

***HISTORY OF THE  
VIRGINIA RAILWAY EXPRESS***

## INTRODUCTION:

By the early 1950's, what commuter rail service remained in Northern Virginia was abandoned. As summarized below, the idea for restoring commuter rail service on the tracks of the Richmond, Fredericksburg and Potomac Railroad and the Norfolk Southern Railway connecting Fredericksburg and Manassas to Union Station in the District of Columbia is certainly not new. When the Virginia Railway Express commenced service on June 22, 1992 to Manassas and July 20, 1992 to Fredericksburg, a long and sometimes frustrating process at last reached a successful conclusion.

Over the entire life of the Northern Virginia Transportation Commission (which dates to 1964) and the Potomac and Rappahannock Transportation Commission (1986), far-sighted and dedicated local and state government officials have struggled to overcome funding shortfalls and opposition from private railroads to initiate commuter rail service. At the same time, NVTC has helped to build the regional Metrorail system, conducted the highly successful demonstration of express buses on the Shirley Highway, and helped secure federal, state and regional funding sources that make it possible to build and operate the region's successful public transit systems. PRTC operates a heavily used commuter bus system and has expanded its boundaries to include new jurisdictions that previously had no involvement with public transportation.

The information reported below has been gleaned from the minutes of monthly NVTC meetings, from research reports and from discussions with staff, commissioners and consultants.

## CHRONOLOGY:

- 1964: Northern Virginia Transportation Commission created by Virginia General Assembly.
- 1965: Commission acts to oppose abandonment of Washington and Old Dominion Railway (current I-66 Corridor) because of its potential for regional transportation, and seeks financing to purchase the railroad for rapid rail and freight purposes, with emphasis on continued private enterprise operation.

During reconstruction of the Shirley Highway (I-395), Commissioners called for the use of the RF&P for experimental commuter rail service to relieve congestion. Self propelled, rail diesel cars (RDC's) were suggested, with service from outlying areas to connect with the planned subway system (Metrorail). Commission voted to conduct discussions with the RF&P and hire staff to accomplish feasibility studies. Second-hand, good condition RDC's were located.

A consultant (Transit Engineer for the City of Philadelphia) recommended initial service with RDC's and to accommodate future growth, diesel locomotive-hauled trains and ultimately electric trains. Initial service would include workday (and one Saturday) trips extending to Lorton and Woodbridge, and eventually to Quantico and Fredericksburg. Fares would be 3-cents per mile plus a 15-cent boarding charge (a trip to the current L'Enfant station from Franconia would be about 50-cents one way).

The Commission also considered a proposal from an Alexandria company for a monorail connection for National Airport/Crystal City/Pentagon, estimated as a \$5 million project.

Representatives of private bus companies (AB&W and D.C. Transit) agreed to cooperate in providing feeder bus service to commuter rail, using joint fares. A proposed train schedule was submitted to the RF&P. Federal agencies agreed to poll their employees to help NVTC estimate patronage.

The Commission urged Loudoun and Prince William Counties to join NVTC.

- 1966: Staff discussions with the RF&P continued. Possibilities of operating pooled service with the B&O Railroad, providing direct links between Franconia and Rockville, were explored. In response to many requests from Fairfax County residents, the scope of the study was expanded to include the Southern Railway.

Commissioners suggested that commuter rail services could be integrated into the planning efforts of the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority, which was created by Interstate Compact in this year.

The Commission voted to commend the RF&P for its "splendid cooperation" in preparing cost estimates and requested that the railroad help to provide a test train with borrowed RDC's from the B&O.

1967: Plans were discussed for a six-year demonstration of commuter rail service on the RF&P between Franconia and Washington, D.C., with one-third of the costs to come from local governments. Commuter rail service could be replaced by proposed rapid rail service at the end of the six-year period. NVTC requested that WMATA apply for a federal demonstration grant.

The Commission proposed a test network to be part of WMATA planning for three commuter rail lines: 1) RF&P, Franconia to D.C.; 2) Southern Railway, Alexandria to Sideburn in Fairfax County; 3) W&OD, and new and abandoned rights-of-way, between Crystal City and Herndon, Vienna and the City of Fairfax. Capital costs would be \$400 million, including rolling stock.

The Commission, noting great similarities between Northern Virginia and the Toronto Metropolitan Area, agreed to send observers to the initiation of GO-Transit commuter rail service.

The Commission approved the final report of its commuter rail consultant on feasibility of the RF&P project, and asked staff to continue discussions with the railroad to implement the service.

In a telegram to the Commission, the President of the RF&P objected to the proposal to bring freight and passenger trains from the W&OD right of way into Washington Terminal via the RF&P, and called the proposal "operationally infeasible." NVTC staff argued that about \$20 million would be needed to upgrade the W&OD, but WMATA's General Manager put the figure at over \$70 million, with an operating deficit per passenger of \$1.25, and service inferior to the rapid rail service proposed by WMATA's consultants for that corridor. He went on to warn that if commuter rail service is provided by NVTC in the RF&P corridor, a 10-year delay in providing Metrorail service would result since the corridor would be given a lower rapid rail priority.

1968: WMATA staff completed their evaluation of NVTC's proposed six-year commuter rail demonstration on the RF&P. Capital costs would be \$12.3 million, with a \$4.6 million salvage value. Operating costs would total \$14.7 million over six years, with passenger revenue less bus feeder costs totaling \$5.4 million. The net project cost was estimated at \$17 million, with trains at 15-minute headways over two-hour morning and evening rush periods, plus every 60 minutes mid-day, evenings and Saturday. The subsidy would be \$1.23 per rider, for about 9,000 work day trips.

WMATA staff warned that seeking federal funding for the six-year experiment could jeopardize funding for the proposed regional rapid rail system. Commissioners responded that it is wise to experiment with commuter rail service while new rapid transit lines are being designed, financed and built. The initial cost of commuter rail is minimal compared to rapid transit, and it can be integrated with rapid transit and extended outward as demand grows. Consultants informed the Commission that at least two years would be required to order rolling stock, build stations and parking lots, and rearrange tracks.

Following extended discussions and public hearings, NVTC voted to support a regional transit system for Northern Virginia with rapid transit in the three proposed commuter rail corridors, and only interim commuter rail service. In adopting the regional system plan, the WMATA Board omitted the W&OD corridor but called for a staff study of interim commuter rail services.

1969: A Senate Public Works Committee report reiterates the feasibility of commuter rail service along the RF&P. The Commission votes to urge WMATA to "redouble" its efforts to investigate the integration of commuter rail service into its rapid transit network, since the Franconia/Springfield Metrorail station is not planned to open until 1978. Commissioners continue to comment on the difficulties of simultaneously seeking federal funding for WMATA's rapid transit network and interim commuter rail service. The Commission forms a subcommittee to work with WMATA and the Transportation Planning Board to implement commuter rail service, and another to identify consultants to reconcile different conclusions of the Public Works Committee and WMATA regarding commuter rail costs.

1971: USDOT Secretary Volpe favors the use of existing rail rights of way for commuter rail service, and his staff undertakes a feasibility study of such service in Northern Virginia and Southern Maryland.

- 1972: A consultant's study (the fourth in five years) is presented to the Commission. Four daily trains would carry 2,500 passengers in Virginia (and additional service would capture 4,200 daily riders in Maryland). By comparison, NVTC's Shirley Busway demonstration was carrying almost 18,000 daily riders at that time. Capital costs would be \$9.5 million with used rolling stock, or \$16 million with new, and first year net operating subsidies would be \$500-750,000. It was reported to the Commission that the private railroads were not interested in undertaking such service.
- 1973: The Commission discussed \$1.8 million appropriated by Maryland for state purchase of a commuter rail system. NVTC supported similar action in Virginia and asked the WMATA Board to report to NVTC by January, 1974 on the concept of including commuter rail service in its Mass Transit Plan, as was proposed in pending federal legislation.
- 1974: An Amtrak official contacted the Commission, suggesting that it was possible to obtain funding (one-third from Amtrak and two-thirds from the District of Columbia) for a rail line from Frederick, Maryland to Richmond, permitting commuter service in Virginia as far south as Quantico.

Transportation Planning Board staff urged NVTC to work with WMATA, Prince William County and environmental groups to provide a concrete proposal for commuter rail service to include in TPB's plans and programs.

Prince William County officials developed a proposal for service on the Southern Railway and the RF&P after speaking with the Presidents of those railroads. Both were believed to have surplus locomotives and railcars that could be refurbished. The County intended to seek \$700,000 of grants to help buy rolling stock and finance parking lots and shelters. Operating costs would be met from passenger fares for the single daily round trip. Stops on the Manassas line would be at Clifton and Burke on the way to the District of Columbia. On the RF&P, service would originate at Quantico with stops at Woodbridge and one site in Fairfax County before reaching to the District. An anticipated 600-800 daily riders would pay \$1800 to \$2400 per day to cover the \$1200-\$1500 daily operating costs. If no capital grants were obtained and instead equipment were leased, fares would be \$3.00 per round-trip to cover the \$2.69 per passenger daily operating costs, assuming 90 percent of the available seats were filled.

The County did not seek NVTC's support or participation.

Maryland initiated commuter rail service on the B&O's Brunswick Line.

- 1978: Commission reviews status of commuter rail proposals. The RF&P is reported to be "totally disinterested" in any commuter rail service, in light of its heavy freight schedules. Also, difficulties in financing the Maryland system are cited as grounds not to proceed with further in-depth studies on this line. Commission contacts Southern Railway regarding possible service from Culpepper, Manassas and Burke Centre to King Street Metrorail in Alexandria.
- 1980: Two percent motor fuels tax legislation approved for NVTC.
- 1981: The State Rail Plan contains an element concerning commuter rail service for Northern Virginia. TPB asks NVTC to consider coordinating a further study, in light of indications from the Virginia Department of Highways and Transportation that the RF&P might now be amenable to allowing commuter rail service on its tracks. Proposals for additional passenger service to Newport News and Busch Gardens might lead to new opportunities for commuter service.

Commissioners commented on the results of earlier studies that identified high costs of refurbishing rolling stock and entry into Union Station, as well as the reluctance of private railroads, as stumbling blocks. Staff was directed to update previous studies and report back to the Commission.

- 1983: The Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments completes Phases I and II of a Northern Virginia commuter rail study, which analyzes travel demands, capital requirements, operations issues and institutional problems. Service contemplated in the study would link with outer Metrorail stations and not continue into the District of Columbia. MWCOG requested that NVTC and local governments express interest before Phase III of the study was undertaken. NVTC staff recommended against further study, citing opposition of the railroads and limited funds, among other reasons. Some Commissioners urged that the study proceed, since private conversations with rail officials indicated a willingness for further discussions.
- 1984: Third phase of state-sponsored commuter feasibility study completed by R.L. Banks and Associates, for MWCOG. It calls for service to King Street Alexandria using new equipment at a capital cost of \$45 million, plus contingencies. Using new locomotives and railcars, with service terminating at Alexandria, about 3,000 daily riders were expected. No new yards were contemplated. NVTC staff introduced the concept to the Commission, together with a Prince William County member of the House of Delegates. Staff was directed to report back regarding the terms and conditions required by the RF&P and Southern, since strong railroad opposition had doomed earlier commuter rail efforts.

1985: Monthly briefings are initiated for Commissioners by NVTC staff. VDH&T representatives reported that the RF&P was amenable to further discussions if no railroad subsidy would be required. In April NVTC staff proposed two-year experimental service with used railcars and locomotives and with reduced crews at significant savings. A two-year budget and five year pro forma financial statement was provided. Eight trains would operate during rush hours. An NVTC resolution endorsed the plan and provided staff's findings to a new Legislative Subcommittee on Commuter Rail, to be used to help determine the willingness of local jurisdictions and the Commonwealth to participate financially. Staff was directed to seek reduced crew size agreements to contain costs.

Staff was also directed to undertake a study of commuter bus alternatives. The commuter bus report reviewed existing studies, described current operations and proposed a two-year experimental budget comparable to that of the commuter rail experiment. For an 80-bus operation to carry 3,000 daily passengers in the two corridors, net costs for the two-year period would be \$12 million, or only \$5 million if leased buses and a private operator (at a contract rate of \$3.55 per revenue mile) were used. The net cost of the two-year rail experiment with used equipment was stated to be about \$8 million annually, plus \$2 million in start-up costs. A public meeting with citizens, government officials and private bus operators is convened by NVTC in Manassas to discuss the report and related issues.

Despite the difference in costs, staff and Commissioners were concerned that bus service would not attract single-occupant automobile drivers as effectively as would commuter rail service.

The Commission adopts a resolution approving a detailed scope of work to implement the commuter rail experiment.

NVTC staff accompany federal and state officials to examine used railcars and locomotives in Pontiac, Michigan and Toronto. Suitable used railcars cannot be located, although locomotives are readily available for rehabilitation.

Draft Master Agreement is negotiated with several local jurisdictions, and a basis for sharing costs and revenues is agreed to. Stations are identified. Discussions occur between NVTC and outlying jurisdictions regarding joining NVTC.

Meetings with organized labor provide promise that reduced crew sizes may be acceptable.

Robert L. Banks and Associates, Inc. is hired to provide overall project consulting. He reevaluates the NVTC staff budget and two-year operating plan and finds it sound. Consulting costs are shared by local jurisdictions in the service territory. Among the issues identified for further analysis is insurance.

Proposal to operate a single commuter rail train (Amtrak's Virginian) as a pilot is evaluated. The Urban Mass Transportation Administration promises a grant. NVTC arranges for Greyhound to accept commuter rail tickets on parallel routes. Congressman Parris sets a target of Labor Day 1986 for the start of pilot service using the Virginian. Amtrak refuses to allow the use of its insurance for the Virginian.

1986 Public hearings on state and federal capital grants for the project are held and grant requests are filed. Costs for the full eight-train demonstration are estimated at over \$7 million of net local subsidy per year. Amtrak is asked to provide a precise cost estimate for operating the schedule provided by NVTC staff, and for including NVTC's service in Amtrak's self-insurance program.

A March 17, 1986 Rail Rally arranged by a Commissioner drums up popular support using a group known as the "Friends of the Virginia Railway Express."

In June, Governor Baliles commits the Commonwealth to financial support of commuter rail in a speech to NVTC.

In July the Commission acts to proceed with the Virginian pilot, including sending the draft Master Agreement to the jurisdictions for further comment. Contracts with the RF&P and Amtrak are to be negotiated. Construction cannot proceed until UMTA provides a "letter of no prejudice" for its \$1 million grant for parking and platforms.

In September, the General Assembly, acting in special session, increases NVTC's transit assistance substantially.

Liability insurance problems prevent the pilot train from operating, since commercial insurance is not available at any price.

Work begins on establishing a self-insurance trust, with a \$5 million state contingent loan and \$150,000 grant.

Tillinghast Nelson and Warren is hired to perform a study of expected insurance claims for VRE service.

NVTC sought to store railcars owned by Go-Transit of Toronto (that had been used by MARC in Maryland) to give the Commission time to arrange for leasing, but liability insurance for storage could not be obtained.

Negotiations proceed with organized labor for a 13(c) labor protection agreement to permit receipt of a federal grant.

New legislation creates the Potomac and Rappahannock Transportation Commission with a two percent motor fuels tax to help pay for the commuter rail project.

Legislation that would have capped liability failed in the Virginia House of Delegates' Courts of Justice Committee; instead, NVTC's liability was clearly established so that it could agree to indemnify the railroads (i.e., issues of sovereign immunity were resolved).

Negotiations continued on terms of the draft master agreement.

1987: Chase, Maryland accident between a Conrail locomotive and Amtrak train calls into question the enforceability of Amtrak's no fault insurance plan. Conrail withdraws its support for the project despite two years of active cooperation. Ridership study completed by R.H. Pratt raises earlier estimates to almost 4,000 daily, depending on the amount of parking, and provides station-specific estimates.

VDOT provides \$3.2 million for capital and administrative costs.

VDOT agrees to undertake parking lot design and construction.

Work begins with several federal and District of Columbia government agencies regarding the proposed L'Enfant Station.

NVTC approves 13(c) agreements with organized labor.

NVTC and PRTC endorse the Master Agreement in concept.

A detailed financial plan is developed with financial advisors, bond counsel and underwriters. A Commonwealth Transportation Board resolution provides a stable financial basis for planned borrowing by NVTC. An insurance broker of record is selected by the Commissions.

Agreement is reached with Amtrak on an operating contract that provides modest crew reductions.

Drafting of specifications begins for the competitive procurement of rolling stock. Up to 38 railcars and eight locomotives are to be purchased. Proposals are received for locomotives that far exceed the available budget, so the proposals are rejected.

NVTC contracts with a team of consultants to study commuter bus alternatives in Northern Virginia and Prince William County undertakes a complimentary study also encompassing Manassas and Stafford County.

1988: NVTC and PRTC participate in a year-long effort to produce a transportation plan for Northern Virginia through the year 2010, including identifying commuter rail corridors.

The commuter rail project becomes known as the Virginia Railway Express with a distinctive, historical logo. At the insistence of the private railroads, a plan for a self-insurance-trust is developed that will provide up to \$100 million in liability protection for the participating railroads although the Commissions actuarial study indicated a level of \$30 million would be sufficient. The plan would be administered by the Commonwealth's Division of Risk Management.

Railcar and locomotive procurement continues. Staff establishes a target of March 1989 to start service but stresses that well over a year is needed from the time equipment contracts are signed. Locomotives are in very short supply and only one suitable bid is received. A railcar supplier is chosen and a losing bidder files suit. Since agreement with the railroads is not achieved on the indemnification plan the existing procurements are terminated and the suit is dropped. New procurements are initiated.

A detailed report on the status of all station sites is provided by Commission staff to local chief executive officers.

In an effort to encourage smaller properties to join together in negotiations with potential contract operators (such as Amtrak,) NVTC, PRTC, R.L. Banks and APTA co-sponsor the first annual North American commuter rail conference held in Rosslyn, (Arlington).

New Virginia legislation permits the Commissions to purchase off-shore captive insurance to help establish the self-insurance trust. Also, enforcement of honor system fare collection is enabled through new state legislation.

The Commonwealth's Division of Risk Management is assigned the role as the project's risk manager by the Governor and the General Assembly.

A quarterly newsletter called the Track Record is issued to an extensive mailing list.

Financial advisors, bond counsel and bond underwriters advise the Commissions on a financial plan and \$79 million debt issue to purchase 38 railcars and 10 locomotives while funding the Self-Insurance Trust.

All six participating and contributing jurisdictions endorse the Master Agreement and financial plan in concept. Fredericksburg decides not to participate.

Amtrak, the Southern Railway and the RF&P finally agree to the Self-Insurance-Trust, as does the Division of Risk Management, at a level of \$200 million per occurrence.

Amtrak's Graham Claytor presents the SIT plan to Conrail. Conrail refuses to consider the plan, since a federal judge has ruled in the case of the January 1987 Chase, Maryland accident that a similar arrangement was not enforceable.

A new chief executive officer, Richard Sanborn, takes over at Conrail. He agrees to work out an operating agreement with the Commissions but continues to insist that it be contingent on settling Conrail's concern that the SIT provide iron-clad coverage. After a month on the job, Mr. Sanborn passes away, and negotiations cease. Other remedies are considered by the Commissions, including ICC intervention and terminating service at Crystal City.

The Commissions begin another railcar procurement process, but are forced to suspend it indefinitely since Conrail will not agree to terms.

Commissions appoint members and VRE's Operations Board begins to meet monthly, and selects its officers.

UMTA provides a formal grant award of \$750,000 but requires the project to be implemented by October, 1989, or most of the grant will be lost.

1989: Southern Railroad provides a draft operating agreement which the Commissions hope to use as a model for RF&P and Conrail.

Negotiations are resumed with Conrail under the auspices of its new chief executive, James Hagen.

Federal legislation is introduced by Senator Robb and Representative Boucher to resolve Conrail's concerns with the enforceability of the Commissions' indemnification contract.

The Operations Board calls for the two Commissions to recommence the purchase of railcars and locomotives, issue the tax-free debt, and establish the SIT. The proposal calls for the Master Agreement and financial plan to be revised to include a contingency for service terminating in Crystal City, if Conrail will not otherwise cooperate. New patronage estimates are prepared for this option, employing a fare discount for passengers transferring to Metrorail to cross the Potomac River.

After refusing to consider enlarging its First Street Tunnel since 1985, Amtrak agrees to investigate the possibilities and the Commissions contract to do so. Enlarging the tunnel would permit high-capacity railcars to be used at significant savings to the project.

New Virginia legislation strengthens the Commission's powers to plan and operate VRE service. Protection of the assets of NVTC's members held in trust by the Commission is included in the biennial budget. Language clarifying terms by which Loudoun County would join NVTC is included in the Transportation District Act.

The Northern Virginia Transportation Plan is completed, and calls for doubling VRE service frequencies along existing corridors. A \$7 billion funding shortfall for highway and transit projects is identified, through the year 2010. NVTC leads a regional consulting effort to identify sources of funds. Fairfax County proposes that NVTC issue contract revenue bonds to fund completion of the Fairfax County Parkway.

In October, 1989 the Commissions vote to execute the VRE Master Agreements, Liability Insurance Management Agreement, and operating agreements with Amtrak, Southern Railway, RF&P, and Conrail (although Conrail will not execute the agreement until federal legislation is in force providing indemnification). The agreements are signed in a special ceremony and train ride on October 27, 1989.

1990: Loudoun County joins NVTC.

An architect/engineering consulting team is hired to design platforms and stations.

Following an exhaustive investigation of the low-bidder in the railcar procurement, the Commissions award the contract to Mitsui and Company (USA) Inc. and its Brazilian partner, Mafersa S.A. All railcars are due in 24 months, with sufficient railcars to start service due by October, 1991.

Staff pursues the purchase and rehabilitation of F10 locomotives from the MBTA in Boston, but Amtrak refuses to agree to operate the units. Instead, an award for 10 rehabilitated railcars is made to Morrison-Knudsen.

The Commission's \$79 million bond issue closes on February 7, 1990.

Fredericksburg and Manassas Park agree to join PRTC and become full participants in the VRE project. Discussions with Fauquier County officials are hindered by the refusal of the Norfolk Southern to entertain any extension of VRE service beyond Manassas.

The VRE Operations Board recruits a rail operations manager.

President Bush vetoes Amtrak's reauthorization including Conrail indemnification for VRE. Congress fails to override. Shortly thereafter, a new bill passes and is signed by the President. The Conrail operating agreement is then executed.

Fare collection equipment (40 units) is ordered from Schlumberger, to accept credit card transactions. Additional machines will validate tickets for the proof-of-payment system.

Ft. Belvoir officials announce plans to bring an additional 6,000 people to that location, and to use a connection to VRE to help relieve congestion. The Commissions did not consent to such plans.

Two new ridership forecasting studies are undertaken to confirm that sufficient rolling stock has been ordered.

A proposed constitutional amendment to allow the Commonwealth to issue pledge bonds for transportation projects is defeated in a statewide referendum.

The Americans with Disabilities Act is signed into law, requiring extensive modifications to stations and accessible rolling stock. The Commissions planned to provide accessibility with mobile lifts at each station.

Norfolk Southern proposes to retire 11.5 miles of track north of Manassas.

The Commissions initiate discussions with MBTA in Boston regarding procuring surplus, used stainless steel railcars instead of exercising the option for 14 new railcars from Mitsui.

The Commissions begin to discuss the VRE fare structure and related policies.

1991: The Commissions' limited waiver of sovereign immunity is reenacted by the General Assembly after a sunset provision had taken effect.

Deliveries of Mitsui's railcars are delayed.

Rehabilitated locomotives are completed ahead of schedule by Morrison Knudsen and some are leased to other operators (Maryland's MARC) pending start-up of VRE service. At \$1.1 million each, the locomotives are like new at half the cost.

Serious negotiations begin for up to 25 surplus stainless steel railcars from MBTA. Discussions with UMTA fail to yield a solution that would permit transfer of the railcars in time to meet the planned October, 1991 starting date. Late in the year, MBTA does agree to sell 21 coaches to the Commissions. Morrison Knudsen is chosen to rehabilitate the units in Hornell, New York.

The Commissions agree to pay to keep the Norfolk Southern track north of Manassas in place for VRE operating flexibility, since replacing the track in the future would cost \$500-\$600,000 per mile. The annual payment by VRE to Norfolk Southern is about \$150,000.

The purchase of ticket vending machines from Schlumberger is converted to a capital lease on favorable terms to improve cash flow.

Bids for construction of 11 VRE stations are rejected, since the lowest bid was \$4 million above the engineering estimate for a \$7 million budget. Despite value engineering, a rebid yields a total cost \$2 million above estimates. The contract is awarded to Keystone Builders with funding from other budget line items.

NVTC and PRTC agree to cooperate with NVPDC in a federally funded study of the land use implications of VRE.

A contract is awarded to Henderson Construction for construction of two layover yards at almost \$1 million less than the engineering estimate (which was \$4 million).

A contract is awarded to Wang Laboratories for VRE's automated customer information system.

A contract is awarded for 16 mobile wheelchair lifts with options for additional units, to comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act. The Commissions also authorize solicitation of bids for on-board wheelchair lifts.

Revised ridership estimates are provided by R.H. Pratt, increasing expectations to about 4,500 daily riders. JHK and Associates completes a survey research study that confirms these estimates but suggests as many as 13,000 riders may choose to use VRE each workday.

Unsuccessful negotiations continue with UMTA to permit spending approved grant funds on the project.

Public hearings are held on VRE's proposed fare structure.

Contracts with Facchina Construction for L'Enfant Station in the District of Columbia (to be used by 60 percent of VRE's riders) and with Amtrak for Ivy City yard improvements are awarded.

Cross-border leases for VRE's rolling stock are pursued following a favorable Attorney General's opinion, but no lease arrangement is consummated.

DeLeuw Cather is awarded a contract to manage construction at VRE's stations and yards.

A staffing plan is approved for VRE by the Commissions providing up to 11 employees for the Operations Group. Management and policymaking responsibilities are defined.

"The Express" is selected as a system nickname. The motto is "You've got a train to catch."

The Commissions agree to help sponsor the new Crystal City Transit Store to sell VRE tickets and help respond to telephone inquiries.

Congress approves the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act which offers significant flexible funding increases and provides new opportunities for environmentally friendly projects such as VRE.

CSX acquires part of the RF&P, which splits into two organizations, one with land assets and the other with railroad assets. Accordingly, the Commissions must now deal with three organizations versus one.

1992: The first two Mitsui railcars arrive from Brazil in January and more follow later in the year. At about \$700,000 each, the railcars are a bargain while providing superior ride quality.

Separate offices are established for the VRE Operations Group.

Staff prepares a \$228 million six-year capital improvement program (CIP) including track improvements, additional rolling stock, new parking, and extended services. If the region determines that it wishes to use VRE as part of an aggressive strategy to meet federal Clean Air Act mandates, approximately 32,000 daily riders could be served as a result of the investments included in this plan.

Opening dates are chosen: June 22, 1992 for the Manassas Line and July 20, 1992 on the Fredericksburg Line. The inaugural trip, including the Governor, is set for June 12, 1992, with local station celebrations preceding the openings.

The Commissions co-sponsor the annual APTA Commuter Rail conference, including a test ride for delegates on April 12, 1992 to Fredericksburg.

Service begins as scheduled, but a brief nation-wide rail strike interrupts service during the first week.

Ridership in the first full month averages about 3,000 trips per day.

A September passenger survey reveals very high customer satisfaction, especially with crews.

An October survey is used to allocate local shares of the proposed FY 1994 budget.

Manassas Park and Fredericksburg sign the Master Agreement and become participating jurisdictions.

1993: Ridership reaches 7,800 average daily trips by the end of the year and overcrowding becomes a problem on some trips.

VRE seeks to expand service to include mid-day and additional peak trains, but CSXT refuses to agree without a substantial increase in base payments. The commissions approach several associations with a plan to create a national forum to resolve such disputes, including the American Association of State Highway and Transit Officials and the American Public Transit Association.

Stafford County calls for a new passenger survey to allocate shares of subsidy, which is performed in March.

A new budget process featuring close involvement by Chief Administrative Officers of local jurisdictions is created for the FY 1995 budget cycle.

The commissions agree to purchase 10 additional Boise Budd railcars from the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority. Federal funds are obtained to rehabilitate these cars and to purchase two additional rehabilitated locomotives. Two more rehabilitated locomotives are obtained from closing out the Mitsui/Mafersa railcar contract. These transactions authorize a fleet of 69 railcars and 14 locomotives.

Marketing initiatives include two baseball trains operated to Oriole Park at Camden Yards.

1994: First quarter ridership reaches over 8,000 average daily trips.

Notwithstanding customer praise, VRE is working to accomplish several service enhancements in 1994. Among these are:

- 1) New trains: VRE's approved FY 1995 budget calls for adding peak and mid-day trains to relieve over crowding and serve new markets for shoppers and reverse commuters.
- 2) Supplemental bus service: As an immediate relief to overcrowding, VRE is sponsoring several new early afternoon express bus routes from selected Metrorail and VRE stations that parallel VRE lines and are free to VRE ticket holders. In addition, several new feeder bus routes to VRE stations are planned.
- 3) Free transfers to connecting buses and Amtrak: VRE now offers its ticket holders free transfers to and from selected regional and local buses for a seamless transit commute. VRE is developing a new ticket vending machine that will dispense magnetically encoded tickets for full compatibility with Metrorail faregates. VRE customers will soon be able to board five Amtrak trains using VRE tickets for peak, late night and weekend trips along VRE's Fredericksburg line.
- 4) New ticket issuing machines: To provide easier access to VRE tickets at dozens of retail outlets, VRE is purchasing new desk-top ticket vending machines. Customers will appreciate the speed and merchants the reduced paper work when using the machines later this year.
- 5) On-board telephones: Each VRE train has been equipped with an on-board telephone for customer use (crews will continue to offer access to their cellular phones to customers during delays). VRE will share in the revenue.
- 6) New stations and expanded parking: Two new stations are underway, both in Fairfax County on the Fredericksburg line. One (Lorton) will open later in 1994 and the other (Franconia/Springfield) in 1995. Planning for parking expansion is underway at several other stations. Three historic stations built in the early 1900's are being rehabilitated.
- 7) Strategic planning: VRE is developing a new ridership forecasting methodology and a track capacity simulation model in cooperation with state agencies and private railroads. Extensions toward Richmond and the proposed Disney America theme park will be examined, as well as a doubling of VRE frequencies to meet growing customer demand and regional clean air targets.

- 8) Guaranteed ride home: VRE initiated its "Special Delivery" program in January, 1994, providing reimbursement of 90 percent of the taxi fare for customers who must return home during times when VRE trains do not operate. About one person each day uses the service for trips of up to 60-miles, primarily for medical emergencies, and the program is already paying dividends in customer loyalty. One of the first customers to use Special Delivery arrived home in time to escort his wife to the hospital to deliver a baby boy.
- 9) Americans with Disabilities Act: Among the new improvements for persons with disabilities are on-board wheelchair lifts and a new generation of "talking" fare vending machines at each station.
- 10) Baseball Trains: In cooperation with Maryland's MARC commuter rail system, VRE will again offer in 1994 four weekend baseball express trains to the gates of Oriole Park at Camden Yards.
- 11) Education Express: In a joint effort with George Washington University, VRE will offer short courses (such as effective time management and stress reduction) on selected trains. The courses will also be available at the university free to VRE crews.