

Let's Talk!

The next VRE online forum will start on Wednesday, August 5th at 12:00pm. Click on the "VRE" Button below to submit a question.



There are currently 26 questions waiting to be answered.

VRE Management:

Welcome back to another edition of the monthly On-Line Forum where VRE Management and special guests answer your questions. We have the usual suspects from VRE: Chris Henry, Director of Rail Operations, and Rich Dalton, COO/Deputy CEO; but we also have Brian Barton, CSX Trainmaster, Gregg Baxter, President, Keolis Rail Services America and John Kerins, General Manager, Keolis Rail Services Virginia here in the studio today.

We would like to thank everyone for riding our Firecracker Special Trains on July 4th and our host railroads for making it possible. Even though it rained that day, we had a good turnout and everyone had a good time.

Now on to the questions!

VRE Management:

Welcome back to another edition of the monthly On-Line Forum where VRE Management and special guests answer your questions. We have the usual suspects from VRE: Chris Henry, Director of Rail Operations, and Rich Dalton, COO/Deputy CEO; but we also have Brian Barton, CSX Trainmaster, Gregg Baxter, President, Keolis Rail Services America and John Kerins, General Manager, Keolis Rail Services Virginia here in the studio today.

We would like to thank everyone for riding our Firecracker Special Trains on July 4th and our host railroads for making it possible. Even though it rained that day, we had a good turnout and everyone had a good time.

Now on to the questions!

Yvonne from Fredericksburg, VA asks:

With the increase ridership on the trains, everyday the train cars are so crowded that people have to stand in the lane and it blocks people who have to get off the train, as well as, no room for those who are getting on the train. In view of this, will the VRE be increasing the number of train service to and from Fredericksburg?

VRE Management:

While several trains may seem crowded, there are usually seats available in other cars. On the Fredericksburg line that's usually the cars at the north end of the train. We are also adding a train on the Fredericksburg line this year.

JDS from Woodbridge, VA asks:

What's VRE's policy on chewing tobacco use onboard? I see this at least once a week, and it's extremely offensive.

VRE Management:

We don't have a policy against the use of chewing tobacco. We hope those that do it, do so with discretion.

Dan from Manassas, VA asks:

Last week on WTOP's "Ask the Governor" program, McAuliffe said that the more people that we can get out their cars and into rail the better. In the show, he also mentioned VRE, by name. Are you encouraged by such statements, as state support to extend VRE to Gainesville will be critical? Are you planned to invite the Governor to the Sep opening of the Spotsylvania Station? I hope so.

VRE Management:

We welcome any support from both riders and elected officials.

Kim from Woodbridge VA asks:

What is the proper way for conductors to check tickets of passengers who sit on the upper level? Do the

procedures call for conductors to walk by personnel on the upper level or are conductors told to yell from the ground floor and force passengers to literally lean out of their seats (a safety risk) and extend their arms with ticket in hand so that the conductor can read the ticket? Just want to ensure I and my fellow passengers are aware of proper protocols and procedures.

VRE Management:

Conductors do not have to walk on the upper level to check tickets.

Jim from Stafford VA asks:

Any update on the opening of the new station?

VRE Management:

A lot of good progress has been made on the station and the parking lot despite the inclement weather challenges earlier in the Summer. We should be able to give you a more precise estimated opening date by the end of Summer.

kevin from fredericksburg asks:

when will the new station open and will the new train schedule be release.

VRE Management:

By the end of Summer we hope to release the schedule of the new train.

Connie from Dumfries, VA asks:

two questions: 1st: Any status an increase in transit subsidy being increased to \$235? anything higher than \$130. 2nd: I followed instructions on getting a FRC given by the conductor due to my train being delayed 35 minutes. Due to the overcrowding the conductor instructed all passengers to visit the VRE website and submit the paperwork to receive a FRC. Well, the system doesn't work at least not for me. In 9 years this is the 2nd time I've submitted paperwork and received NO FRC in the mail. I know two riders who did submit and did receive a FRC. whats up? Unstatisfied rider!

VRE Management:

On July 21st, the Senate Finance Committee passed a tax extenders bill that proposed to increase the commuter benefit from \$130 to \$250/month, retroactive to January 1, 2015, and going through December 31, 2016. This is different from the House-introduced (King HR 990) bill that would permanently extend the benefit at \$235/month with annual inflation adjustments. The Senate bill was not assigned a bill number before they left for recess. This issue was NOT included in the Surface Transportation Reauthorization (DRIVE Act/Highway bill), but it is likely that a tax extender package will continue to move through the Senate as well as the House in the fall. We will keep you apprised of the status of this important legislation for VRE riders. All FRC requests were mailed out last week.

Ed from Burke asks:

Could you please put up more Quiet Car signs?

VRE Management:

Not at this time.

Jennifer from Stafford, VA asks:

Will VRE ever have an earlier train schedule traveling north in the morning? Many government employees who want to ride the train cannot because their duty day requires them to be at work by 6:00am, but the train does not arrive at L'Enfant train station until 6:15 to 6:20 currently.

VRE Management:

Unfortunately, our current agreement with our host railroads states we can only operate our trains within a certain window.

Scott from Manassas Park, VA asks:

I am surprised to see google maps does not recognize VRE as public transportation while determining routes. Both metro rail and bus schedules/routes are provided. Has VRE looked into making this happen? It seems to me that it would increase ridership of people visiting the dc area.

VRE Management:

We are currently in the process of adding our data to Google Transit.

George from Broad Run asks:

That new gas station right at Piper Lane & 28 will be opening soon. Looks like the only entrance to it will be from Piper Lane. Seems incredibly brain dead; access to the gas station will be greatly curtailed and outgoing traffic from VRE will become more of a nightmare than it already is from 5:00-7:30pm. Why will there not be an entrance off 28 to cause less VRE traffic disruption?

VRE Management:

We will pass this concern over to VDOT.

Bob from Woodbridge asks:

Congrats on continuing to provide good service. Please also continue to work with PW County to change the traffic flow at the Woodbridge station and Route 1. Both traffic lanes should be allowed to cross Route 1 at any time to lessen traffic backups.

VRE Management:

We will.

JP from Woodbridge asks:

When I started riding in 2011 you guys gave a lot of communications. Now its like pulling teeth. Last week the train shows up on track 3 with no warning, before that the train did not run one day and it took along time to get that info out. it communication a thing of the past?

VRE Management:

We will ensure any time a train deviates from the normal platform an announcement will be made.

Shannon from Woodbridge, VA asks:

Traffic Safety concern: Please remember that the right lane at the intersection of Highway 1 and Dawson Beach Road is right turn only except between 5 and 7 PM M-F. Numerous near miss accidents have occurred when people in the right lane proceed onto Occoquan Road and end up in the left lane in the middle of the intersection. I have witnessed three near miss accidents at this intersection in the last week.

VRE Management:

We will continue to work with the County on this issue.

Lynne from Woodbridge, VA asks:

Occoquan Road is 35 mph. People speed down that road in the morning and cut from the right lane into the left lane at the Highway 1 intersection in the morning; some of which run the red light daily. Is it possible to have a police car somewhere on Occoquan Road to catch speeders and folks that insist on running a red light just to make the train that they will make anyway?

VRE Management:

This is another issue we will work with PW County on.

Not Silenced!!! from Manassas, VA asks:

The 'Quiet Car' policemen need to STOP, their conduct is completely RUDE and INAPPROPRIATE. The sign definitely says that 'whisper briefly-quietly' to a neighbor IS allowed. Recently, I had whispered 'Hi' and 'how are you' to my neighbor. The guy behind us reminded us we were on the quiet car. IMO if your 'ears' are that sensitive, then invest in some ear plugs and stop the rudeness!!! The quiet car is 'quiet' not 'silent'. Maybe VRE could offer 'ear plugs' for sale for these people.

VRE Management:

The Quiet car is not a silent car, you are correct.

Jon from Washington, DC asks:

Have you given any thought to longer term passes? I have seen some mass transit systems use quarterly and yearly passes. I am just trying to think of ways to save money and would be willing to commit to a longer term pass for a discount.

VRE Management:

We have not considered but will be happy to look into it.

Tony from Woodbridge VA asks:

This question has been asked before and never adequately answered, so I am asking again. When VRE runs late or has some kind of mechanical issues, etc., they often hand out a FRC (FREE Single Ride)

ticket. This is of almost no good to all the Monthly Ticket holders. Why is there no system or instrument to offer something to those customers? It gives compensation to riders that ride less often, and nothing to those that are the hardcore riders that use VRE daily! Please tell us something besides, "Well you can give the ticket away" answer!

VRE Management:

We have no plans to change the current policy.

Heather from Lorton, VA asks:

Are there any plans to get WIFI on the trains? If so, what is the timeline.

VRE Management:

As stated in previous on-line forums, we are still working to get uninterrupted WiFi throughout our Rail System. No estimated date for implementation.

Chris from Culpeper VA asks:

I have been wondering if there are plans to extend the Manassas line down to Remington and Brandy Station. With all the commuters driving up Rt. 28 & 29 it would make sense to provide an alternative to sitting in the traffic on Rt. 66. I am a monthly ticket holder riding for the past 2.5 years. Thank you.

VRE Management:

No plans at this time. A Gainesville/Haymarket extension is an active project.

Tim from FBG VA asks:

Is VRE going to post a planned/revised schedule for the FBG line with Spotsylvania due to come online shortly? It would help current FBG customers in their decision to switch to Spotsy or continue to use FBG.

VRE Management:

We are still waiting on the finalization of the station. As soon as we know the public will know.

Diana from Manassas VA asks:

I asked last year why the train announcements had stopped, and was told they'd be reinstated soon. This hasn't happened on 327 at least. Now we again have talkers and people on their phones in the quiet car and folks lining up after we leave Manassas Park who don't get off until Broad Run. So those of us trying to detrain at Manassas have the problem of trying to figure out if the person in front of us is actually getting off. Can we get announcements back in place please? Always new riders who need to hear it, and old riders who need the reminder. Thx.

VRE Management:

We will remind our Crews of this again.

Mel from Burke, VA asks:

While generally more a problem in the winter, this morning the headlights of a car that backed into a parking spot were on while someone sat inside, blinding all the cars driving up the ramp of the parking garage. I get why you back into the parking spot, but please be courteous and turn off your headlights - the drivers that come after you have NO way of avoiding the glare of your headlights.

VRE Management:

Courtesy reminder from a fellow rider.

Janet from VA asks:

Can VRE have the time and temperature added to the monitors at each station. I appreciate the notice is trains are on time, running late, or cancelled. But, it would just be good to look up and see the time and temperature. Thank you.

VRE Management:

We are working on a project to update the displays at the station to include real time information such as; weather, bus schedules, train arrival times, etc. Stay tuned!

Mim from Bristow, VA asks:

Manassas line train 330 has been a few minutes late almost every morning when arriving at the Alexandria station. There was been an Amtrak train ahead of us and it has made our train late. Is there any way to make sure this doesn't happen so often in the future? The few minutes of delay can significantly delay me getting to work if I miss my connecting bus.

VRE Management:

Unfortunately, Amtrak trains have priority over all other trains.

Cheermom from Fred VA asks:

I am writing concerning the non-handicap accessibility at the Alex. Station. Several times in the last

couple of weeks either VRE or Amtrak have let us off on the opposite side of the station and I use a cane and have to use the steps. Luckily there is no one with a wheel chair. What would they do? Then they repaired the crossover with no notice or signage when it would be done and again I had to take the steps. During the repair we VRE should have been let out on the station side. Please advise and thanks. Loyal rider for 24 years!

VRE Management:

Thank you for being a loyal rider. The cross over issue was temporary due to CSX track work. We are working on a new tunnel with elevators so both platforms will be accessible.

Dave from Gainesville VA asks:

I had to make the occasional long trip to Ft Meade yesterday. Coming home a MARC conductor told me she thought the VRE-MARC partnership program had ended. I told her I hadn't heard about that and I thought my VRE ticket was good to use MARC so she let me board (MARC checks tickets on platform unlike VRE)

VRE Management:

As of July, 2015, you can no longer ride MARC with a VRE ticket.

Mark from Fredericksburg, VA asks:

Good call on awarding Keolis on a new contract; I find their conductors uncommonly pleasant, courteous and professional. Can you give a quick summary of the construction on the Fredericksburg line. I know of the new station, but seems like a new track is being added to nearly the entire line is that correct. Thank you for the outstanding service. Any day on 95 is a miserable day.

VRE Management:

Thanks for your compliments. We will pass it on to the crews. A third track is being constructed on the Fredericksburg line.

craig from manassas asks:

The VRE/AMTRAK representative that is supposed to be at union station in the afternoon is still unavailable. when we call VRE offices for assistance the lady on the phone is irritated. Has this representative position been scratched? Is there help in the near future? After a long day it would be nice to have no problems catching the ride home.

VRE Management:

The selection of a representative should happen soon. We will let you know when they start.

Rob from Fredericksburg asks:

Is there anyway to get the various groups trying to sell or pass out items in the mornings and afternoons at the Fredericksburg train station to move out of the way or not be there at all? The station is already a bad choke point with pedestrian and vehicle traffic. Now everyone has to dodge these people causing even more congestion at the station.

VRE Management:

We will pass this along to the City of Fredericksburg

Todd from Bristow asks:

Please fix the gigantic potholes in the Broad Run station parking lot (in the side parking lot closest to the train yard). This needs to be addressed.

VRE Management:

We will pass this on to Prince William County.

W from Woodbridge asks:

People will not move their bags to let you sit down, one lady refused to put her purse in her lap. Also, I keep getting hit with backpacks - I know not everyone reads the forum. Could maybe a flyer of common courtesy things be done and placed in the seats. Also, Lenfant station is stinky, my eyes water the moment I reach it - its coming from the trash cans and the concrete needs power washed. Also there is still an ant problem at the Woodbridge station.

VRE Management:

We will keep these courtesy reminders for our monthly RIDE magazine as well as train talks. Our Facilities manager will look into the Ant problem at Woodbridge.

Dave from Woodbridge, VA asks:

In the VRE Mobile App, the Trip Tools link just goes to VRE's website that doesn't have trip tools. I'm surprised VRE's website has been redesigned yet. Will it be soon? Other rail apps feature trip tools. So, how about adding features that the GoVRE app has like Schedule, Railtime and Twitter?

VRE Management:

Planning for Phase 2 of VRE Mobile will be kicked off later this month. Phase 2 will include Blackberry and Windows versions of the App as well as a trip planning tool. Our new website will launch this fall.

Dan from Woodbridge, VA asks:

A courtesy tip. Riders, you do not need to keep holding the door open after the conductor opens it and don't lean on it to hold it open. LET THE DOORS CLOSE. Also, don't open the doors too early. The doors do not need to stay open between stations and it should not be open until the train is on the platform.

VRE Management:

Courtesy Reminder!

Davin from Woodbridge, VA asks:

Will VRE start using the storage tracks at L'Enfant Plaza this fall?

VRE Management:

The project is underway. We do not have an estimated completion date at this time.

James from Gainesville va asks:

Queuing has become, and continued to be, a major problem. The 328 is a major problem, as folks who get off at L'enfant are already up and blocking the isle when we are at Crystal City. This makes it difficult for people trying to get off. I've seen a few people almost miss their stop because of it. After which the l'enfant folks just make fun of them. I've brought this up to the VRE management, and all that I've been told is that they would talk to the conductors. Either that was a lie, or the conductors are refusing to enforce the no queueing policy.

VRE Management:

We know queuing is a problem. We ask passengers to not stand until the train has departed the station prior to theirs. The Conductors do their best to enforce this. We will ask Conductors to make announcements reminding passengers of this practice.

Debbie from Broad Run, VA asks:

Yesterday afternoon on Train 333 it seemed like we must have hit something on the way home. The train came to a complete stop for a few minutes and then it started back up and we proceeded on. The conductors did not inform the passengers of what happened, so I am asking what happened. Also shouldn't it be a policy that when instances such as stopping the train that the passengers are informed as to what the incident may have been or why the train had to stop instead of being kept in the dark.

VRE Management:

Train 333 hit a small tree last night. Conductors are required to make announcements regarding delays in a timely manner. We will address it with the appropriate crew.

Kash from Lorton, VA asks:

I recently had the catalytic converter stolen from my car while it was parked at VRE's Lorton Station. What can we expect from a security standpoint to mitigate issues like this so that it doesn't happen again?

VRE Management:

Thanks we will notify Fairfax County.

Gulliver from Leeland River Estates asks:

Advance queuing is a problem. Yesterday on Train 306, the yahoos were just standing at the door waiting to queue. When I tried to go to the restroom it was like it an inconvenience to let me pass. The people waiting for Leeland, and Fredericksburg, is just flumadiddle. Where are the conductors. I did not see a conductor once last night on 306. Conductors are so quick to issue tickets for fare violations. Write up the yahoos are queuing so early. Please work with Stafford County to put pet waste stations at Leeland Station. It is a violation of Stafford County statues to leave that s

VRE Management:

Previously answered question, but we like the word flummadiddle.

Crystal from Fredericksburg asks:

Are there plans to add another express train? It would be nice to get to D.C. within 45 minutes to an hour. Thanks

VRE Management:

We have no plans at this time to add another limited stop train.

Hungry from Manassas asks:

Ever thought of offering bottled water or snacks? Might help curtail some of the costs.

VRE Management:

No current plans.

Karen from Fairfax, VA asks:

I board the Rolling Rd. train in the AM and am wondering if you will ever implement later trains arriving after the last pick up of 8:18am (say, 9:00am)? Same thing with the evening. I board at Union Station and the last train out is at 6:50pm. It would be nice to have a later option. This is particularly an issue when the govt. is delayed two hours in the morning. My work time starts at 10:00am, yet I have to get the 8:18am train. Thank you.

VRE Management:

We have no plans to operate outside of our current window.

Steve from Fredericksburg asks:

Good Afternoon: This is a policy question requiring no hardware or scheduling logistics: Can VRE and Amtrak initiate the use of Step-ups (with applicable VRE fare media) for weekend Amtrak use? It would be great to avoid 95 when having to be at work on the weekends, and add ROI to VRE-supporting entities. Thanks.

VRE Management:

Our current operating agreements do not permit the use of step-ups on weekend trains.

Linda from Manassas, Virginia asks:

Yesterday on 327 to Manassas a woman got on with a huge bike...it took up three seats when she rested it against the row. As you know, trains are very crowded...why was this permitted?

VRE Management:

We will address this with the crews. Our bicycle policy allows full size bicycles on the last three trains, mid-day trains and reverse flow trains.

VRE Management:

Thanks for all the great questions as our time is up. We always enjoy these chats with our riders. Our monthly safety tip: It is easy to be distracted this summer with the warm weather, parties and vacations. However, make sure you take time to be aware of your surroundings and not take any unnecessary risks while commuting.
See Tracks? Think Trains!
Rich, Chris, et al.
