



## Feedback



### Let's Talk

Our next on-line forum is scheduled to be held on Wednesday, April 6 from 12:00n until 1:00p.

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#### VRE Management:

Welcome back! Today, we are going to talk about equipment and service. I will center my attention on those questions, although I may answer some others. Since we all experienced with this let's start!

#### John from Manassas, VA asks:

Is there any (good) news that you can share regarding the bids for new rail cars?

#### VRE Management:

VRE is purchasing 11 new cab cars to replace the Mafersa cab cars. This procurement was completed earlier this year and a "notice of intent to award" was given last week. Providing there are no problems, VRE expects to recommend the award to our Board on April 15th for 11 "gallery" style cab cars with an option for 50 more. These cars will be similar in style to the current Gallery cars, but will be new with better creature comforts. The option needs to be exercised by April of 2006. VRE has received some money from the State of Virginia for the option and is hoping that the TEA legislation will give us more.

#### David E. Cann from Stafford, Virginia asks:

As a VRE passenger for most of the last 8 years, I am very curious to know why the two Stafford County stations are "Zone 8" when the Quantico is "Zone 6." Why do fares jump two full zones between stations? At a time when you are considering raising fares for the two Stafford stations by a higher amount than all others because our County Council does not want to pay the additional \$90K you asked for

recently, it appears reasonable to me that an explanation of this far schedule should also be in order. We are already paying a higher fare simply because you designated our stations to be a higher far zone quite a few years ago, and I would like to know the justification for the "double increase." Because you need the money is not a reason, because your passengers in Stafford need it, too!

**VRE Management:**

Our zones are based on the distance of the stations from Union Station. Currently, zone 7 exists because of this. While there are currently no stations in zone 7, the Stafford stations are well beyond the mileage for the zone formula to be zone 7. When construction at Leeland Road station occurred several years ago, we put Brooke on sale at a zone 6 price to encourage people to shift during construction. In the years that followed, Brooke's ridership increased and began to fill the station to capacity. At that point, the station was returned to its original zone. In addition, zone 7 is reserved for potential future stations at Cherry Hill and Widewater.

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**Penny from Manassas asks:**

Why don't we have more trains leaving the city in the am?

**VRE Management:**

Under the Memorandum of Understanding with CSX it is specified how many trains we can operate on their line. Before CSX will grant us permission to operate additional trains, there are a series of 7 capital projects that must be completed to improve the existing infrastructure so that it can support increased capacity. This being said, we are happy to report that with support from the Commonwealth of Virginia we are currently working with CSX to complete infrastructure improvement projects. The most important project, expansion of the single track Quantico Bridge, is already underway and others including, the construction of another interlocking near Aquia, are scheduled to begin shortly. As projects of this nature are completed we will be in a better position to add trains.

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**Debbie from Haymarket asks:**

While I appreciate the problem with people queing prior to their stop I would also like to point out that if those people actually got up when the train pulled into the station they might not miss their stop. Those of us that que get up and make sure all Manassas station folks have gotten off. However, if you just sit in your seat until we get up and then complain

cause you can't get through perhaps you are just looking for something to complain about.

**VRE Management:**

Certainly, there is a right way and a wrong way to queue. The right way is to wait until the train has actually departed the station before yours. The wrong way is to get up while the train is in the station prior to yours, or worse, has not even arrived at the station prior to yours. While we agree that everyone should be aware that the train is approaching their station, there are those without visible physical disabilities who simply find it uncomfortable or are unable to stand as the train approaches the station. Queuing before they can get up and get off the train is unfair and may cause them to miss their stops.

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**Dan from VA asks:**

Has VRE considered more on board advertising?

**VRE Management:**

Yes, we do have advertising on train cars and expect to have more in the near future. As we replace Mafersa with Gallery equipment, we will put more advertising on the Gallery cars, especially as the economy gets better.

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**Willy from Springfield, VA asks:**

There are a couple of marquee signs that have been inoperative or impaired for several months; one on the l'Enfant Plaza platform which has a garbled display, and the other outside the Backlick Road station facing the parking lot which is totally inoperative despite the one inside the station working fine. Do you intend to repair them or not?

**VRE Management:**

We know that there are some signs that have been an issue. We are working to repair them, unfortunately, it has taken longer than we expected. To report sign outages, visit our station information form on the website. These comments go directly to our Manager of Facilities.

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**Mark from Broadrun asks:**

As more people move and live in the vicinity of Broadrun, it is likely that this will lead to increases in VRE ridership. Also, as gasoline prices continue to increase, this may also bring in new riders. What are VRE's plans to handle likely increases in ridership that in my opinion are going to exceed your current

capacity in the near future.

**VRE Management:**

There is no doubt that there are more people who want to ride VRE than we currently have capacity for. We have a long term strategic plan to increase our capacity and serve more people. However, the roads are getting worse faster than our ability to execute the plan. Short term, we are looking for more daytime storage so we can lengthen trains. Negotiations are ongoing and I am hopeful. Look for more information on this as it progresses.

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**Frank from Fredericksburg asks:**

Would VRE partner with local jurisdictions and install emergency pre-programmed phones in stations, on platforms, and in parking lots that automatically dial 911 when lifted from the cradle?

**VRE Management:**

We used to have pay phones that permitted 911 calling, but because of the phones lack of use and severe vandalism, Verizon removed the phones. We are looking at a program that will install call boxes at select stations and are evaluation other stations for the need for call boxes.

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**Mark from Broadrun asks:**

Will the expanded parking lot now under construction handle all the cars that line both sides of the street?

**VRE Management:**

The two parking projects will provide almost 200 additional parking spots. It should remove most of the cars off the access road, but I am sure additional people will start parking there.

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**Charlie from Fredericksburg, VA asks:**

Is it true that VRE is considering scrapping the 10-ride ticket? If so, why? The 5-day ticket is a potential waste of money for those that telework thus making the 10-trip ticket the right answer. Additionally, due to frequent telework schedules and periods spent out of town in the course of the job in the DC area, a monthly ticket is also a potential waste of money; thus (again) making the 10-trip ticket the right answer. Personally, I believe the 5-day ticket was the dumbest action VRE could have taken. I make that comment completely blind to any knowledge of how successful or unsuccessful it may be, but,

would also submit that if it is successful to VRE, it's a potential rip-off to the customer. Thanks for your time.

**VRE Management:**

No, we are not considering scrapping the 10-Trip. We have only changed the fare structure to increase the discount on the monthly and encourage more people to use passes.

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**Donna from Dumfries, VA asks:**

What, if anything, is being done to eradicate the foul stench emanating from the restroom facility on Train 307? To say it is nauseating would be to grossly understate its affect. When can we expect some relief?

**VRE Management:**

This toilet continues to be a problem. We have completely cleaned out and reset the system 3 times. Early this week, we replaced the recyclable material inside. We are hoping this takes care of the problem and are continuing to investigate why this specific toilet is having more issues and not responding to maintenance.

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**Roxann from Bristow, VA asks:**

When will you improve the quality of the trains on the Manassas line? We are tired of hearing that the trains on the Fredericksburg line are nicer because only they can maintain them. Do something to fix that please. For what we pay, the train quality should be equal and it is not. Signed, tired of riding in a cattle car.

**VRE Management:**

Soon all VRE equipment will be Gallery equipment. I think you are referring to wanting to move the Kawaski equipment to Manassas line. An inspection pit is 50% complete at Broad Run. As soon as it is finished, we will look at our consists and see what can be done.

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**Mary from Broadrun/Nokesville asks:**

I was recently told that we were going to lose the Sounder cars in the May/June time frame, is this correct? I take the 5:45a into Union Station.

**VRE Management:**

Yes, we will lose 6 Sounder cars by May 1. We will have to replace the Sounders with additional Gallery equipment. Seattle asked for the cars back, which they can do

contractually.

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**Andy from Alexandria, VA** asks:

Yesterday afternoon we were stopped before a broken down CSX freight train, a rather long one. While we were waiting to be cleared to pass by, the conductor announced that we would be stopping momentarily to pick up a CSX trainman at the rear of his train and give him a lift to the front. I thought that was rather neighborly of us. So, how is our relationship with CSX? Better than before? Worse? Tenuous at best? I remember we had a few problems with them last year, which caused significant delays for all the VRE trains.

**VRE Management:**

I feel that our relationship with CSX has improved. We are both working very hard to complete the 7 projects on the CSX line so we can add four additional round trips on our system. I feel CSX is more concerned now about reliability and dispatching such that their trains and our trains operate more reliably.

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**Joe from Stafford, VA** asks:

Heard recently that the train consist on the Fredericksburg line would be increasing by two cars. Is that true and when will it start?

**VRE Management:**

If I can get additional mid-day storage space in Washington, my intent is to start lengthening trains by adding cars to the most heavily used trains. We do not have the mid-day storage space yet, but we are negotiating with Amtrak. I will keep you updated.

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**David E. Cann from Stafford** asks:

Is there any future plan to expand the Brooke parking lot, and is there anything that can be done about people who DAILY park in places clearly not for parking. . . such as painted spaces at the end of rows. While this makes it easier for them to get out, it also makes it more difficult for the rest of us to do so.

**VRE Management:**

The answer is no for the immediate short term. We are currently working with Stafford County and VDOT on the possibility of restriping the lot for more space. While this will not be a complete solution, it will be an improvement.

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**Nadia** from **Fairfax, VA** asks:

I am new to VRE I was wondering if there is enough parking at Burke if I arrive at Burke at 730 am? Thanks

**VRE Management:**

I board at Burke Centre and get there at 7:30. There are usually parking spaces in the far part of the lot at that time.

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**Henry** from **Fredericksburg, VA** asks:

Has VRE really looked at queing in the right light - if not for proper queing, the time spent at each stop could be longer. Maybe you should look at getting people to que up and get off the trains faster instead of waiting until last minute to decide to get up and meander to the door to get off.

**VRE Management:**

There is nothing wrong with getting up to detrain prior to your station. There is something wrong with getting up to get your place in line one or two stations before yours. The issue is those people who get up too early.

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**Mike** from **Manassas, VA** asks:

"Customers also are not to eat, drink, or smoke anywhere in Metrorail Stations. Customers can be cited by Metro Transit Police for violating the no-food and no-smoking rules." When will you make all of the VRE stations no-smoking like the Metro?

**VRE Management:**

We are not looking to be as restrictive as WMATA needs to be. However, all VRE stations are located outdoors. This limits our ability to ban smoking and instead, we look to regulate it. We realize that many people would prefer no smoking, but at this point, we do not anticipate making that rule.

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**Ted** from **Fredericksburg, VA** asks:

On the Fredericksburg Line, ride times from zone 9-1 have increased considerably over the years that VRE has been operating. Would you please consider an express train on the Fredericksburg Line? I suggest stops at the 3 stations closest to the line ends.

**VRE Management:**

Yes, as we add trains on the Fredericksburg line, we will

definitely look at the possibility of an express train from the Fredericksburg area.

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**Gary from Manassas Park asks:**

Will you ask for rider input on the seating configuration of the new cars? From my experience I prefer the seats all facing the same direction, rather than the quad facing seats which limit foot and leg room and are more awkward to enter and exit. (Sorry if this is a duplicate message--my first chat!) Thanks!

**VRE Management:**

Because so many of you are so open with us about your preferences on different kinds of equipment, we feel confident that we will be able to procure a car that will satisfy the majority. Currently the configuration will have seats facing in one direction. BTW, welcome to your first chat, we are glad to have you on board.

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**Tim from Fredericksburg asks:**

You guys need to do something about posting the track numbers in the afternoon at Union Station. I usually ride #307 in the evening. So often, the electric signs will list a Track number, then once everyone has walked down to the platform to wait for the train, they will change to another track number and not give any notice to the passengers who are waiting. I understand that these things sometimes happen and it is necessary to make last-minute changes of track numbers, but passengers need to be better informed of these changes. It's not easy for 100 people to run to another track at the last minute.

**VRE Management:**

We know that this is a problem and have notified Amtrak that we have had many complaints about this, more so recently. Because this is a turn back train, there are times when the track changes just prior the train departing. We will continue to work with them. However, in the meantime, continue to let us know each time that this is a problem so we can be aware.

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**Kim from Fredericksburg, VA asks:**

It has been rumored that Spotsylvania may open a station for it's residents. Is this true? If so, when will the station open, and where is it planned to be located? Thank you.

**VRE Management:**

Spotsylvania is seriously considering joining VRE. Their

Board, however, must first vote to join. I do not know when that will occur, but it could occur by this summer. If they join VRE, a station could be constructed in Spotsylvania in 2-3 years.

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**Russell from Fredericksburg** asks:

I've tried several times to get VRE to justify the new zone 8 increases mathematically and received only one vague/insufficient reply for the effort. So here is an easier question. Can the Leeland road exit be widened to lessen the bottleneck?

**VRE Management:**

We can show you the calculations behind the numbers, however, at this point, we are hopeful that we will not have to put them into effect. At the Stafford public hearing, that question was asked and Supervisor Gibbons indicated that he would ask VDOT and the County about looking into making that happen.

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**Freda from Fredericksburg, VA** asks:

I know you have a lot of questions before you, but how many forums must I be a part of to get my question answered? Would you please consider reinstating the weekend Amtrak service by selling a monthly ticket of about \$325 that would permit VRE riders to ride Amtrak on the weekends?

**VRE Management:**

A monthly Amtrak ticket costs more than \$280 a month. If you ride Amtrak everyday, this would be the ticket you should buy.

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**Dana from Winchester, VA** asks:

Enough with the "sucking up" and "softball questions"! What about the Haymarket extension?

**VRE Management:**

I like it, going for the jugular! But seriously, the status is that there is no funding available for the present time. The Virginia legislature asked for an implementation plan by December 1, which we will produce. If funding was available, it would take at least 3 years to improve the track and build stations along that extension. There is a strong desire for this extension and we will continue to work to make it a reality.

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**Debbie from Haymarket asks:**

Is CSX going to do something about the rough crossing by the airport? The asphalt must raise above the rails by 6" and makes for a very rough crossing.

**VRE Management:**

I think you mean Broad Run airport, in which case it would be Norfolk Southern. We will forward your concern. However, please first send us more detail to [gotrains@vre.org](mailto:gotrains@vre.org) so we can be as specific as possible.

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**Edward from Stafford asks:**

Please provide statute/regulation citation that prohibits restricting parking lots or monthly passes to residents of VRE member jurisdictions.

**VRE Management:**

I do not have the web address for this regulation handy. However, it is an FTA (Federal Transit Administration) requirement that any organization that accepts federal money cannot discriminate against anyone based on where they live. As we accept federal money for parking, equipment, and facilities, that pretty much knocks our ability to restrict people out the window. There are a few parking lots in our system that do not have federal or state interest and we may look to restrict parking at those lots, mostly in Fredericksburg.

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**ron from fairfax-va asks:**

under what set of conditions does VRE generate an annual "surplus"? seems like we are always in a "deficit" mode regardless of ridership numbers.

**VRE Management:**

Public transportation, by design, is not set up to be profitable. In VRE's case, the local jurisdictions that we serve and the state provide subsidies towards about 40% of our operating budget (track access fees, contract with Amtrak for crews, etc.). The revenue from tickets accounts for the other 60%. Our capital budget (buying new equipment, building more parking and stations, etc.), on the other hand, is normally funded through non-guaranteed federal and state grants. At this time, we do not have a dedicated source of funding, which would certainly improve many areas of VRE 's service. As that is not currently in the cards, we are working within our current budget framework to provide reliable and safe commuter service. While our ridership is increasing, it has flattened off a bit. By contrast, our operating expenses are increasing at a

much higher rate.

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**Ron from Falmouth, VA** asks:

This isn't actually a question. Some of the posters have made what seem like unnecessarily snide comments about the service you provide and the behavior of their fellow riders. I just wanted you to know I really appreciate the job you do and the level of service you maintain in spite of the miniscule budget you have to work with and the private, freight-focused railroads you travel. All of the VRE-contracted Amtrak (and regular Amtrak) conductors I've encountered have been gracious, helpful, dedicated, and nearly always good-humored-- worlds better than the vast majority of the airline or bus line employees I've encountered.

**VRE Management:**

I always like a good compliment, thank you very much.

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**Freda from Fredericksburg, VA** asks:

My question was pertaining to weekend usage (for Amtrak). I usually ride VRE and have been since 1994. I think your answer was quite rude...although you didn't answer my question.

**VRE Management:**

Didn't mean to be rude. Sometimes written communications come off colder than they should. At this time, we are not planning to allow weekend service on VRE tickets. However, should the step-up tickets be successful, we may consider it using one or more step-up tickets next year. Better? :)

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**William from Nokesville, VA** asks:

Yesterday I was waiting at the Crystal City station for Manassas Line train 327. An announcement came over the speakers indicating the train would be 10 minutes late due to OTM (other train movement) and platform congestion at Union Station. These announcements are not descriptive enough and are too vague. What were the other trains moving? CSX? And why was there platform congestion? Why can't the PA announcements readily point blame at who's responsible for the delays?

**VRE Management:**

Our current station signs do not permit to provide explanations the way we want them too. We have a consultant investigating options on new signs that will permit longer and better

explanations. It is a full scale procurement and will take some time to accomplish.

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**mike from fredericksburg** asks:

why do the trains regularly slow down in the afternoon after Brooke but before Leeland? Is there a slow order in affect for that area?

**VRE Management:**

I do not know. I will look into it. Please send your email address to [gotrains](mailto:gotrains) so we can get back with you.

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**Sassy from Brooke, VA** asks:

I reported a street light that was out to the entrance to the Brooke station a while back. It is hard to see the entrance to the station when it is dark. I was told it was Dominion Power's responsibility. It appears it is on the VRE land. Can the light be fixed?

**VRE Management:**

Our Facilities Manager is working with VDOT on this problem. I will check on its status.

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**ross from burke, va** asks:

I know that VRE is somehow associated with or possibly even owned by Amtrak. Are we vulnerable to losing VRE service if, as the president seems to want, Amtrak itself gets shut down or loses significant funding?

**VRE Management:**

We are not owned by Amtrak. We are owned by local governments. We contract with Amtrak to operate and maintain our trains. If Amtrak was to shut down, we would have to make arrangements with other contractors to continue the service.

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**Fred from Fredericksburg** asks:

Are there plans to have the afternoon Southbound Amtrak trains (95, 93/83, 85) stop at L'Enfant Plaza?

**VRE Management:**

I am currently negotiating to have 93 stop at L'Enfant. I will let you know when I am successful and we can announce it.

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**Sam** from **Stafford** asks:

Why would you buy more Gallery cars, when we all know the Kawasaki cars are more comfortable.

**VRE Management:**

First, not all riders like the Kawasaki cars. Our surveys show that we have a fairly even split between all of the equipment. That being said, we do a competitive procurement and must select a rail car provider based on cost and our specifications. I think a Gallery car with better accoutrements would be more to your liking. We do hear you and know that our rider value comfort.

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**VRE Management:**

Unfortunately, it is 1:00. As much I would like to stay and chat some more, it is time for me to get a few things done before I head to Meet the Management at Union Station. We can continue our discussion there. I'll even buy the cookies! See you next month!

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