information about upcoming events (such as board meetings, Meet the Management schedules and online chats with VRE management), displays photos either from VRE or shared by riders, hosts video clips, and highlights interesting stories and news of interest to VRE riders.

VRE encourages riders to join in on the conversation and find a venue that works for them. In addition to these platforms, riders can always visit VRE.org and email gotrains@vre.org with any questions.
WHICH BAG LOOKS SUSPICIOUS?

DIFFICULT CHOICE, RIGHT?  
(The answer is ALL OF THE ABOVE)