

## Let's Talk!

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The next VRE online forum will start on Wednesday, January 8th at 12:00pm.



There are currently 21 questions waiting to be answered.

### **VRE Management:**

Happy New Year and welcome to our monthly On-Line Forum! For those of you who made a resolution to start riding the train, welcome! We have some exciting changes planned for this year including opening a new station, new cars coming in the spring and we have placed an additional order of seven cars with the intent of retiring the legacy fleet entirely.

In addition to VRE staff, we have folks from CSX and Keolis here so feel free to ask them questions as well. We see have lots of questions in the queue, so let's get to them!

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### **James from Manassas, VA asks:**

Dear Sir/Madam, Happy New Year! Your riders are anticipating a great 2014. Keep up the great work. Question(s): Why do the conductors relay instructions to the engineer? And vice versa, why do the engineers relay track points back to the conductor? I have been quite perplexed in my years riding VRE of this. In comparison, I fly a lot too and the flight attendants do not convey speed, etc. to the pilots, nor, do the pilots convey the passing of specific points during the travel to the attendants. Thank you very much!

### **VRE Management:**

Happy New Year to you, too, James and thanks for the compliment. A suggestion: don't compare American train conductors to flight attendants because while the engineers "drive", the conductors "run" the show. This is why you hear conductors giving instructions and engineers have to comply. The engineer relays where the train is so the conductor is knowledgeable of the location of the train and to ensure and the engineer and conductor maintain two-way communication for safety purposes.

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### **Marie from FRED'S-BURG asks:**

Does VRE turn off the diesel Engines when not in use? Growing up in Connecticut, and taking train to NYC daily, the train company (which seems to have a lot of issues lately, name not provided!) let the engines run 24/7. What about VRE?

### **VRE Management:**

Once the train reaches the yard, the crew connects it to ground power so the diesel can be shut off but vital operations continue running. During this extreme cold, however, we keep the locomotives running all day.

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### **Steve from Fredericksburg, VA asks:**

When are you going to work with mobile networks to ensure the train routes are well covered with cellular service? Verizon service along the Fredericksburg route is UNACCEPTABLE from Woodbridge down south to Fredericksburg. The VRE ride is very long and I can't do much work on it without a data connection. You need to work with Verizon on behalf of all your customers. Please get it solved! On-train WiFi service is not even feasible until there are sufficient cellular towers for it to connect to. When will this be fixed? Makes my train ride horrendous.

### **VRE Management:**

We agree. This is the same issue we are trying to solve as it relates to WiFi.

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### **downtown burg from fredericksburg, va asks:**

Since your not opening the spotsy station anytime soon, can you shift funding to giving us the wifi we so desperatly want.

### **VRE Management:**

See question above.

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**George from Broad Run** asks:

It's bad enough that we need to still use the legacy cars, but when insects are dropping on my head from the ceiling and crawling on my hands - this is way too much! Happened twice last month, both when riding the legacy rails. Surely you can take minimal preventive actions to keep the insects at bay.

**VRE Management:**

The best thing to do in that situation is to email [gotrains@vre.org](mailto:gotrains@vre.org) or fill out a train information concern form on our website (<http://vre.org/feedback/mechanicalconcerns.php>) to get it immediately addressed. There is a program to periodically treat the cars for bugs. Hopefully you are not seeing insects in this extreme cold.

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**Mark from Lorton, VA** asks:

Can't the rails crack in really cold weather? Metro has had this problem, but why not CSX?

**VRE Management:**

CSX did have cracked rails the past couple of days which accounts for the track work that delayed some of our trains. They did have track inspectors well ahead of us running service to detect these flaws and minimize any inconvenience to our service.

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**MJBucci from Leeland Rd.** asks:

any way to have the parking lot light "on" hours reduced and/or turned off on weekends. The orange haze light pollution emitted off the lot is bad for my mental state. Besides the lot is not an overnight lot (leave car at your own risk) so why illuminate the rascal?

**VRE Management:**

Thanks for the suggestion. However, while it is park at your own risk, we help reduce the risk of crime by lighting the parking lots overnight.

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**Steve from Burke Center** asks:

What is the timeline for the new cars to come on line? And will the first set of new cars "retire" the legacy cars that run on the Manassas line as the second morning train and the 6:10 evening train? Are there any new features with the new cars that riders will enjoy as well. Better electronic signage, seats?

**VRE Management:**

We are scheduled to receive the new cars beginning in March and once we receive all 8 cars in this order, all the legacy cars on the Manassas line will be gone.

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**Mike from The Forsaken Zone** asks:

Hi. You blew off this question last month: How could you go pretty deep into 2013 forecasting a January 2014 Spotsylvania Station opening and then be off by at least 10 months? You haven't explained at all how it was possible to be that wrong or how you could leave yourself in a position of negotiating to buy land after you committed to needing it. Come clean on this. The cover up is worse than the screw-up

**VRE Management:**

The purchase of the land for the station and the parking lot is the responsibility of Spotsylvania County. VRE is already working with CSX on the third track portion of the project and we are ready to begin constructing the station as soon as the land is acquired.

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**Krista from Burke, VA** asks:

The door leading to the outside parking lot from the garage shattered sometime yesterday and there is a ton of glass on the ground and no way to get around it. Passengers have had to walk on top of the glass to get through. Can someone please check this out and get it cleaned up? Thanks!

**VRE Management:**

We got notified of this yesterday and will get it cleaned up ASAP.

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**Bob from Fredericksburg, VA** asks:

When, if ever, will VRE join the 21st century and like Amtrak, other commuter trains and buses, offer WiFi to its passengers? Why not at least consider a subscription service if not free ?

**VRE Management:**

We would like to offer WiFi but are 1) waiting for an acceptable solution to avoid deadspots in our

service 2) need to find funds for the project.

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**John from Manassas** asks:

It's a given that there will be times when circumstances create problems where trains are over crowded. I was caught up in that situation on December 30th when the 'S' schedule didn't work for the afternoon trip on Manassas 331 at Alexandria. Others and myself literally had to run from the rear of the train forward to find a car we could board. The frustrating part was that the vestibules were thoroughly packed to the point you couldn't board, yet there was plenty of standing room in the center sections of the cars. It is imperative that the conductors take charge and direct passengers to

**VRE Management:**

We agree, John. The holiday week is tricky to plan for given that vacations reduce the ridership but that day, fewer people were taking vacation. Hopefully we are better prepared next year in anticipating ridership. We will also have the conductors manage the crowding better when it does occur.

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**Anne from Manassas VA** asks:

Why did VRE stop making the on board courtesy and safety announcements? In this transient area, there are always new riders who haven't heard the one about parking lot etiquette, or the one about keeping feet on the floor, not across the aisles, on railings, or on seats. I can't remember all the other announcements, but they were helpful. Conductors also need to be more aware and tell riders when they are not following train etiquette.

**VRE Management:**

You will be hearing more announcements again soon and yes one of the secondary duties for the conductors is enforce courtesy rules.

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**Jason from Gainesville, VA** asks:

every time the train goes through the tunnel leaving Union Station we could smell strong fumes. We all are aware of Dangers of Inhaling Diesel Fuel Fumes. VRE was able to instruct the crew to temporarily shut down the air system while going through the long tunnel and that went quite well. So why are we still have to suffer inhaling Diesel Fuel Fumes? Please take action on this issue right away. Thank you.

**VRE Management:**

The dampers should be closed off for every southbound trip. This will reduce the diesel fumes, but they will not eliminate them completely.

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**Tom from Manassas, VA** asks:

The lingering cloud of cigarette smoke remains a problem at the north exit of the Manassas parking garage. Those of us sensitive to smoke are even MORE sensitive to it when the air is cold, leading to throat inflammation or worse. Getting off the train in the afternoon is no better, as some folks light-up as soon as they hit the platform. This issue is a major nuisance and has been mentioned time and again...is it a Manassas jurisdiction issue or VRE? Please, no more "we are studying it"...it's a health hazard.

**VRE Management:**

The north end of the platform is where we have a designated smoking area. The overall smoking issue is something every individual jurisdiction and VRE must agree to.

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**Randy from Rippon** asks:

What's the status of the repair of the stairs at Rippon? Last week I witnessed a small piece of stairs fall and nearly strike a woman.

**VRE Management:**

We are going to the VRE Operations Board this month to get authorization to replace the stairs. The project should commence this spring and be completed by late summer.

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**terry from rippon** asks:

when can we expect additional cars to be added to the current consists to help handle standing room only?

**VRE Management:**

We have plans to add an additional Fredericksburg Line train this fall.

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**Linda from Manassas** asks:

Just a comment.....while missing the past few days because of the cold...every other day the homeless person is still at L'Enfant...still making sure people have to step around him....still sitting at various places on the steps or at the bottom of the steps. Someone is going to fall over him and get hurt. Does it depend on where he is sitting to determine whether the city or VRE could be sued for medical care?

**VRE Management:**

We continually work this issue with Metropolitan PD. The best thing for our riders to do is not offer money which makes the L'Enfant station an attractive place.

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**Todd from Stafford, VA** asks:

Are there any plans to add more quiet cars to the consists in the future? I prefer to ride in the quiet car but find that it is almost always full.

**VRE Management:**

No plans to expand the Quiet Car program past one car.

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**Danny Boy from Manassas, VA** asks:

I've noticed that many, if not all, of the writings coming from your office, regardless of the medium (emails, newsletter, etc.), are lacking in properly written English and poorly punctuated. Does anybody ever review the material before it's published, or is it that nobody cares?

**VRE Management:**

Yes, we do peer reviews of all communications and we are sorry they are not up to your standards. Please feel free to make suggestions to specific examples when appropriate.

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**Big D from Woodbridge, Va** asks:

There are still people crossing over rt.1 to Occoguan Rd in the right lane before 5pm. It's typically the same offenders. I have seen some very close accidents because of the illegal act. Please contact Prince William County Police to have them monitor the situation.

**VRE Management:**

Thank you for the observation, Big D. Our Manager of Safety and Security will address the situation with Prince William PD.

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**Laura from Burke, VA** asks:

Given the recent reduction of the monthly public transportation subsidy, monthly tickets now cost more than the \$130 available on the government-issued TranServe debit card. Are the automated vending machines capable of handling split credit card payments? If not, is there an estimated date for this?

**VRE Management:**

We will have a split payment functionality added to our test system next week. Once we have fully tested this feature we will roll it out to the full system.

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**Lisa from Fredericksburg VA** asks:

What's the status of the Spotysylvania station? It was supposed to open in Jan 2014, but there's been absolutely NO UPDATES!

**VRE Management:**

The negotiation for the land is still ongoing. We are starting this month to make the necessary track improvements for the station and we hope to have it open by October of this year.

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**Pierre from Manassas Park** asks:

When is the conversion of the ADP lift cage to customer standing room at Manassas Park going to be finished?

**VRE Management:**

We will start a program for all the stations in the spring.

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**David from Woodbridge VA** asks:

Riding the train yesterday another rider state it would be nice to have a weekend service. Is there any plans to run a special train once in the morning and once in the evening on the weekends? MARC just recently added some weekend service and it would allow some passengers that live at the end of

the line to get into the district without driving for the weekend.

**VRE Management:**

There are no plans at this time.

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**Randy from Bristow asks:**

As a 20 plus year rider and entering my last year before retirement a few items: Riders, don't put your feet and legs on the chairs. Re: technology - phones have digital amplifiers so don't talk SO loud you can be heard 15 ft away; look before you walk away to pick up the pieces of chocolate, the stray fry, or chip from your meal. Lastly, CONDUCTORS - besides writing tickets (nice job BTW) - CONFRONT and challenge passengers whose habits aren't deterred by general announcements. The majority pay your salary, call out and embarrass those segments. This will improve the customer experience

**VRE Management:**

Courtesy reminder from a rider. BTW, congrats on your upcoming retirement.

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**JS from Fredericksburg VA asks:**

Please pass out more ticket holders on the lariat.

**VRE Management:**

You can always email at [gotrains@vre.org](mailto:gotrains@vre.org) to request a ticket holder, you have to provide your own lanyard. Some conductors also carry extra ones.

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**Paul from Fredericksburg, VA asks:**

When will the new station at Massaponax be open?

**VRE Management:**

We are projecting October of this year for the Spotsylvania to open.

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**Dan from Manassas, VA asks:**

VRE is the best commuter rail in the country. Have the most recent improvements at the Woodbridge Station (allowing VRE/Amtrak riders to be dropped off at the "Kiss and Ride" directly off busy Route 1, which saves time and hassle and is safer) been well received?

**VRE Management:**

Thanks, Dan! We always appreciate your support and riders seem to like the accessibility to Route 1 now at Woodbridge.

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**Jeff from Manassas, VA asks:**

While I waited at Crystal City last night for the train, a Fredricksburgh line train came in to Crystal City (around 6:12 or so). The train stopped and opened some but not all of the doors. People started boarding the train. Then, the train moved forward about 3/4 the length of a car, with some of the doors still open and people hanging on to the handles as they attempted to board. Please explain this safety violation.

**VRE Management:**

We were not aware of this and will look into it.

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**Stevie Wonders from Falmouth asks:**

Have VRE employees stopped answering email questions? I have submitted numerous comments recently, but the lines of communication are dead. Questions include problems with VRE app for iPhone IOS 7; Leeland Road dirt parking lot; and improving cellphone service between Quantico and Leeland. Inquiring minds want to know.

**VRE Management:**

Sorry about that, Stevie. Try sending them again and we will look in our spam filters to see if maybe they got caught.

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**Charles from Centreville, VA asks:**

Hi, Yesterday I was on train 327. The announcement system was out of sync by one station which caused me and another person to miss our stop at Burke Center. Please remind you staff to either make sure the automatic announcements are correct or turn it off and make the announcements themselves. Their inattention cost me and my wife an hour and a half of our evening. Charles Houston

**VRE Management:**

Sorry about that, Charles. We will make sure the conductors are more attentive.

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**Dave from Gainesville asks:**

Do Amtrak trains have the right of way over VRE. We're often delayed by late Amtrak trains traveling off their assigned schedule.

**VRE Management:**

During the formation of Amtrak, the agreement was that they would receive priority over the freight trains that were owned by the railroad the Amtrak trains were operating on. This has led to a de facto rule where they get priority over all trains. The dispatchers do their best to work with us and get our trains operating on time which is reflected in our high on-time performance.

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**Jason from Fredericksburg, VA asks:**

I'm the developer for GoVRE Android. Who's a good POC for information technology to address issues with the GTFS feeds that mobile devices pull from? I would like to know when the "calendar\_dates" will be updated, still showing 2013 dates, and if VRE plans to provide "fare\_attributes" so the pricing can be automated on mobile platforms.

**VRE Management:**

We will pass this along to our IT department to address this issue.

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**Joe Pearson from Stafford, VA asks:**

First, I am very pleased with the service! Will you ever consider adding another train southbound (Fredericksburg Line) mid afternoon between the 301 and 303? I'm sure there are many that work early and the 301 is too early and have to wait on the 303. For example: When individuals take the 300 or 302 into work in the morning, they could conceivably be done by 2:00 P.M. but it is too late to catch the 301...but too early for the 303.

**VRE Management:**

We will consider it and many people have asked about it. We have to work with the host railroads to modify our operating windows.

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**Michele from Fredericksburg, VA asks:**

I would like to comment on the use of Step Up tickets. I rode Amtrak last week using my monthly VRE 2-8 ticket with a Step Up ticket. The conductor told me I could not ride to Fredericksburg because of the 2-8 zone and I had to get off at Quantico and wait for the next VRE or pay \$45.00 to Amtrak. I didn't see anything in the instructions about Zones. Did I miss that? It was a huge inconvenience and ended up taking 3 hrs. to get home.

**VRE Management:**

We are sorry we are not more clear in our instructions and will correct this.

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**Murali from Manassas park, VA asks:**

Are there any plans to expand Manassas Park's parking lot. No one is getting parking spot for 8.0am train.

**VRE Management:**

We would like to expand parking but there is no land in the immediate area where we can expand parking there. We will continue to work with Manassas Park to find a solution.

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**RC from Lorton asks:**

Did the idiots at CSX forget that VRE trains were running this morning? Why did we have to sit thru a delay before arriving at the Fran/Springfield station, making a train that was ALREADY late even more so?

**VRE Management:**

CSX is very aware of when we operate service. However, there was track work going on in the area and unfortunately we could not get a hold of the foreman to ask if it was safe to enter the area. In this situation, safety is paramount.

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**Alia from Brook va asks:**

Are you going to do at least one train for MLK or Pres day?

**VRE Management:**

We are waiting on final approval from CSX for MLK day. Our goal is to run an "S" Schedule that day. We will notify through Train Talk and update our website once a final decision is made.

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**Jeff from Fredericksburg asks:**

To get a basic heated waiting area at Fredericksburg station, would that be a city project? VRE? Combination?

**VRE Management:**

This would be a Fredericksburg City project but we can suggest it to them also.

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**James from Fredericksburg asks:**

To the guy complaining to VRE about the cell phone service... shut up.. are you serious? How is this a VRE question? If you want service, compare carriers, ATT works just fine. Or maybe, contact the service provider. VRE isn't responsible for maintaining your data connection.

**VRE Management:**

We agree this would be a nice amenity. That is why we continue to keep it on our radar.

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**Rachael from Falmouth asks:**

Happy to see you will run the 4th of July Express! Thank you!

**VRE Management:**

This is a tentative plan to operate trains to see the fireworks display in DC. We will confirm late spring once we have all the details worked out.

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**Davin from Woodbridge, VA asks:**

Please remind people to not open the door too early and keep holding it open allowing the cold air to spill into the passenger compartment. Wait until you see the train approaching the platform before opening the door.

**VRE Management:**

Thanks, Davin, for the courtesy reminder.

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**Carl from Stafford, VA asks:**

Over the past few months I and others have filed reports about the heat not working on the trains (to include pictures of the temperature on a thermometer I brought with me). When will VRE release the findings of the maintenance team about how they will fix the problem?

**VRE Management:**

We are currently receiving data from technicians who have been riding trains the past couple weeks. We will have something out by the end of the month.

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**Greg H from Stafford, VA asks:**

Just a comment in the event that I cannot attend - I love the fact that you have this forum!

**VRE Management:**

Thanks for the comment. It is the BEST hour of the month for us!

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**Kent from Fredericksburg asks:**

Is it possible to place new (or move existing) station signs from above the light fixtures to below them? In winter months you cannot see the station signs from the cars, the announcements are not always understandable, and all the cars do not have the interior station scroll notification.

**VRE Management:**

We are evaluating this and will be making changes throughout the year.

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**AS from Woodbridge asks:**

Hi, I'm glad to hear CSX staff is on the forum, my question relates to them. This morning on train 310, we got held up by CSX track work just south of Springfield. The conductor said they could not get a hold of the CSX foreman. We ended up being delayed for 15 minutes. CSX knows the VRE schedule, and that two more trains were coming, wouldn't it make sense for the foreman to be available during this time?

**VRE Management:**

CSX apologizes for the delay. They are looking into the issue to ensure that this doesn't affect us in the future.

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**VRE Management:**

Stay tuned about the potential "S" service on soft holidays and other service enhancements throughout the year. The best way to keep these services going is to generate ridership so tell all your friends!

If your question wasn't answered please send it in to [gotrains@vre.org](mailto:gotrains@vre.org) where we answer all inquiries.

Stay warm! See you next month.

Rich, Chris, et al.