

Express stop coming to Woodbridge VRE station

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WOODBIDGE, Va.—Prince William County leaders got what they wanted – a stop on the new Virginia Railway Express train.

VRE's new \$500,000 express service is expected to begin operating in July, and will serve the Woodbridge VRE station in addition to six other stations along the commuter railroad's Fredericksburg line.

VRE officials had originally planned to serve two stations in Stafford County, bypass Prince William, and then stop again in Alexandria where many commuters work or can make easy connections to other transit services. VRE wanted to bypass the Prince William stations because they do not have the same crowding problems as their Stafford counterparts.

Officials then held a series of public meetings and posted an online survey, where 11 of the 3,000 people who responded said they wanted the express to stop in Woodbridge. The commuter railroad changed its plan after hearing from the respondents and receiving strong words from county board Chairman Corey A. Stewart, R-At large, who said the train "damn well better" stop in the county.

"Eleven people is a lot of people when you consider those that don't know about the train. And out of 400,000 residents in the county, not all of them can make it out the meetings," said Martin E. Nohe, R-Coles. "If you asked every rider at the VRE station if they thought an express train should stop in Prince William County, every rider would tell you that they think it should."

The express train will be the first VRE train to leave the Fredericksburg station each weekday at 5:05 a.m. The train will then stop at the historically overcrowded Brooke and Leeland Road VRE stations in Stafford County, skip the Quantico and Rippon stations and then stop at Woodbridge. From there, it will stop in Alexandria, Crystal City, L'Enfant and will terminate at Union Station.

Officials say the train will get riders to their destinations at least 16 minutes earlier than any other VRE train on the line.

"The idea here is to see how the express train does with this particular stop, but if it doesn't grow the business, and there is not a demand long term, let's bring it back up and see how we can best serve the whole of the public," said VRE spokesman Mark Roeber.

The commuter railroad doesn't know how many people will board the express train at Woodbridge, or if they will opt to wait for the next train at 5:56 a.m., which is now the

first train to leave the station weekday mornings. After six months to one year, VRE will review the number of passengers who board the express at Woodbridge, said Roeber.

County officials who felt like the express train was leaving them behind took issue with VRE, as Prince William pays 37 percent, the lion's share of the railroad's local subsidy. Stafford pays 15 percent and Fredericksburg two percent.

Using the transit formula that determines how much money localities will pay in local subsidies to VRE, more riders board the commuter trains in Prince William County than any of the other six jurisdictions that fund the service.