

Let's Talk

Join us for our next online forum Wednesday, June 1 from 12:00n until 1:00p. Can't be there "live", then post your question now. All Q&A will be saved for future perusal!

**VRE Management:**

Hello again. Before we start today, I want to let you know that I just found out that we will be able to stop Amtrak 93 at L'Enfant station starting on July 5. Hopefully, many of you on the Fredericksburg line can use this train.

VRE Management:

Additionally, we will start adding more cars to our current trains in July. We intend to add up to 12 coaches in the next several months. This will amount to 1800 additional seats and should reduce some of the current crowding. In doing this, we will create 2 eight car trains, one on each line. They will operate as Manassas Line #328/331 and Fredericksburg line #300/307. These are our most crowded trains.

VRE Management:

Now, I will start with the questions!

Ben from Fairfax, VA asks:

As a college student and summer intern in DC, VRE is a great mode of transportation, especially with the 50% discount for riders under 21. Since I've turned 21 recently, I don't get the discount anymore - wouldn't it make sense to make the "youth" discount a "student" discount? Riders can show their college ID to the vendor to buy tickets. Money shouldn't be a big issue because so few people would be affected. I feel its time to extend the discount to students a few months over 21 rewarding them for their education efforts rather than giving the discount to those kids who aren't studying!

VRE Management:

I am glad that you have been able take advantage of VRE during your internship. You will be happy to hear that you are still eligible for the "youth" rate as the age range includes age 21.

Mike from Clifton, VA asks:

Is the VRE planning to lease new trainsets to fill the void left when the Sounder cars are returned, and is there a particular agency being looked to for cars and engines?

VRE Management:

We are looking at a couple of different options. The first is that we have several Gallery

cars that we have not put into service. They will be going into service throughout this summer as we take an additional Sounder set out of service and lengthen several of our trains. We are also looking for another short term lease for additional equipment.

Frank from Arlington asks:

Can the conductors be asked to have patrons remove their feet from the seats. Additionally, can the automated announcement be modified to give a reminder to patrons to keep their feet off the seats. Please note that the MARC system makes such announcements. It's inconcieveable that adults, most of whom are executive / professional level workers would put their feet on the seats without removing their shoes but, it happens daily. I believe you'll agree that this behavior is unacceptable. Thank you for all that the entire team does to ensure that patrons have a safe and otherwise uneventful commute.
FRank

VRE Management:

Courtesy is one of the toughest issues for us to tackle. Passengers putting their feet on the seats is just one of many that we hear about on a regular basis. While we ask our conductors to make announcements about these issues, there are many who ignore these requests. We are working our legal counsel to create a code of conduct that will make it easier for our crews to enforce the courtesy standards that will be set up. When we are closer to implementing this, we will put it in the Update and Train Talk.

Lori from Fredericksburg, VA asks:

Are you considering adding a second exit for the Leeland Station parking lot? Getting out at night is becoming a nightmare!

VRE Management:

Yes, a feasibility study of parking at Brooke and Leeland will be done in the near future. A second exit lane and/or a second exit will be looked at.

ronald hopkins from varina, va asks:

when will spotsylvania station open thanks

VRE Management:

Spotsylvania first must join PRTC. If they do, I think a station can be built in 2-3 years once funding is obtained.

Benji from Federicksburg, VA asks:

Could you address whether or not Spotsylvania County is in discussion w/ VRE to bring VRE into SC?

VRE Management:

Yes, we have had multiple discussions with County staff and have briefed the Board of Supervisors twice. I anticipate that Spotsylvania will make a decision about joining VRE by the end of the year.

Rich from **Broad Run** asks:

While VRE is expanding parking at Broad Run, is anything being looked into regarding the MAJOR traffic backup on Piper Lane after the popular afternoon trains detrain? Can't the county assist in directing traffic at the Piper Lane/Rt. 28 intersection?

VRE Management:

We have contacted VDOT about the timing of the Piper Lane light. They are looking at it right now to see if they can make changes and add time, if not all the time, then during certain times of the day. We know this is an issue and are continuing to talk with them often.

George from **Burke, VA** asks:

Where on the VRE.org web-site can one find the new, increased fares?

VRE Management:

There is a link on the home page of our website at www.vre.org. Look in the What's New section under the picture for the link.

Linh from **Woodbridge, VA** asks:

What are those blue covered boxes on the platform and in the garage at the Woodbridge station?

VRE Management:

The blue covered boxes, located at stations with elevators, are emergency call boxes equipped with TTYs. Once in service, passengers will be able to immediately connect to an operator to either call for emergency assistance or to let us know that there is a problem with the elevators.

Tony from **Rippon, VA** asks:

Does CSX limit what times you can run your trains?

VRE Management:

CSX approves all train schedules and times. Schedules are designed not to interfere with their freight service.

Joseph from **Stafford, VA** asks:

What is going on with the new bridge above Quantico? No activity or advancement has been observed.

VRE Management:

This is a 2.5 year project. Our Construction and Facilities department is coordinating the project with CSX and has been intimately involved in the construction. I can assure you that work is progressing on the Quantico Bridge. It is scheduled for completion in Spring 2007.

Jim from **Stafford** asks:

Will the new Gallery cars have tables?

VRE Management:

No, the new Gallery cars will not have tables.

Rick from **Bealeton, VA** asks:

I'll be able to retire in 15 years, any chance VRE will come out to Bealeton before then?

VRE Management:

It's hard to say. We know that there is interest in going to Bealeton. Right now, the political push is to go to the Gainesville/Haymarket area – which would be within the next 3-5 years. Bealeton would probably be sometime after that.

Belynda from **Manassas Park, VA** asks:

Several Federal Agencies are moving their offices to the Prince William/Manassas area. What plans is VRE making to accomodate increased ridership, parking, etc. combined with commuters coming INTO the area as well as leaving in the mornings and evenings?

VRE Management:

We are looking into the possibility of reverse commutes along the future Gainesville/Haymarket line.

Chuck from **Bumpass, VA** asks:

These new Gallery cars you are touting, does each of them have a head, or must we continue to congregate around the Cab car which is typically crowded with disabled folks in wheelchairs.

VRE Management:

Cab cars will have restrooms. If we can exercise the option to purchase additional cars, half of the trailers will also have restrooms.

Kathleen from **Lorton, VA** asks:

Please make it easier to find the the link with the live locations of the trains - perhaps by putting on the home page. I have problems locating it every time I want to use it.

VRE Management:

There is a link on the top of the page. There is a red button that says "Service Update" that will take you right to "Rail Time." We are about to unveil our newly designed website that will also have a quick access link to "Rail Time."

Ron from **Falmouth, VA** asks:

I haven't seen any response to the question posed in one of the previous sessions on the apparent speed restriction through Quantico. Is such a restriction in place? If so, what are the reasons behind it? Every Fredericksburg VRE train I've ridden slows to 30 MPH through all of Quantico, if my GPS receiver can be believed.

VRE Management:

The speed limit is 45mph across the bridge and 55 mph through Quantico.

Jon from Bristow, VA asks:

Has VRE ever done a feasibility study on providing a 3 PM southbound train on the Manassas line?

VRE Management:

When the MOU projects are complete and we can add trains, we will take a look at the variety of suggestions that people have put forward. Right now, the leading candidates are an earlier train at roughly 4:30a on the Fredericksburg line and a later evening train after 7:00p on the Manassas line.

Eric from FXBG, VA asks:

Why is the "bathroom" car always at the end of the train? (I won't ask why it's always at the *other* end!). Is there something about those cars that prevent them from being in the center of the consist?

VRE Management:

Bathrooms are currently located in the cab cars. The cab cars power the locomotive when the locomotive pushes the train. Hence why they are always at the "wrong" end of the train. (-: As we purchase new equipment, we have spec'd that 2/3 of the cars have a bathroom in them. That will take care of this problem!

taterpuff from Fredericksburg asks:

Why do you bother having open forums, town meetings and request our feedback if you are going to go ahead and raise the rates, despite our overwhelming objections? Your service was so deplorable, I started to slug.

VRE Management:

Funny you should ask that. Coincidentally, we just published an article in our weekly newsletter on this. You can find it at <http://www.vre.org/service/commuterweekly/may18.pdf>. We do hear you. When we hold hearings, which are required, we listen to what each person has to say. In the past, we have changed our plans based on feedback received. But, in the case of rising fares, the choice is to raise fares or to cancel service. Neither is appetizing, but that is what we are faced with.

b from f-burg asks:

My question concerns the June 27th start date for the step-up fee for Amtrack riders, how

do you propose to implement the step-up? I assume that riders will have to valid every trip? Will the step-up ticket be sold at the problematic TVM machines?

VRE Management:

Step-Up tickets will be sold at TVMs and at the vendors. You will need to validate the Step-Up ticket prior to boarding an Amtrak train.

Alison from Burke, VA asks:

Are we validating FRCs now? I have all new ones, but I am not sure if I should be validating or not.

VRE Management:

Right now the answer is no. Hopefully, we will able to start again shortly. We will let you know when we have a firm date.

Donna from Dumfries Va asks:

How is it the trains always manage to be running late the day after a holiday?

VRE Management:

We know that delays are frustrating to begin with and especially so when you have a short work week to get everything done. Yesterday's delays on the Fredericksburg line were the result of signal problems just south of Quantico. Looking back, the day after Presidents' Day (the last 3 day weekend), we operated 100% on-time. But, we'll keep an eye on this and make sure that it doesn't become a trend.

Brian from Burke, VA asks:

Why are the conductors giving out so many tickets recently? I have seen new riders who were confused about tickets as well as veterans with many years of VRE patronage under their belts recive tickets. It seems that people are being treated like children. There can't be that many people truely trying to avoid paying for a ticket.

VRE Management:

Writing a summons is a job that neither VRE nor the conductors really enjoy. However, it is almost impossible to tell who honestly forgot and who is trying to cheat the system. Because of that and to avoid discrimination, we have asked our conductors to tighten their ticket checking procedures. We know that seems insensitive, but there isn't a way for a conductor to make the determination.

Robert from Stafford asks:

how much fuel on average, does it take to run a train? Is it different if the train is more crowded? Thanks

VRE Management:

3 gallons per mile when moving. Consumption is about the same whether or not there are passengers or not. It is approximately 4 gallons per hour when idling.

David from **Stafford, Virginia** asks:

Just a general comment based on the ten years or so that I have been an "on and off regular" passenger, but it doesn't particularly require a response on this forum. I have been a regular rider of VRE for most of the last ten years, and I want to thank you for a great service, great employees, and even an ALMOST enjoyable trip to work every morning. I have some specific disagreements here and there, such as continuing loud talking and cell phones of inconsiderate fellow passengers in the "quiet(?) car" I ride, but I truly commend you for a wonderful service. I do not care for the past or present fare increases, since I think it is already "too pricy" in my opinion, but it still far and away beats dealing with I-95. That's my speech, so I will climb off my soapbox now. . . .

VRE Management:

Thank you very much. We try very hard to satisfy our customers. It's not easy when you're financially restricted.

Pete Burke Center from **Burke Center** asks:

1) Trains crowded 2) Old equipment (cattle cars) replaces newer (Sunder) 3) Ticket prices are going up What's wrong with this picture??????

VRE Management:

Ahh, another point of view...

Craig Miller from **Stafford, VA** asks:

With respect to incredibly long train stoppages within developed areas such as the hour plus stop in Stafford after the Deputy landed his car near the tracks, what legal authority do you assert to prevent a passenger from leaving the CSX right of way during this delay?

VRE Management:

CSX will not permit the discharge of passengers on their property. It is trespassing and dangerous.

Tim from **Fredericksburg** asks:

Can you please remind the conductors to ALWAYS turn off the air handlers before going through the Union Station tunnel? Sometimes the diesel exhaust is so bad I can barely breathe.

VRE Management:

It wouldn't be an on-line forum if we didn't address this topic! We continue to remind them and will do so again.

Gene from **Dumfries, VA** asks:

I posted a question back in March that requested that CSX repair broken track timbers at the Rippon Station. Several of these timbers were not supporting the clamps that hold the

track in place. Immediately next to these sections are timbers that are rotting or severely cracked. As of this date there has been no change to the track and I believe things have gotten worse. One of the track clamps is now hanging at about 15 degrees. We all stand there and watch as freight trains roll over these tracks and watch the tracks move up and down at significant distances. What needs to be done in order to get this issue resolved and the tracks repaired?

VRE Management:

We have forwarded this concern to CSX already. We will forward it again asking for an answer.

David from Woodbridge, VA asks:

What are the future plans for the Woodbridge station? I heard that an additional non-station side platform was planned plus a second entrance/exit from an extended route 123. True?

VRE Management:

There are plans to redevelop the entire Route 1 interchange area. Right now, there is a plan to add another platform and a "Kiss and Ride" will be added. There are no firm dates at this time.

Louis from Fairfax, VA asks:

I recently found VRE's financial statements online and was surprised to read that VRE is funded about 50% by various Government agencies. The recent fare increases don't seem so bad when you consider that VRE is being heavily subsidized by the Government. Another thing that was interesting is that VRE's pension costs are so low. I imagine the cost of VRE will have to increase significantly when the VRE/PRTC employees start reaching retirement age. Has VRE considered these future costs in its long-term planning/strategy? Is PRTC insured by PBGC? After seeing what recently happened at United Airlines, I think the VRE employees would be concerned about the long-term viability of their pension funds.

VRE Management:

Thank you for your concerns. VRE employees are part of the Virginia Retirement System and we pay into the retirement system each pay period. Currently, the plan is fully funded. And yes, 50% or more of our day to day and capital budgets are funded by local, State and Federal agencies.

Kate from Alexandria, VA asks:

I just moved to the area from NY and am pretty shocked at how undeveloped the Virginia railways are given the rapidly expanding housing market of Northern Virginia. Can you tell us what you see for the future of the commuter train lines (ie. do you think you will branch out with more lines, provide more trains and times, switch freight to different tracks to provide more efficient service?).

VRE Management:

Thanks for the vote of support! Compared to NY or Chicago, VRE is in the infancy stage of

using its rail for transportation. We do have a long-term plan that is outlined in our Strategic Plan. (on the website at www.vre.org) However, right now we are looking to see if Spotsylvania County will join which will bring a new station and also working on a study to see what is involved with taking VRE to Gainesville Haymarket. That study is due in December.

Joan from Fredericksburg, VA asks:

Will there be vending machines on the train or at the stations; this would increase the revenue for VRE and will help maintenance costs. Thanks, Joan LeCouteur

VRE Management:

This has been something that we have been interested in doing. It requires changes to our operating agreements with our host railroads. Right now, it is not an active project, but it is one that we are seriously looking at pushing forward.

Kathleen from Lorton, VA asks:

"Rail time" and "service update" -- as she slaps forehead. That's why I can never find it - those terms are just not intuitive to me. I'm looking for "see where trains are now" or "Find current physical location of train." "Rail time" means nothing and I look at "service updates" for something new -- schedule changing and the like.

VRE Management:

I like the way you think. Good point!

Charlie from Spotsylvania asks:

I just want to say "Thanks" to the conductors who do issue summons. I have consistently seen ticket offenders since I've been riding (3 yrs). Example: Those patrons who buy a ticket for a station other than their own to save a buck. Congrats to the conductors who uphold the policy!!!

VRE Management:

We'll pass along your appreciation. As we have said, being the "bad cop" is no fun and not something they enjoy.

Bill from Stafford asks:

Some conductors open the train doors by arrival and others seem to take their time and open them after arrival. Does the VRE have a policy on this to maintain punctuality? The 301 from Fredericksburg is regularly late and the conductors seem to be much more casual than a few years ago. You added five minutes to the schedule but still can't be on time!

VRE Management:

Each conductor has their own style on how and when they open the doors. Just like driving a car -- each of us start and stop differently. Having said that, the door opening shouldn't delay the train. There is two minutes built into the schedule for boarding at each station. Especially in the case of #301, where there is not a large number of passengers, the door

timing shouldn't be a factor. However, this train does sometimes get hung up with freight traffic in the area. In April it was only 71% ontime – pretty bad. We will take a look at the causes and see if there is anything we can do.

Brian from Stafford, VA asks:

How can I help drum up support for parking expansion at Brooke? Train 310 riders now always have to create parking spaces, and at least one day last week, I, along with a couple dozen other passengers, had to go "off road" to park our vehicles. This problem will not get any better without at least 30% more parking spaces at Brooke. Whose job is that? The county, or you guys?

VRE Management:

Parking at Brooke is not slated for expansion, but, to answer your question this would be initiated and funded by Stafford County. The good news is that VDOT will be restriping this lot and adding a few more spaces on the fringe. All together this will add 40+ spaces this summer.

Leo from Fairfax Station asks:

In line with tatterpuff, have you considered taking advertising on the trains, like Metro, in lieu of price increase?

VRE Management:

We have some advertising on the trains now and we are pushing to have more placed. We use the same ad agency as Metrorail, but because we do not carry as many people, placement is more difficult. We made about \$100,000 last year.

Flipp Answer from From You asks:

This is why you don't get the participation in the forums you should: Pete Burke Center from Burke Center asks: 1) Trains crowded 2) Old equipment (cattle cars) replaces newer (Sunder) 3) Ticket prices are going up What's wrong with this picture?????? VRE Management: Ahh, another point of view...

VRE Management:

No federal reauthorization in over two years - State funding flat - Roads highly congested (3rd worst in the nation) - No commitment to funding transit at the required level - No tax increases. Without increased capital funding, VRE is putting forward the best product that will carry the most people safely and reliably as we can. VRE's cost per passenger mile is the lowest in the industry.

Donna from Burke, VA asks:

When will work start on the Burke Center garage?

VRE Management:

They have been in the parking lots doing test borings on the soil. Construction is scheduled in 2006 and the garage is scheduled to be complete in 2008. Fairfax County is working on

a parking mitigation plan to handle cars displaced during construction.

Anne from Burke, VA asks:

What is the grace period for monthly passes? 1 day before and after the change? Today, I missed a train running home for my new monthly pass (on my kitchen table). Did I have to?

VRE Management:

Sorry to hear that. The grace period for monthly tickets is the first service day of the new month.

VRE Management:

The clock on the wall shows that it is 1:00p. As always, I enjoy this hour that I spend taking questions. I apologize to those who think my answers might be flip. However, I am trying to inject some interest and humor into some of these questions and answers. Needless to say, I take everything that you ask seriously. When we are done, we will send questions to appropriate department heads, CSX, and NS for followup.

VRE Management:

To those I didn't get to answer today, I am sorry that we are out of time. We are going to take July and August off from the on-line forum sessions and will meet you back here in September for another go around.

VRE Management:

Until then, hope all of you have a happy summer and email gotrains with any of your questions. - Dale