CELEBRATE THE NATIONAL CHERRY BLOSSOM FESTIVAL
Reason #48
A community to grow on.

There’s a lot to love about our well-appointed Tidewater homes—welcoming families to Potomac Shores. Choose from five new neighborhoods by Ryan Homes and NVHomes. Traditional and main-level living with indoor/outdoor floorplans. Over a dozen home designs with two to seven bedrooms. And golf or forest views. It’s riverfront living only 30 miles from DC. Where every home comes with an exquisite community. Upcoming VRE station on track.

CALL OR VISIT THE GREETING HOUSE: 855-808-6051

P.S. I love you
Safety and security are the highest priorities at VRE. We are always striving to develop creative and effective ways to reinforce these priorities and improve the quality of service we provide to our passengers, employees, contractors and the communities we serve.

We host classroom and field training programs with first responders on rail safety, familiarize them on our rail equipment and collaborate on security information. These programs foster improved communication, further develop responder capabilities and enhance relationships between the regional railroad community and law enforcement officials (see more about our recent training with K-9 units on page 5 of this month’s RIDE).

We also collaborate on matters of security and best practices in security initiatives with our freight and passenger railroad counterparts and government security personnel all over the U.S. and Canada through a committee established by the Association of American Railroads.

One of the most important elements of a safe and secure system is passenger vigilance. VRE has joined with our region’s transit agencies for the “If you see something, say something™” campaign, which provides direction on detecting and reporting suspicious behaviors or objects around transit stations and equipment. As a VRE passenger, your participation in the security process is critically important and we depend on you to stay alert to suspicious behavior and objects. If something doesn’t seem right on the train, please alert a VRE crewmember. If you observe something at a passenger station or along the tracks anywhere, call 911. It is important to notify the police immediately and provide as many details as you can. Contacting VRE first will delay the process.

We continue to be vigilant and focused on the constantly changing security landscape and thank you for your assistance to ensure a safe and secure VRE. You can learn more about VRE’s safety and security program at www.vre.org/safety.
THE NATIONAL CHERRY BLOSSOM FESTIVAL STARTS MARCH 20TH

The National Cherry Blossom Festival, Washington’s greatest springtime celebration, reminds us of the gift of the cherry blossom trees and the enduring friendship between the people of the U.S. and Japan.

The 2016 Festival is from March 20 – April 17 and includes three spectacular weeks and four weekends of events featuring diverse and creative programming promoting traditional and contemporary arts and culture, natural beauty and community spirit.

This year the National Cherry Blossom Festival Parade®, along Constitution Avenue, will occur on Saturday, April 16 featuring giant colorful helium balloons, elaborate floats, marching bands from across the country, celebrity entertainers and performers. From the National Archives to the Washington Monument, spectators will be delighted by the pageantry and excitement that is the nation’s premier springtime parade.

To learn more about the 2016 Festival and view a schedule of events, visit nationalcherryblossomfestival.org.

▲ National Cherry Blossom Festival celebrates spring in Washington.
VRE ENHANCES CUSTOMER SERVICE AT UNION STATION

VRE is partnering with Amtrak to better serve the passenger experience at Union Station. As part of this effort, Kim Combs has been named VRE’s Station Manager at Union Station.

Kim’s role is to assist VRE passengers and relay track information. She is in direct contact with Amtrak’s Commuter Control Center and VRE’s Communications Center to ensure on-time departures and communicate delays and track changes. She is also focused on safety and security, working with Amtrak and VRE staff on safety initiatives.

Kim started in her new role in December and has been training with VRE. She is now at the VRE gate area to assist riders on all afternoon and evening trains leaving Union Station.

This new Amtrak position was created based on VRE customer feedback to manage and direct passenger and train-related activities involving Union Station operations.

“Because I am a seasoned commuter myself, I can relate to the concerns of commuters,” said Kim. “I enjoy assisting VRE riders with their commutes and serving as their liaison at Union Station.”

Previously, Kim served in Commuter Operations at Amtrak, working on customer service, on-time performance and passenger safety for MARC and VRE.

Kim has enjoyed interactions with VRE passengers.

“VRE riders are very appreciative and helpful to one another,” said Kim. “I’m so impressed with their knowledge of VRE’s system and operations.”

Kim lives in Northern Virginia. She enjoys indoor and outdoor activities and sports plus spending time with family.

Imagine your home, totally organized!

Custom Closets, Garage Cabinets, Home Offices, Pantries, Laundries and Hobby Rooms

40% Off Plus Free Installation

40% off any order of $1000 or more. 30% off any order of $700 or more. Not valid with any other offer. Free installation with any complete unit order of $500 or more. With incoming order, at time of purchase only.

Call for a free in home design consultation and estimate

800-293-3744 703-330-8382

www.closetsbydesign.com Follow us

Licensed #VA 2705068445 #MD 131690 #DC 420214000077 and Insured
2016 © All Rights Reserved Closets by Design Inc.
VRE’s motto of “A better way. A better life.” holds true by providing economic and environmental benefits to our region.

40% of VRE riders drove alone before using VRE.

100,000,000,000

Riding VRE removes more than 100 million vehicle miles from our region’s Interstates annually.

1.6 to 3.8 million personal hours saved annually by riders using VRE.

87% of VRE riders receive a transit subsidy or pre-tax payment for public transit.

Fredericksburg to DC, cost per mile annually

VRE's existence has saved $1 billion in costs associated with highway widening

49¢ vs 14¢

Driver vs VRE rider

Small sedan driver commuting 28,000 miles per year, 2014 AAA Driving Costs Study
VRE HOSTS K-9 TRAINING

At VRE, safety and security are always our top priorities. A key component to this drive is fostering strong relationships and building effective training and orientation programs for the law enforcement agencies in our service area.

VRE hosted a law enforcement K-9 training event, organized by the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments (MWCOG) at our Broad Run Maintenance and Storage Facility in January. At the training, VRE made our railcars available and partnered with more than 70 dog teams from over 20 different law enforcement agencies representing many of the Northern Virginia jurisdictions participating in MWCOG. The purpose was to continue to sharpen the skills of dogs with a variety of detection specialties and to keep their handlers familiar with the layout of our railcars during their real-world patrol events.


“This K-9 train event, along with frequent training drills, classroom modules, uniformed and non-uniformed patrol support are aimed at keeping our passengers and other stakeholders as safe as possible,” said Greg Deibler, VRE’s Manager of System Safety and Security.

SAVE MONEY WITH TRANSIT BENEFITS

In December, legislation was passed to increase the transit commuter tax benefit from the previous amount of $130 to $250 retroactively for 2015 and increasing to $255 for 2016. The legislation makes the parity between transit and parking benefits permanent.

Many employers allow their employees to set aside up to $255 in pre-tax dollars each month to spend on public transportation, up from the previous level of $130 a month. The program saves commuters money because they don’t pay state or federal taxes on the dollars set aside, up to the new limit.

Federal government employees can now get up to $255 per month to pay for transit through SmartBenefits®.

Contact your benefits coordinator or tax advisor for more information.

Additionally, you don’t need to get your tickets through the mail anymore if you use SmartBenefits®. You can now purchase tickets on VRE Mobile. Learn more at www.vre.org/mobile.

Piper Lane Visibility Improved

Good news for riders who use the Broad Run Station!

Prince William County (PWC) Department of Transportation crews have cleared the brush and trees on the east corner at the intersection of Piper Lane and the Broad Run VRE Parking Lot Access Road. Through your feedback, VRE and PWC became aware of drivers’ limited range of vision to the east/left when making a right turn onto Piper Lane to leave Broad Run station.
VRE UPDATE

VRE GHX ALTERNATIVES TO BE PRESENTED

Initial alternatives for train schedules and locations of passenger stations for the Gainesville-Haymarket Extension (GHX) of the Manassas Line will be presented at the community meeting on Wednesday, April 27, 6–8 p.m. at Gainesville Middle School (8001 Limestone Drive, Gainesville, VA).

VRE is studying a range of alternative train schedules that would be implemented in conjunction with the extension. They include more frequent morning and evening service to Alexandria, Arlington and DC; express service to the DC core area; and all day, rail “shuttle” service between Haymarket/Gainesville and Alexandria that would provide a connection to the Metro system.

Three general station areas in the study corridor were presented at the November community meeting. These areas were identified based on regional development patterns and potential for supporting the development of transportation centers in the GHX corridor. More specific station locations are being identified based on physical feasibility. Ideal locations will be located along the existing tracks with adjacent land suitable for station parking, with good access to local roadways and convenient bicycle and pedestrian access. Protecting environmentally sensitive land will be a priority.

After gathering feedback on these initial alternatives and the findings of the technical analysis from the public and other stakeholders, a detailed evaluation of the most feasible alternatives will be conducted before recommending a specific schedule and set of station locations for the proposed Manassas Line extension.

The GHX team continues to meet with interested stakeholder groups, gather public comments, and respond to general questions and concerns. To schedule a project briefing for a local community organization, submit questions or share comments, please send an e-mail to ghx@vre.org. For more information about the VRE GHX project, visit www.vre.org/ghx.

KATIE CRISTOL JOINS VRE BOARD

VRE’s newest Operations Board member is Katie Cristol, representing Arlington County. Katie grew up in the region and has a strong understanding of how vital public transportation is to our economy and reducing road congestion.

Katie is interested in smart growth, transportation alternatives and reducing the number of single occupant commuters. Serving on the Northern Virginia Transportation Commission and as the liaison to the Arlington County Transportation Commission, she is focusing her attention on our region’s transportation. Katie is excited to work with VRE Operations Board members to expand VRE’s service and capacity, as part of VRE’s System Plan 2040.

“Because of the capacity challenges on I-395 in Arlington, VRE plays an important part in getting people in our corridor to and from work,” said Katie.

Arlington’s Crystal City Station is the busiest destination station in Virginia for VRE. With much development going on in the Crystal City area, Katie looks forward to serving as the connection to VRE from the Arlington County Board.

“Smart growth is crucial to Arlington and as Crystal City redevelops, having VRE as a transportation option is a major asset in reducing traffic,” said Katie.

Katie was elected to the Arlington County Board in November 2015. Katie moved to Arlington early in her career, attracted by the vibrant arts and culture, walkable development and sense of community engagement. She and her husband, Steve, live in the rapidly-growing Columbia Pike corridor with their dog, Bear.

Katie is also an education policy advisor, partnering with district, states and nonprofits across the U.S. on strategic planning, resource allocation and community engagement. She holds a public policy master’s degree from Princeton University, and a bachelor’s degree from the University of Virginia.
SPOTLIGHT ON KEOLIS

MEET NICHOLAS WAGNER

For Nicholas Wagner, every day at VRE is exciting. After being encouraged by a close friend and mentor at VRE, Nicholas joined the Keolis family in August of 2015 and has only scratched the surface of his interest with the railway.

Nicholas previously worked as a concrete pump operator and mechanic for a concrete company in the nearby area. Now Nicholas enjoys his experience as a Qualified Mechanical Person, working to inspect and ensure safety standards are met. He appreciates the opportunity to work in an environment that enables him to continue learning on a daily basis, while providing a service to the community he lives in.

Nicholas uses his skills in electrical work to secure and inspect locomotives, train mechanics and maintain motors that help keep service disruptions to a minimum and, most importantly, keep passengers safe. The daily challenges of the position and general learning curve of working in the railroad industry have motivated him to continue learning new skills and pursuing new opportunities with Keolis.

One of the most rewarding parts of his job is being able to work with a great team at VRE. He likes the VRE staff’s dedication to their employees and the opportunity to grow within the industry. In fact, Nicholas is currently in training to become a conductor.

His crew at VRE have been incredibly welcoming and never ceases to provide adventure during his day.

“I work with really great people and it’s always enjoyable to go to work,” said Nicholas.

In his free time, Nicholas is pursuing a degree in Business Administration from Germanna Community College. He also keeps busy by taking on projects at home and in the yard. Nicholas prioritizes his family time and takes advantage of the proximity of his brother, who is currently studying at the College of William and Mary in Williamsburg, VA.

RIDE SAFELY ALL YEAR LONG

By now, the new year is in full swing and most of us are settling back into our daily routines. But no matter what month it is, it’s always the right time of year to stay aware of your surroundings.

While on your regular transit rides, be on the alert for any suspicious objects. This may include bags, boxes or packages left unattended – especially if partially hidden or in unusual locations. Other suspicious objects include aerosol spray cans, anything emitting a strange smell or gas or carry-on items such as large backpacks. 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.™

These bags or briefcases may simply be forgotten or discarded items, 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.
WASHINGTON UNION STATION EXPANSION PROJECT

Wednesday, March 30, 2016
Informational Forum

Learn more about the project elements that will form the station expansion design concepts.

Open House format: 4 p.m. to 8 p.m.
Formal presentations: 4:30 p.m. and 6:30 p.m.

Washington Union Station’s Presidential Room
(Located in the East Hall)
40 Massachusetts Avenue, NE; Washington, DC 20002

For more project information visit:
www.WUSstationexpansion.com

The Project Elements
Rail Infrastructure • Public Concourses • Parking, Bus, and Taxi Facilities • Retail Spaces • Public Open Spaces

The project elements will be assembled, in various configurations, to form concepts for the station expansion.

The Washington Union Station Expansion Project would expand and modernize Washington Union Station. The project includes reconstructing and realigning tracks, developing new concourse facilities, maintaining multi-modal transportation services, and improving and expanding infrastructure and other supporting facilities while preserving the historically significant station building.
RAIL TIME PUZZLES

SUDOKU

8 1 9
5 4
6 2
7 3
1 4
2 8
3 5
9 6

"Sorry, lad, but me pot o' gold is at the other end of the rainbow!"
WHICH BAG LOOKS SUSPICIOUS?

DIFFICULT CHOICE, RIGHT?
(The answer is all of the above)

REPORT ALL UNATTENDED BAGS AND UNUSUAL BEHAVIOR TO POLICE OR TRANSIT PERSONNEL.

1-877-4VA-TIPS

IF YOU SEE SOMETHING, SAY SOMETHING.
securetransit.org

Purchased with funds provided by the US Department of Homeland Security