

Let's Talk!

The next VRE online forum will start on Wednesday, February 5th at 12:00pm.



There are currently 12 questions waiting to be answered.

VRE Management:

Welcome to the February edition of the on-line forum. Let's get started.

William from **Fredericksburg, VA** asks:

How long will you continue the subsidy on the Amtrak step-up tickets?

VRE Management:

We receive funding from VDOT and DRPT during the 1-95 express lanes project construction for the additional \$2.00 subsidy. The time line for that funding is through December 2014. After that we will evaluate options to continue the \$3.00 step up fare.

Bob from **Manassas, VA** asks:

How is a one-way free pass adequate compensation for a train breaking down and causing a two hour delay getting to your destination?

VRE Management:

The FRC is our way of immediately recognizing that we had a service disruption and that passengers were inconvenienced.

Steve from **Burke** asks:

Just a suggestion. I've seen a lot of people panic/run off the train in Alexandria due to being on the wrong line. It may help to insert the lines "Manassas Bound" or "Fredericksburg Bound" to the train-approaching message. It currently only states the train numbers, but many people (including myself) can never seem to remember the train numbers we ride everyday.

VRE Management:

We think this is a great idea and we will get with our IT department to begin working on it.

Marsha from **Manassas** asks:

What was the reasoning behind cancelling 335 yesterday citing downed trees when, on 327 which was just past Alexandria when you announced, experienced no downed trees that caused delays. You also ran 338, the turnaround train back to DC so you had the equipment. On the surface it looks like mighty bad decision making at the cost of your customers needs.

VRE Management:

Thanks for writing Marsha. As we stated in our updated Train Talk, one of our north bound trains hit a tree causing damage to one of our cars. This equipment could not be used for the remainder of the evening service. That left us one train consist short.

Jason PL from **Gainesville, VA** asks:

On January 21. There was an email sent at 4:02am saying VRE would run on Full Schedule, and another email sent out at 4:10am saying VRE would run on S schedule. A lot of riders headed to Broad Run Station knowing VRE would run on Full Schedule from email sent at 4:02am. We were surprised knowing VRE changed it to S schedule during our commute. Since VRE cancelled the 322 train, those who were forced to wait in the cold parking lot should receive FRC. I have left a voice mail to a gentleman and he never replied. Please make comment on this matter.

VRE Management:

We notify our passengers at 4:00am if there is going to be a service change. On January 21, we did not hear from OPM until 4:03am which resulted in the decision to run an "S" schedule.

Ken from Burke, VA asks:

Are there funds available to replace the older passenger cars with the newer style cars that have individual seat backs, and if so are there plans to accomplish that?

VRE Management:

Yes we currently need 13 of the Legacy cars to operate our daily service. We start receiving 8 newer style cars in March 2014 and 7 more have been ordered.

Big D from Woodbridge, Va asks:

Last Friday on the early train the conductor mention that in the fall an extra would be added to the Fredericksburg line. Would this mean the Express would depart earlier in the morning? He also mentioned this train would leave Union Station between 12:55 and 3:35, any idea of the possible departure time? Maybe 2:00 or 2:30?

VRE Management:

Yes we do plan to add a train on the Fredericksburg line. The schedule has not been worked out yet

Janet from Spotsylvania, VA asks:

What is the projected date of the opening of the Crossroads station for use by VRE riders?

VRE Management:

Spotsylvania County is in the process of finalizing the land acquisition for the station and parking lot. Once this occurs, we can provide an accurate timeline of the opening of the new station. In the meantime, in order to accommodate the new station the third track project is under way.

Yvette from Fredericksburg, VA asks:

When will the Massaponax station open. I thought it was scheduled to open last December.

VRE Management:

See previous question.

Kevin from Fredericksburg, VA asks:

When will the new train station platform off of Route 17 be ready? Thanks

VRE Management:

See previous question.

Carol from Springfield, VA asks:

When will the broken light in the Rolling Road parking lot be fixed? It was knocked over MONTHS ago. All that has happened is that the light was picked up and removed. That part of the parking lot is dark without a light. Second, when the wheelchair lift cage at Rolling Road be removed? It would provide additional sheltered standing room, something that is sorely lacking at Rolling Road. Thank you.

VRE Management:

We continue to work with Fairfax County to have this light pole replaced. The cage is part of a program that we have scheduled for the late Spring of 2014.

Bob from Manassas, VA asks:

I've noticed that the VRE currently has multiple units of measurement for purchasing tickets--ride pass, week pass, and monthly pass. However, there is a discrepancy between the validation procedure for the ride passes and the monthly/weekly passes. The ride passes need to be validated upon each use, whereas the other tickets only need to be validated once. The two ride pass can be validated at a later date, whereas the weekly pass needs to be used consecutively. I was wondering if there was any discussion on possibly standardizing the options to make it easier for first-time consumers?

VRE Management:

The five day pass is for those passengers that ride every day. The ten ride ticket gives a little more flexibility to those passengers who may only commute 3-4 days a week so those rides don't need to be on consecutive days.

Bob from Burke asks:

I've always wondered - what is the noise that emanates from the suspension of the coaches (or somewhere else)? It sounds like big springs creaking. It can be excessive. Can it be lubed up to minimize? Thanks.

VRE Management:

If you can give us a specific car number, send it to gotrains@vre.org and we will investigate the issue.

Shady from Manassas, VA asks:

Why does VRE tease us with new cars on Monday, February 3rd only to return to the older cars the next day? Riders of 324 should receive a discount for having to endure the old cars.

VRE Management:

On Monday we had a couple of last minute train consist swaps. The new cars mentioned in a previous response will start arriving in March 2014 and allow us to begin replacing some of the Legacy cars.

David from Fredericksburg asks:

I am happy to be riding VRE again after 8 years of absence. My question is about the monitors at each station. Would it be possible 1)to add the time in the upper right corner next to the date and 2)add the departure time of the trains in between the train number and status. I think this information would be appreciated, especially with new riders. Thanks and keep up the good work!

VRE Management:

We are currently working on adding the scheduled departure times on the monitors as further enhancement of our passenger communication system.

from asks:

I've been a rider on VRE since day one on the Fredericksburg line. Over the years I've noticed the conditions of the rail surfaces and especially the bridges. The Neabsco crossing is one that I've been especially concerned about. It is extremely shaky and very "rocking and rolling". Is there any concern on the part of VRE and CRX as to the integrity of that crossing?

VRE Management:

These tracks are inspected daily by CSX and defects are addressed immediately.

Wi-Fi'd OUT from Stafford asks:

Think we can have one forum where Wi-Fi isn't being complained about?!? If your work is SOO important that you can't go without working for an hour in the morning and an hour in the evening, then maybe your important work should get you one of the mobile wifi things you can hook to your computer for travel on the VRE. It's getting BEYOND old the same questions each week. When the VRE gets Wi-Fi you all WILL BE TOLD.

VRE Management:

We are continuing to work on getting Wi-Fi. As we stated before, we have a lot of dead spots and certainly we need the funding to do this.

Jane from Brooke asks:

A kind reminder to people in the mornings to please turn off your headlights while sitting in the lot. Some headlights are very bright and bothersome while sitting in the car waiting for the train. Thanks much.

VRE Management:

A courtesy reminder from a fellow passenger.

Debbie from Broad Run, VA asks:

I'd like to ask that when the crews are plowing the parking lot at Broad Run would it be possible for them to shovel several a few paths across the grassy median between the main lot and the one satellite lot. The other two lots have stairs or a paved path already and it would just be easier than having to walk all the way down to the end of the lane. Thank you.

VRE Management:

We will pass this along to Prince William County.

GB from fairfax, va asks:

Why are VRE riders treated like step children at the Union Station Waiting area? when I tried to use the back escalators because the front ones are not working or they are moving upward, the AMTRAK employees tried to stop me from using them even when I tried to explain my reason. We need someone to switch the escalators to downward when mass of VRE riders trying to catch the train.

VRE Management:

Thanks for bringing this to our attention. We will work with Amtrak on this issue.

Michael from Broad Run asks:

Please let Broad Run Passengers know that the light at Piper lane and 28 has 2 left turn lanes now. Cars are still turning left from the left lane and going into the right lane on 28, cutting off the cars in the center lane that are turning left also

VRE Management:

A courtesy reminder from a fellow passenger.

AL from Fredericksburg asks:

Yesterday and this morning I watched people struggle to purchase tickets using the TVMs. The machines are displaying an error that says "Element Not Found >>327". No one knows what this error message means and when confronted with it most people just stand there in bewilderment and frustration and hold up the rest of the folks in line waiting to purchase or validate. Can you please (1) change the error message displayed so that it provides the customer with clear feedback/instructions and (2) send someone to look at the TVMs in Fredericksburg? Thank you!

VRE Management:

Thanks for writing AL. We will have our technicians look into this matter.

George from FX Station asks:

My comment below relates specifically to train 333 though likely other trains too. When leaving Union Station, the conductors are supposed to close a damper to prevent diesel exhaust fumes from accumulating inside the passenger areas. This has consistently not occurred. By the time we reach the L'Enfant end of the tunnel, the fumes are intense. I recently wrote to GoTrains about this and I was assured that you would send out a reminder, but nothing has changed. By not closing the damper in accordance with a presumably written policy, you are killing us one day at a time.

VRE Management:

We have emphasized this with the crews during job briefings and ride alongs. If you continue to experience this, please contact us with the specific train information at gotrains@vre.org

LB from STAFFORD asks:

LeelandStation has the expansion lot and overflow lot yet there are still those that do not follow the rules(a sign is posted DO NO PARK). There are several cars that park along the sides at the overflow lot, sometimes parked on the walkway. This is not only illegal, but makes it very difficult for cars to get in and out in the evening. There are plenty of available parking spots further up but they are too lazy to walk that far to the train.This makes it quite unfair for those who do follow the rules and law.Why are they not getting ticketed and fined like the VRE does when one breaks rules?

VRE Management:

Thanks for writing LB. We will pass this along to Stafford County.

Sam from Leeland Road asks:

On the Fredericksburg line there is a track 2 and a track 3. Was there ever a track 1?

VRE Management:

Yes.

Cathy from Quantico asks:

Who is responsible for maintaining the announcement system at Quantico? The VRE messages come through, however often the Amtrak messages do not come through at all - the system only beeps and

then nothing - or they come through jumbled to the point where no one can understand them. People are getting caught on the wrong track because the announcements are unclear or non-existent. If you don't want people crossing tracks with the train approaching can you please fix the announcement system so that they know where they are supposed to be ahead of time?

VRE Management:

First of all, we do not want anyone crossing the tracks except at the designated pedestrian crossing, and only when it is safe to do so. Amtrak Conductors make their announcements from on board their trains as they approach the station as soon as they know which track they will be using. We will work with Amtrak on the quality of those announcements.

Steve from Burke, VA (Burke Centre) asks:

Thanks for the reliable service and I like that you are experimenting with additional trains for folks who work in the private sector and work government holidays. With the addition of new trains, any thoughts of extending service by adding an evening train departing around 9pm? Any additional funding for VRE coming from NoVa tax increases or the General Assembly?

VRE Management:

We continue to look at all possibilities. Please check our System Plan on our website at www.vre.org under "What's New".

Diane from Woodbridge asks:

Holding for your "customer service" # this morning for 12 minutes, then another 4 minutes to get assistance on cancelling Train Talk Alerts. Why is there not an effective system in place on your website or a way to actually get "customer service" on the phone? I'm sure you won't use this question.

VRE Management:

Sorry that you had to wait. You can cancel Train Talk alerts through gotrains@vre.org

MJBucci from Leeland asks:

I don't notice the random security checks/task force as much these days... (police w/ dogs etc.) is VRE still active in this area of public safety...

VRE Management:

Yes, as you pointed out they are random.

Sandra from Manassas, VA asks:

A while back VRE had additional trains that would pick riders up at Manassas Park at something like 10:20 and at 2:45 (I think) at Union station. Having the 10:20 train would be great on days when the weather is bad; it is also great when one has early Dr. appointments. Is there any chance of resurrecting these?

VRE Management:

We continue to look at all possibilities. Please check our System Plan on our website at www.vre.org under "What's New".

Davin from Woodbridge, VA asks:

I thought VRE was going to redesign its page last Fall. The design is dated. What happened? Take a look at <http://www.trinityrailwayexpress.org/index.html> or <http://www.acerail.com>. They have a more modern beautiful designed website

VRE Management:

Thanks Davin, we do have a project underway to re-design the website.

Dave from Lorton, VA asks:

Will VRE operate the "S" schedule on President's Day? I noticed it was not listed on the VRE Calendar page. President's Day is a soft holiday like MJ King Day

VRE Management:

Unfortunately, we did not have the adequate ridership on MLK, Jr. Day to support operating on the soft holidays. We will re-visit this at some point in the future.

Matt from Fredericksburg, VA asks:

When the Spotsylvania station comes online, will VRE rename the Fredericksburg Line the Spotsylvania Line?

VRE Management:

No.

Lyn from Quantico asks:

Why are four (4) passengers at a time, who have paid their fare, which is \$250.80 per month each/\$1,003.20 per four passengers or more, asked to give up their seats for a singular passenger? This does not seem fair for non-bike riding passengers to have to go find another seat or stand for a singular biker. Bikes should be able to fold or disallowed on the VRE. Can bikes be disallowed or not inconvenience four (4) other paying passengers?

VRE Management:

Part of our business as a public entity is to promote other forms of transportation. We do not allow bicycles on our busiest trains unless they are the collapsible type.

Lyn from Quantico asks:

If VRE is truly concerned about safety, could the crosswalk at Quantico station be repaired with some cement or something on the side opposite the station? The crosswalk is always either flooded, if it has rained or icy, if it snowed, or muddy thereafter; all not safe. What does VRE plan to do to abate this safety hazard?

VRE Management:

We are truly concerned about safety. We will assess the situation and address as necessary.

Lyn from Quantico asks:

Also, when Conductors want the seats facing the aisle, he more or less just says, "I am going to need these seats for a biker." He doesn't really ask for the seats. Is it OK if the passenger(s) do not want to give up his/her seat? Would that passenger be thrown off or considered disruptive? That should not be the case, if one wants to retain his/her seat, which they paid for, not to be inconvenienced, so that another able bodied passenger is not inconvenienced because he is riding a bike.

VRE Management:

Those seats are designated for passengers needing assistance first and bicycles second. For example, if you ride Train 308, 310 or 312 and you choose to sit in those seats, please expect to be asked to move if those seats are needed. Trains that allow bicycles are designated on our pocket schedules with a bicycle symbol.

Brenda from Leeland Station asks:

On the northbound tracks between Quantico and Rippon, there is an area that seems to rock the train to the point it throws people around. It seems to be getting worse because now there is a hard hit and a banging noise that feels like the train could derail. This incident is making a lot of people nervous, especially because they don't know what causes this. Can someone please explain what this is so our minds can be at ease. Thanks!

VRE Management:

Area track structure is routinely inspected and addressed immediately if needed. This may be more of a ride quality issue and we will work with CSX to improve.

Jon from Woodbridge, VA asks:

One of the sidewalks at the Woodbridge Station garage needs repair work done. It is the third level stairs (above platform level) next to the elevator. The sidewalk there is worn down revealing the rusted brown thing inside cement.

VRE Management:

Thanks Jon, our Facilities team is looking into this.

laurie from Burke asks:

I am one of the non Government workers who ride VRE but my company, like many follow Govt guidelines for delayed openings and early closings. When we have a two hour delay it makes sense to me that the VRE open on a delay as well. it would impact majority of commuters. Just a thought.

VRE Management:

Unfortunately, we do not have the flexibility to operate on a delayed schedule.

from **burke** asks:

For the last three months the 6:10pm train at Union Station opens the "newer car doors first" while the majority of passengers wait several minutes and then the legacy doors are then open. is there not enough personnel on the train to for all doors to be opened simultaneously? this doesn't happen on the other stops the train makes enroute.

VRE Management:

We will look into this with our Crews.

Tom from **Springfield, VA** asks:

Conductors wait until after everyone has boarded to use the wheel chair lift. The problem with this is that it delays the train from leaving the station. So instead, why not use it first after the doors open. People can still board on the other half while the wheel chair lift is being used

VRE Management:

We have found this is the safest way to handle this operation.

Meredith from **Gainesville, VA** asks:

Over the holidays when running on an "S" Schedule, the 328 consistently had cars blocked off so that passengers could not use them. One of these cars was always the Quiet Car. In the future when limiting service, would you please take into consideration the location of restricted cars so that you are not also eliminating other services, such as the Quiet Car?

VRE Management:

Yes, we will address this.

Carl from **Stafford, VA** asks:

How does one go about getting feedback from your maintenance department about problems on the train? This winter there has been a consistent problem with the heat being turned off once the train departs the rail yard. I have submitted many, many reports about the deficiencies but I have never heard back as to what they found and what corrective action will be taken (if any). I have even included pictures with temperature readings significantly below the temperature threshold you say is to be maintained (approx 70 degrees) but the problem continues (to include this morning on 304).

VRE Management:

AIR COMFORT SYSTEM (ACS)

GALLERY IV Passenger Cars

The Air Comfort System is a separate system for each of the A and B ends of the Gallery IV rail cars. It provides the separate thermostatic control to maintain a preset comfort level in the passenger area utilizing the heating, cooling, and/or ventilating the air being circulated. The ACS is designed to maintain a comfort level when place in the warmer setting of the temperature control panel of 70 degrees Fahrenheit plus/minus 3 degrees Fahrenheit using the heating, A/C and/or ventilation of the Air Comfort Control system.

The ACS in the passenger area circulates the air into the return air duct via the Ventilation and Air Conditioning unit to monitor the temperature by the thermostatic control, which provides signals to the temperature control panel. The air return temperature will determine the need to heat, and/or provide A/C and/or ventilating the air being circulated in the passenger area of the A or B ends of the rail car to maintain the designed level of comfort in the passenger areas.

TESTING & MONITORING OF AIR COMFORT SYSTEM (ACS)

VRE conducted performance testing and monitoring of the ACS to gather data to ensure the ACS was

performing as designed by Transitair the Original Equipment Manufacturer (OEM) The testing used dry bulb thermometers where they were placed 36" from the floor level in the upper and lower deck of cars tested and monitored throughout the entire revenue trip for various trains on the Fredericksburg Rail line. The lower deck in either the A or B end the placement of the thermometer was located either on the east or west side of the first double passenger seat area. The upper deck on the A or B end the placement of the thermometer was located either on the east or west side of the second seat of the single passenger seat area. Temperature readings for the upper and lower decks were taken in the Crossroads yard and at Union station to have a base line of heating level in the upper or lower decks at the A or B end of the car which were tested and monitored. Temperature readings were taken and recorded before and after the side doors were opened and closed for each station stop.

VRE conducted testing and monitoring on the dates and cars as follows:

- December 31, 2013 Cars V860, and V801
- January 2, 2014 Cars V878, and V730
- January 7, 2014 Cars V427 and V428

Conclusion of the testing and monitoring of the Gallery IV and Legacy passenger rail cars yielded an average mean temperature of 70 degrees Fahrenheit plus/minus 3 degrees.

FLOOR AND UPPER DECK HEATING SYSTEM

The overhead and lower deck heating is applied independently as heat is required in the passenger area for the upper and lower deck of the A or B end of the rail car. The heating grills or others refer to them as (side vents) are not designed to heat the entire grill area, so there are areas of the grill when the heat is called for in the 1st or 2nd stage of heating will be cool or cold to the touch. The lower deck heat may not be applied while the overhead heat is applied because they are independently turned on as they are required to maintain the 70 degrees of Fahrenheit temperature of plus/minus 3 degrees in the upper and lower decks of the rail passenger car in the A or B ends.

Kevin from Fredericksburg asks:

When will VRE address the seating issues on the train. After a long day at work I'm not trying to stand up half way home

VRE Management:

We have plans to add another train on the Fredericksburg line once the Spotsylvania station opens.

Gary from Alexandria asks:

Good afternoon! Do we have an anticipated start date for the new gallery cars for Manassas 324. Thanks!

VRE Management:

Once we receive and test the new cars to be delivered in March 2014, we will work to replace the Legacy cars on Manassas 324.

aaron from manassas asks:

I was on the Manassas train that died on Friday. Yesterday it was my train home that was cancelled. VRE, I'm still happy with you and your service. Keep rolling.

VRE Management:

We appreciate your support.

Heidi from Falls Church, Va asks:

Would VRE consider running a later morning Manassas line train (than the 332) either permanently (ideally) or one additional later train on days that Fairfax and PW County schools have late openings?
Thanks! Heidi

VRE Management:

Unfortunately, we do not have the flexibility to run a delayed schedule.

VRE Management:

Thanks for another exciting month of great questions. We do appreciate your patience as we navigate through the multiple inclement weather events we have all experienced this winter. Unfortunately, "Phil" says we have approximately six more weeks of this - hang in there.

If your questions did not get answered, please submit them to gotrains@vre.org.

See you next month.

Rich, Chris, Brian, Brenda and Naquana