

Let's Talk!

The next VRE online forum will start on Wednesday, February 4th at 12:00pm. Click on the "ASK" Button below to submit a question.



There are currently 40 questions waiting to be answered.

VRE Management:

We've noticed a lot of questions and comments about the proposed fare increase. We encourage you to participate during our public comment period. We summarize all comments received and present them to the Board for review before they approve any fare increase. For more information about the proposed fare increase please visit our website at www.vre.org/feedback/publichearing.html.
On with the questions.

Clint from Bristow, VA asks:

I would like to give kudos to the crew on Train 322 on the morning of January 22. They handled the lengthy delay with a high degree of professionalism, and did an excellent job of keeping passengers informed at all times. Just a note to some of my fellow passengers that were whining and complaining the whole time: what more did you expect VRE to do after a pedestrian was struck and the police closed the tracks? Options were pretty limited.

VRE Management:

Thank you for the compliments. We will be sure to pass this along to Keolis' Managerial staff.

Chad from Fairfax asks:

Please consider adding a Southbound Manassas line train leaving Union station in between the current 1:15 and 3:45 trains. It is horribly inconvenient to schedule afternoon activities when I have to leave work at 1:00 or 3:30, with nothing in between.

VRE Management:

We do not have any current plans to add trains to the Manassas line.

Dave from Manassas asks:

Does VRE allow locomotives to idle overnight and weekends at the layover facilities?

VRE Management:

The trains are connected to electrical power to avoid the need to keep locomotives running, however, on occasion, especially in extreme cold conditions, we may opt to leave the locomotives running to protect the morning service.

mike from Manassas, VA asks:

Are you planning to add extra train services for the regular schedule?

VRE Management:

The only additional service planned is adding a train on the Fredericksburg line.

laurie from **Burke** asks:

Hello. Thanks again for great service. My question is, when federal government has a two hour delay the majority of companies in DC also follow their lead. This is standard protocol for 90 percent of offices. Why can't VRE offer the same schedule and delay by two hours. Those of us who have no other alternative must brave slick and snowy conditions to make it to VRE on time. I think it's a safety issue as much as it is a convenience issue. im just saying...Thx

VRE Management:

While we do not have the flexibility to change our schedule, we did make consist changes which put the longest trains on the latest schedule to accommodate the later crowds. This seemed to work well during the most recent delayed opening.

Ed C from **Burke, Va** asks:

On Tuesday's train 329 there were no station announcements and nothing on the screen above the door. I wasn't sure where I was at one point. What gives?

VRE Management:

Thanks, we will look into this and always write in to gotrains@vre.org with the car number so we can alert our mechanical crews.

john from **clifton, va** asks:

Is wifi coming to the train service?

VRE Management:

Not at this time. There are still significant areas on both lines that do not receive cellular signals strong enough to support WiFi

Restless on 303 from **Fredericksburg** asks:

Can something be done about "Tickle me Elmo" on train 303? There is a woman who has a very high pitched titter that is painful to hear. She "laughs" constantly... not even professional comics are that funny all the time. After a long day at work, all I want is to sit back and relax... but that doesn't happen when every few minutes I hear a high pitched "tee hee". Please remove her batteries... its bordering on acoustic abuse.

VRE Management:

Sorry, restless. No rules against laughing and having a good time. If it is a distraction, try different car.

Jennifer from **Lorton va** asks:

A car was removed from the frederickburg line and dozens of people are standing by the time it gets to lorton When will the car be added back on?

VRE Management:

We adjust our train consist(s) based on ridership.

Josh from **Springfield,VA** asks:

Why weren't riders alerted when trains were stopped on the Manassas line a few weeks back? The website had no notification and no emails were sent. I had to find the info on Twitter to know that the Metro option was open. Why can you send me an email to come ask a question but an email when service is interrupted?

VRE Management:

Train talks were sent out respectively.

Dan from **Manassas** asks:

What is the status of VRE's extension to Haymarket. Has the environmental impact statement been completed. What can riders and other do to speed up the process?

VRE Management:

The VRE System Plan 2040, VRE's long-range plan, envisions VRE service to Gainesville-Haymarket to begin in the 2021-2025 timeframe.

David from **Haymarket** asks:

The men's bathroom at the manassas station has not been cleaned and the toilet/urinal has been backed up for several days? Can something be done about that? Thank you!

VRE Management:

The Manassas Station is taken care of by the City of Manassas. We will forward your comments to them.

S from **Fredericksburg VA** asks:

Could the conductors please ask those riders who have carry-on roller bags to please step away from the train before they 'stop, drop and roll'? It doesn't take but a few seconds to move out of the way - then extend the handle. If it's that heavy that one must open to drag immediately, perhaps that person needs to re-evaluate what they're carrying to work. My next question is heavy scents - male or female. Maybe an announcement of some sort or a flyer? This makes a miserable ride for serious asthma and allergy sufferers. Third- a rate hike of 4%? We only got a 1% raise this year. Please consider

VRE Management:

We always send out courtesy reminders for all of your concerns. Yes, VRE is proposing a fare increase.

Jennifer from **Fredericksburg, VA** asks:

Why would it not be possible to run the VRE at least on an S schedule for the "smaller" Federal holidays that the majority of the population has to work including a fair amount of contractors? I would think this would be beneficial especially since you are looking to increase the ticket rates. We have added expenses on top of our monthly rates on these dates because we too have to drive or find other means to get to work, when we would normally take the VRE. Thank you.

VRE Management:

We have run "S" schedules on Federal holidays before and did not have enough riders to justify costs.

S from **Fredericksburg VA** asks:

Are there any tentative rail schedules for the Spotsylvania station?

VRE Management:

The schedule is not yet worked out.

Sarah from **Woodbridge, VA** asks:

In the evenings at Union Station, MARC always posts which track the MARC will be on, BUT VRE rarely posts this info. Why can AMTRAK post it for MARC but not VRE? There are several times when we have to wait upstairs inside, until the train is physically coming in to see which track. Some people with disabilities have problems rushing to get down there!

VRE Management:

We will continue to work with Amtrak to make sure information is updated in a timely and accurate manner.

Doug from **Loudoun County, VA** asks:

Thank you for addressing the following question: A large share of VRE's ridership consists of civil servants. To what extent does VRE benchmark {1} proposed and {2} achieved fare increases against changes in Federal wages in the National Capital Region? Please note that I am not asking about commuter subsidies - efforts to increase the level of subsidization simply pushes VRE fare increases onto the U.S. taxpayer.

VRE Management:

Federal wages, increases or decreases in benefits do not influence fare increases.

Connie from **Dumfries, VA** asks:

I heard there may be a fare increase is this true? how much and when? Also, once again -- has there been any sign of the transit subsidy benefits being increased back to \$250? Weird how December they decided to retro the fare but depending on what agency you work for you were NOT retro any funds --

why wait until December (after you get your monthly pass) then decide to increase the fare only through December 2014? why not have a four year plan? to have to go through the increase then decrease so many times isn't helping. Hope you can provide positive feedback.

VRE Management:

Yes, we are proposing a 4% fare increase. While we are doing all we can internally to control costs, there are factors beyond our control that will increase our costs. These factors include the implementation of a federally mandated Positive Train Control system, a decrease in state funding assistance, and increased train operations expenses.

JY from Woodbridge asks:

I know it must cost a ton of money to have the lights in the stairway on all the time but when we must go over to the track 3 side at Woodbridge it would have helped for us to see. This happen last week when we had to switch sides at the last minute. Thanks for the trip.

VRE Management:

We will let our Facilities Manager know of this concern.

Alejandra Rodriguez from Virginia asks:

Why is so hard to get Wifi on VRE trains? It would certainly help, not only for entertainment but also productivity... and connectivity... Could you share true estimates and timelines for implementation? Thank you,

VRE Management:

We are still concerned about reliability throughout the VRE service area and funding is not available.

Mike from Manassas Park, VA asks:

Is there anyway to make sure that the escalators at Union Station stay working in the morning? I don't mind walking up but I've seen a few passengers who struggle and legitimately need the assistance of the escalators.

VRE Management:

Union Station is managed solely by Amtrak but again we are working with Amtrak to address these types of situations.

Dave from Woodbridge, Va asks:

When will the new train be added to the Fredricksburg line? Also, any plans to add an additional car to the 300 Express? Many mornings (Tuesday-Thursday) it is still standing room only once it picks up the Woodbridge passengers.

VRE Management:

A new train will be added to the Fredericksburg line to address the increased ridership.

Sleepy from Bristow asks:

The current conductors on Train 324 walk in the quiet car and yell "tickets please!" Past conductors have had the courtesy respect the quiet car rules by silently checking the tickets. Those conductors rarely had to ask a passenger to see a ticket and if they did, they did so quietly. Is it too much to ask that the conductors be quiet in the Quiet Car?

VRE Management:

We will speak with the Conductors on Train 324 asking them to tone it down a bit in the Quiet car.

Don from Manassas, VA asks:

The information over the loud speakers at Union Station during the 4:25Pm delays was quite inaccurate. Who generates these announcements? Here is a sequence of the delay announcements, 55 mins (numerous times), 15 minutes (numerous times), then 25 minutes (once) right before the train arrived. Perhaps saying estimate arrival time is...would be easier to understand.

VRE Management:

The automated delay announcements should have been disabled to eliminate confusion. Our communications room staff was manually sending out updates.

Harry from Confusion asks:

Proposed 4% fare increase puts a hurting on us. Also, encourages people to drive. Noticed train 324 is longer than usual. Is this change permanent?

VRE Management:

Yes, the proposed fare increase is necessary due to a decrease in state funding and an increase in train operations expenses. We've made no changes to Train 324.

Mike from Hanover, VA asks:

I ride the 5:05 Train 300 from Fredericksburg. This morning there was no heat in the Quiet Car!!! Why is there no heat in these cars?????

VRE Management:

We will have our Mechanical department look into it.

Doug from Broad Run asks:

I ride in the quiet car in the morning and the sounds of cell phone alerts is near constant. Conductors are rarely seen and they only stay for a few minutes once per trip. Even if they are standing next to a person with a ringing cell phone, they do not say or do anything about it. Please have your conductors enforce the quiet rules.

VRE Management:

Courtesy reminder.

Joe B from Fredericksburg, VA asks:

I understand the need to raise rates. However, one cost saving measure I would recommend is to cease providing paper copies of the VRE Ride Magazine. They usually end up left on the train or in the trash. A digital copy would be more helpful. Thanks.

VRE Management:

The magazine is funded through advertisements so it is revenue neutral and your fares do not go to the cost of creating it. A digital version exists on the website as well.

Andrew from Clifton, VA asks:

This morning there was a huge backup of cars at the Burke Ctr. station right before the 328 arrived. It was caused by the George Mason Univ. shuttle bus that was, coincidentally, promoted in the "Ride VRE" distributed today. The goal of transit improvements is quite laudable and I applaud this project. But someone needs to talk to the GMU people and explain the problem they've caused several times now. They need a better system for picking up and dropping off passengers or their goodwill, and the VRE's, will start to evaporate. Thank you for addressing this matter.

VRE Management:

This is something we will investigate with Fairfax County.

Lee from Burke asks:

Is the parking deck at Burke Centre smoking or non-smoking? I had an asthma attack this morning walking past a car in which the commuter must have been smoking for quite a while as he waiting for a train, so I have a distinct interest in signs being posted if it is non-smoking (since it is a public building in Fairfax County).

VRE Management:

This is an open air facility and it is the property of Fairfax County. So unfortunately, we cannot enforce any smoking policies other than on our platforms.

GS from Burke asks:

I read this morning about a proposed 4% fare increase to cover increased operational costs. Doesn't plummeting oil prices offset enough of the operational costs to avoid a fare increase at this point. Separately, in my 8 years riding, i believe this is at least the 4th fare increase. In that same period, inflation has been extremely low. What is the operational costs driving the increase, is it union benefits?

VRE Management:

We are doing all we can internally to control cost, there are factors beyond our control that will increase our costs. These factors include the implementation of a federally mandated Positive Train

Control system, a decrease in state funding assistance, and increased train operations expenses.

Adam from **Fredericksburg, VA** asks:

When is VRE going to start operating on weekends between Fredericksburg and Washington? Also, when is VRE going to add more trains and expand the schedule to run more hours of the day?

VRE Management:

We currently do not have plans to operate on weekends.

David from **Gainesville VA** asks:

Bicyclists have it hard. No racks at Broad Run or Crystal City and Broad Run's Piper Lane has no shoulder so I shudder every time I pass a bicyclists on Piper using a portion of the narrow, potholed road

VRE Management:

We will pass this along to our member jurisdictions.

Glynnis from **Fairfax** asks:

Regarding the traffic circle at Burke Center, despite posted signage cars are double & triple parking to pick up passengers. My concern is when they exit. The STOP sign for the surface lot is before the circle begins. Cars exiting improperly from the circle stop & are assuming cars exiting the surface lot will stop again, however those drivers have already stopped. I've seen some close calls recently. Cars exiting the surface lot have the right of way, not those improperly exiting the circle. Can something be done so everyone is on the same page? Thanks

VRE Management:

There is no traffic circle at Burke Centre. This is a restricted bus loop and we will contact Fairfax County.

Cliff from **Burke, VA** asks:

I have enjoyed the great pictures that are printed on the front of the VRE express magazine. However sometimes I am not able to recognize where the pictures were taken and I am not able to find any notice in the magazine. Do you have a list available for past pictures and could you add a notice in upcoming issues?

VRE Management:

We will pass this suggestion along to the staff that created the magazine.

Rosita from **Dumfries, VA** asks:

What can be done about Handicap Parking at Rippon? I am currently wearing 2 surgical shoes, and am walking with a cane. I was almost hit by a car last Wednesday in the upper parking lot. The car was coming straight at me. It was a compact red car with bright lights. I could not move and if the car didnt swerve at the last minute, I would have been hit. It happened between 6:45 and 7:00pm. I tried to move/run but couldnt. I have tried to catch the 7:04am train from Rippon so that I can get handicap parking but if you are not there before 6:45am, all spaces are taken.

VRE Management:

Our stations meet all current Federal ADA requirements. We are working with local jurisdictions on speed enforcement issues at a number of our parking lots.

Tim from **Lorton, VA** asks:

When will testing begin for your mobile app? I thought it was supposed to be late January. Also, make sure it is available for Android and not just the iPhone you advertised in VRE magazine. I've seen many riders using Android phones

VRE Management:

We are currently alpha testing internally. Public beta testing begins in March with full roll-out later in Spring on Android and Apple phones. Later iterations will include Windows and Blackberry phones.

Davin from **Woodbridge, VA** asks:

Why are the crews having trouble stopping the train this week? On Monday, Train #307 stopped to far up and yesterday it stopped to far back. As a result, I was one of the last on the train and couldn't get a seat on the upper level. We stand approximately where the door will open so we can be first on the train, but we can't when the Train stops in the wrong place at the station platform

VRE Management:

We have engineers in training on both lines. Stopping the trains consistently at the same spot is more difficult than it looks, but should improve as they gain experience.

Liz from Fredericksburg asks:

I know we are supposed to take off backpacks while getting on and off the train. I choose to carry a backpack over a briefcase/laptop bag because of the weight that I have to carry every day. I'm more in the way when I'm trying to drag my 20lb backpack up the stairs. I see others with the same problem as I was clocked in the head by a heavy backpack someone was swinging up the stairs. I'll be keeping my backpack on, and people behind me can be aware of their own surroundings. Just a thought! Thanks to everyone at VRE for making commuting easy and headache free. You guys are the best!

VRE Management:

Thanks for your compliments.

Bob from Bristow, VA asks:

Nice cover shot in today's RIDE magazine of a VRE train driving through the snow. Do you know where it was taken? I've been trying to figure this out all morning, but the layout of the tracks and the Capitol dome in the background have me puzzled.

VRE Management:

North of Alexandria.

Ellis from Woodbridge asks:

Who should we call at your office if there is a problem with lights where roads cross train tracks.

VRE Management:

There will always be a telephone number posted on a sign or a large sticker on or near the crossing signal. There will also be a unique identifying number for that crossing. Call the number posted on the sign, provide this information and the railroad will dispatch someone immediately.

Ray from Spotsy asks:

I'm really looking forward to the new station. Its been a long time coming. Will the new station be on the Express line?

VRE Management:

We plan for all trains to start at the Spotsylvania station.

Louis from Manassas, VA asks:

2 questions: Why are conductors closing cars off? also another increase in fare? How about we get the commuter benefit rate up to the same as riders then increase.

VRE Management:

For normal service the only trains that close off cars are Train 325 and Train 336. VRE continues to advocate for permanent commuter benefits parity with parking.

Concerned from Woodbridge asks:

When people leave the parking garage at Woodbridge after getting off the 303 train they are still crossing Rt.1 to Occoquan Rd in the right lane which is illegal until 5pm. Please contact PW County Police and either have the sign removed or the area monitored. Way to many close incidents with these same people each day.

VRE Management:

We will pass this along to Prince William County.

Connie from Lorton asks:

When considering the revenue generated from the rate increase, did you consider potential lost

revenue from VRE riders who switch to the Metro?

VRE Management:

Yes we did.

Shannon from **Bristow, VA** asks:

This is probably covered in the general information, but I am a new rider and cannot find it. When southbound trains are delayed for the afternoon commute, and the "metro option" is available. How does one get to the Broad Run parking lot from metro?

VRE Management:

When metro option is opened it allows VRE riders to ride the Metrorail system with a valid VRE ticket. This alternative works for some riders but not others. We are working with PRTC to be able to do something similar.

Steve from **Fredericksburg** asks:

If and when Amtrak Step-up fares increase, will the current \$3 tickets still be honored? Also, any thoughts on weekend cross-honor agreements with Amtrak (even at a higher stepup rate)?

VRE Management:

Step up tickets are valid for one year from the date of purchase.

Dave from **Bristow** asks:

Please tell us again why you refuse to add service to the Manassas line. Your fredericksburg riders are more vocal perhaps?

VRE Management:

Once we add the new Fredericksburg line train, both lines will have an equal number of revenue trains.

VRE Management:

Thanks for another month of great questions. We've seen a lot of questions but a few great themes emerged. Never risk your safety or that of your fellow riders by being in such a hurry to get to the train or out of the parking lot. Also take grade crossings seriously!
See you next month.
Happy Valentines Day!
Rich, Chris et al.