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I am so pleased to announce some great news about two VRE projects that have been in the works for a long time.

VRE’s original system plan has always included a train station at Potomac Shores (then called Cherry Hill). VRE has partnered with SunCal, the developer of the Potomac Shores community, to build a new station at no cost to VRE. Potomac Shores station is planned to open for service in 2017 (see article on page 8), although the opening date is predicated on VRE making other improvements on the Fredericksburg Line.

I am also happy to announce that Spotsylvania County has the property access it needs for VRE to start construction of the station and for the County to build a 1,500 space parking lot. VRE has been hard at work constructing the third track necessary for Spotsylvania to become the southernmost terminus on the Fredericksburg Line. Spotsylvania station should open for revenue service in 2015.

Constructing a world class commuter rail system is not an easy task. It takes supportive partners like CSX Transportation and Norfolk Southern for us to provide the services we offer. It also takes determined commitment on the part of the VRE Operations Board members and the jurisdictions they represent. Without their unwavering support and financial commitment to improve VRE, we simply could not offer new or improved services. Finally and of utmost importance, is the role the Virginia Department of Rail and Public Transportation has played in the development of VRE. The Commonwealth has been instrumental in our success.

Thanks for riding VRE and we look forward to making system improvements as we strive to be North America’s best commuter rail system.

DOUG ALLEN
Chief Executive Officer
Virginia Railway Express
VRE RECEIVES AWARD FOR FIRST RESPONDER TRAINING EFFORTS

On June 17th, VRE was awarded the Gold Level for Security Program Excellence in Commuter Rail from the American Public Transportation Association (APTA) at its annual rail conference; high honors from our public transportation industry peers, many of whom operate much larger systems. The award recognized the aggressive and comprehensive first-responder training program which VRE and Keolis conducted with our host railroad partners for the benefit of personnel at Fairfax County Fire & Rescue as well as Fairfax County Police.

The program featured classroom and hands-on field training at our yard facilities for all ranks of fire, EMS and police personnel, on railroad safety, access protocol, passenger safety and comfort topics and rail equipment safety features. This led up to a full scale response simulation where first responders were faced with realistic obstacles such as darkness, wooded and steep geography typical of our normal operating environment beyond our stations. In addition, personnel were tasked with properly requesting the host railroad to stop train movement on adjacent tracks and working with VRE crews to survey the train and quickly attend to passengers who needed assistance.

Simultaneously, we injected an evacuation of our headquarters building from which our system communications originate. Our communications and operations staff had to think quickly and travel to one of our redundant command sites to regain communications with the railroad, fire and rescue as well as our passengers. The goal was to make sure that if any of our passengers ever needed the services of these teams, the response would be swift, safe and as efficient as possible for everyone involved, and regardless of the circumstance the rest of our system would be well informed and accurate information could be relayed to those who needed it.

This raises an important point. While we are incredibly humbled to have received this recognition, there were likely two-dozen or more newly-hired first response personnel hired into agencies around our service area since the time we held this exercise. These new-hires weren’t part of this training and may at some point be called to assist a passenger aboard one of our trains. We will want to ensure that these personnel can be trained and knowledgeable when faced with a situation where they find themselves around active railroad track and equipment. Therefore, we will continue to aggressively pursue and improve regular safety and railroad response training, information sharing, and other resources to all of the public safety and security organizations in the region. VRE is committed to your safe travels!
When Gary Skinner ran for a seat on the Spotsylvania Board of Supervisors back in 2008, he promised county residents one thing — he would bring the Virginia Railway Express to Spotsylvania. He has delivered on that promise.

After campaigning locally and working with neighboring jurisdictions, Spotsylvania successfully joined the VRE system in 2010.

“Our [Benjamin Pitts and my] campaigns were run basically on VRE and if we didn’t get elected we probably wouldn’t have VRE because we wouldn’t have had the majority of the vote on the board,” Skinner said. “I got on the board and said, ‘this is important to us.’ I had to convince people that VRE had something for everyone.”

Spotsylvania residents had been riding the system for years, hopping on at stations in Stafford and Fredericksburg, but not paying the subsidy VRE member jurisdictions are required to pay, Skinner said, noting it was that subsidy that once deterred his county from joining.

“They were calling us slugs,” he said. “And people were worried about the 2.1% tax, thinking it would skyrocket our price of gas. It didn’t affect anything and they found out we were getting more than $3 million back a year to be used for transportation projects.”

About 960 people currently ride out of Spotsylvania but he expects that number to grow to about 1,200 once the station opens, he said. And, being the first stop on the Fredericksburg line, his constituents are guaranteed seats on currently crowded trains.

As part of the agreement to join VRE, a third track has to be built along with the station. The track construction is well underway and the county has just acquired property access for the station. Skinner said they hope to award a contract for the construction of the station’s parking lot in August. Once complete, the station will include 1,500 new parking spots as well as restrooms.

The station will also be an economic boon for the county, Skinner said. Once open, he would like to see VRE add more North and South-bound trains, the latter of which could entice businesses to move into Spotsylvania.

“I think we need to build data to see how many people ride and then see what agencies are willing to move into Spotsylvania,” Skinner said. “But we need to have North and South-bound transportation to show them people won’t have to necessarily move to get to work.”

Skinner, who works at SAIC, served in the US Marine Corps for 20 years and is a decorated veteran of Desert Storm. Prior to joining the Board of Supervisors in 2008, Skinner served on the Spotsylvania School Board. Currently, he is an active member of the county’s transportation committee and with the Chaplin Youth Center, which is for at risk and court-involved youth in need of out of home placement.

When not serving the community, Skinner is a NASCAR fan who enjoys spending time with his two sons and wife of more than 30 years.
“Slow” Order is an order given to railroad engineers to reduce their speed over a given section of track. Slow orders are usually imposed by railway dispatchers for sections of track that are in some way deficient, or when there is a requirement to perform maintenance.

When maintenance workers wish to work under dispatcher protection without a designated “window” of time where no trains are allowed to run, they typically post flags at either end of the section they will be working on and a slow order is posted on the track.

**HEAT RELATED SLOW ORDERS:**

Heat restrictions are slow orders given to railroad engineers to reduce their speed over a given section of track usually between the hours of 1:00 pm and 7:00 pm when the ambient temperature is predicted to be 90 degrees or more. Passenger trains must operate 20 mph slower than their maximum operating speed.

Trains ride upon two ribbons of steel. This steel has been metallurgically engineered to be incredibly strong and stable, yet incredibly flexible. This flexibility, which serves well in the creation of curved track and during periods of exceptional cold (when rail remains strong) can be a double edged sword. When many miles of rail are subjected to intense heat, the rail becomes incredibly hot. The stone track-bed and the consistent lack of shade do nothing to help this problem either. Since the rail is firmly anchored into the wooden railroad ties, it has little room to move, which helps to keep trains moving at great speeds stable. Heat causes expansion, and the superheated rail can increase in length measuring in several inches over a great distance. Since there cannot be any gaps in a rail to allow for this expansion, pressure builds up in the rail as it tries to expand lengthwise but can’t. With no room to expand, the rail can bow. It sometimes pulls the wooden ties right out of the stone track-bed and creates a sharp curve. When this occurs, the track has what is known as a “sun kink” or “heat kink”. These occur without warning and if unchecked, can create a very unstable operating situation for a train.

When railroad maintenance officials see that conditions may be right for such a situation, they issue heat warnings and our trains end up traveling slower, because higher speeds add to the friction which adds to the heat. When trains slow down, there is less friction and therefore less heat which reduces the bending of the rail.

**FLOOD RELATED SLOW ORDERS:**

The most common delay during stormy weather is caused by wind and heavy rain, with both CSX and Norfolk Southern having policies in place that deal with severe weather. If the National Weather Service puts out a flash flood warning, for example, CSX’s policy states that trains can go no faster than 40 mph; NS’s policy states that no train can go faster than 20 mph. Slowing down enables the engineers to safely navigate through areas with limited visibility. Most importantly, should deep water cover the tracks, or if a tree has fallen or a section of track is washed out, a slower rate of speed will allow the engineer to slow or stop the train before it is too late.

**TRACK WORK RELATED SLOW ORDERS:**

Like delays on the interstate due to road construction and maintenance, railroads also experience delays due to yearly maintenance, track upgrades and tie replacements to keep the railroad in safe working order.

CSX and Norfolk Southern, the host railroads who own and maintain the tracks we operate on, frequently run geometry cars to test the rails to make sure that everything is safe and stabilized. When they find a problem, they fix the tracks and rail-bed. After the work is complete, speed restrictions are placed along the repaired track until proper train tonnage passes over to make sure the ties, rail and/or rail-bed has settled properly.

While Slow Orders may mean that a train will arrive at its destination a little later than usual, at least it will arrive there safely. Safety is always our top priority.
**KEEPING COOL IN THE SUMMER HEAT**

Eat advisories, ozone warning days, and humidity are plentiful this time of year. There are some strategies you can employ that really can take the heat off and can make a big difference in how comfortable you are as you wait on the platform or find yourself in a crowded train.

1. Cool and plentiful water really is your best friend. Be sure to bring along a water bottle, and consider toting it in a small, insulated bag. Drink the water even if you don’t feel thirsty, because thirst kicks in when one percent to two percent of body weight is already lost.

2. Look into small, battery operated hand-held fans and misters sold in many drugstores and online to give you a cooling break.

3. Wear lightweight, light-colored and loose-fitting clothing.

4. Consider wearing wool. Yes, wool. Word has it that lightweight worsted wool—one that weighs no more than eight to nine ounces per yard—is best during the summer and ultimately matters more than the color of the fabric.

5. Ditch jackets and pants with linings for the summer, as the lining can trap heat in hot weather.

6. Seek shade, even if it means carrying a light umbrella or parasol to help ward off the worst of the sun’s rays. Wear a hat with a wide brim.

7. Don’t avoid the outdoors completely: going outdoors regularly can help build up your heat tolerance.

The summer heat is not something to ignore, so please take precautions and don’t overdo it. Our trains are air conditioned, most platforms are shaded, and the walks from train to car are not long. Please, take it easy when the mercury climbs to dangerous levels!

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**MARY JUNKERSFELD**


Although the trains come and go at Quantico and the hustle and bustle of commuters and travelers continues, something is different at the Quantico VRE station. After almost five years of caring for the needs of VRE commuters, Amtrak travelers, and the local Quantico populace, Mary Junkersfeld passed away on Monday, June 16th.

Mary worked as manager of the Quantico Station coffee shop for the last two owners and her position as a VRE ticket vendor brought her into daily contact with VRE customers. “Worked” is not really an accurate description of what Mary did – she dedicated her every effort to helping each individual that came into the station. Whether it was a confused commuter in a hurry, a lost out-of-town Amtrak traveler, a young Marine who needed someone to provide a friendly ear, or a local resident interested in current Quantico happenings, Mary was going to make sure that before they left the station, their needs were met. These people were all her friends. The really special thing is that she didn’t spend that effort with everyone because it was good for the railroad business or because it would increase the coffee shop’s profit margin, Mary did it because she believed that it was the right thing to do. She wanted to leave a small piece of her heart with each and every individual that she came in contact with.

Mary was also a cat lover. One of her favorite missions in life was caring for the 40 or so feral cats that live adjacent to the VRE station parking lot in Quantico. On that Monday morning, she left the train station to feed the cats – as she always did. She didn’t return promptly and when locals went to look for her, they found her lying in the grass. Efforts to revive her were unsuccessful.

On Thursday, June 19, there was a memorial at the Quantico train station. A large crowd of Mary’s friends and family came to say goodbye to her. There was the laughter that comes with fond memories and there was also a lot of crying. Mary touched a lot of lives and many of her friends just wanted to recount stories about her generosity and caring. Mary will not soon be forgotten – and, yes, something is different at the Quantico VRE station.
Commuters in Northern Virginia will have a new option for travel on the VRE available to them when a new rail station opens in the heart of a master-planned community that’s being developed in Prince William County.

Situated on the western banks of the Potomac River in Prince William County, Potomac Shores is a luxury resort community being developed by SunCal, one of the largest real estate development companies in the U.S. that specializes in large-scale, mixed-use master-planned communities.

Potomac Shores is a new waterfront community that is being designed as transit-oriented development (TOD) due to its convenient access to the future on-site VRE station and a variety of transportation options. The station will be in the heart of the community’s town center and a short walk for many Potomac Shores residents. The rail station will be located along the waterfront district’s bluff-top promenade overlooking the Potomac River, and commuters will take an elevator or stairs down to the boarding platforms to catch VRE trains.

The design and planning process for the new station is presently underway, with the design review by VRE, CSX Transportation and Prince William County expected to be completed by late spring 2015. After a bid is selected, the start of construction is anticipated to begin in the third quarter of 2015, with the opening of the station planned for summer 2017.

The town center’s TOD design will help create a vibrant, livable community. This involves the creation of a compact, walkable community that is centered around the rail station, thereby allowing for less dependence on automobiles. Key TOD concepts include: a pedestrian-friendly design; a commuter rail station; a mixture of uses in close proximity including office, residential, retail and civic uses; high-density, high-quality development within a 10-minute walk from the train station; the easy use of bicycles and scooters as daily support transportation systems; and managed parking around the town center and rail station.

Potomac Shores Development covers 1,920 acres and features nearly two miles of shoreline, 1,000 acres of preserved hardwood forests and streams, traditional Virginia Tidewater architectural designs and a new Jack Nicklaus Signature Golf Course. The community will offer a town center, a planned marina and waterfront village, a resort hotel, the new rail station and a corporate campus. It will also feature a private 10,000-square-foot recreation center, two public schools, more than a dozen sports fields and courts, 10 miles of trails and over 3,800 residences in walkable neighborhoods. The first phase of homes are being built by NVHomes and Ryan Homes. For more information about life at Potomac Shores, visit www.potomacshores.com.
SPOTLIGHT ON KEOLIS

MEET JAMES “CHIPP” BOONE JR.

W
ith more than 100 years of railroad history in his blood, James “Chipp” Boone Jr. was destined to become a man of the railroad. Born and raised in Richmond, VA, Chipp began following his dad around the rail yard from a young age. Five of his family members worked for the railroad and he dreamed that one day he would do the same.

On August 5th, 1992 Chipp made his dream a reality when he went to work for Amtrak as an assistant conductor. With 18 years of service under his belt, and as the VRE was transitioning rail operations in 2010, Chipp was recruited to help bring his veteran experience to the team. After stints in South Carolina and Mississippi, it was a welcome homecoming for the Virginia native. “It was good to be back home. This is where I am supposed to be.”

At age 49 and a former football coach, Chipp sees management of the railroad like the football field. “Everybody who works with me is in their 20s. Getting to know the employees and be able to ‘pass down the knowledge’ that was handed down to me from my father and family is a great opportunity.” As Senior Operations Manager, Chipp is currently mentoring three managers as well as handling day-to-day operations. “We have a young group of managers and they’ve really grown and matured and it’s great to see.”

During his time with VRE Chipp has seen the ridership grow from 5,000 to more than 20,000 commuters. Chipp enjoys every aspect of the railroad and makes it a point to be involved in as much as he can. “My whole life has been on the railroad and one aspect I really like is helping to grow the business.” Chipp looks forward to the day when his son, who is currently finishing his rail apprenticeship, will join him on the tracks. When he’s not on the rails, Chipp is an avid outdoorsman and enjoys hunting, fishing and surfing.

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→ **Use of e-cigarettes are not allowed on our trains.**
Smoking is allowed on the north end of the platform, but it is limited to only the first 100 feet.

→ **No queuing in the aisles.**
Please do not stand in the aisle until everyone has de-boarded from the station stop before yours.

→ **No talking in the Quiet Car.**
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