

Virginia Railway Express

A commuter railroad serving Washington, D.C.

Matt Van Hattem

Virginia Railway Express GP40PH-2 V22 leads Fredericksburg Line train 307 across Quantico Creek in Quantico, Va., at 6:53 p.m. on May 23, 1997. *(Matt Van Hattem)*

Virginia Railway Express serves commuters in northern Virginia and Washington, D.C., with an 83-mile system comprised of two lines and 18 stations.

Service to Manassas began on June 22, 1992; service to Fredericksburg followed on July 20, 1992. Trains on both lines call at stations in Alexandria, Arlington (Crystal City), and Washington, D.C. (L'Enfant Plaza and Union Station).

VRE was formed in 1989, a joint creation of the Northern Virginia Transportation Commission and the Potomac and Rappahannock Transportation Commission, each of which elect commissioners to the VRE Operations Board, which coordinates operations and financing, with funds supplied by the two commissions. The Board also oversees the VRE Operations Group, which manages the service.

After selling \$80 million in bonds for initial funding, VRE's progress was stalled by protracted legal negotiations with Conrail over trackage rights and liability for the use of its line between Alexandria and Washington, D.C. A planned October 1991 start-up was delayed by labor strikes and material shortages at the Brazilian factory where 38 VRE coaches were being manufactured. Cars began arriving on the property in spring 1982.

Amtrak supplies VRE's crews, maintains the equipment, and operates the trains under contract. The tracks are owned and dispatched by Amtrak (from Washington Union Station south to the CSX junction at Virginia Avenue); by CSX between Washington and Fredericksburg (the former RF&P main line); and by Norfolk Southern between Alexandria and Manassas (the ex-Southern Railway main line).

VRE's original motive power consisted of ten RP39-2C's from Morrison-Knudsen, rebuilt from CSX GP40's with a Cummins head-end power unit. Later additions included rebuilt RP40-2C's from MK, rebuilt GP40PH-2's from AMF Transport, a GP40PH-2 purchased from North Carolina DOT, and former Amtrak F40PH's leased from Rail World.

Rolling stock consists of single-level coaches built by Mafersa - the government-owned Brazilian carbuilder - plus bilevel cars from Kawasaki, as well as double-deck gallery cars from Nippon Sharyo (delivered new beginning in late 2006) and Chicago's Metra, rebuilt by Northern Rail Car. The Kawasaki cars, introduced in January 2000, were tacked onto an order for identical equipment from MARC (Maryland Rail Commuter) and allowed VRE to begin phasing out 21 demotored ex-MBTA Budd Rail Diesel Cars in use since start-up. Two trainsets of F59PHI locomotives and Bombardier bilevels are on lease from Seattle commuter railroad Sound Transit.

VRE entered into a cross honor agreement with MARC that allows ticketed VRE passengers to travel free on reverse-flow MARC trains - trains leaving Washington Union Station before noon arriving in Washington after noon. Commuters with multi-ride VRE tickets may also board designated Amtrak trains making limited stops.

New commuters can request VRE's free new rider kit, which contains information on VRE schedules, fares, and services.

Trains operate Monday through Friday. There is no service on weekends. VRE trains do operate a limited schedule on selected holidays.

- Manassas Line. Weekday rush-hour service to the Manassas Broad Run/Airport, 35 miles from Washington. Limited reverse commute and midday service also provided. Serves 10 stations.
- Fredericksburg Line. Weekday rush-hour service to Fredericksburg, 55 miles from Washington. Serves 12 stations.

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