

Virginia Railway Express

Feedback

Let's Talk

Our next on-line forum is scheduled to be held on Wednesday, October 5 from 12:00n until 1:00p.

**VRE Management:**

It's good to be able to talk with you again. It doesn't seem like it has been that long since we have talked. As you know, CSX is replacing the ties on the Fredericksburg. They are 25% complete. We have had delays in the morning, which bothers me. But, we are all gritting out teeth until the project is done. I want to emphasize that this project has to get complete. When it is finished, the track should be smoother, less rough riding, and will eliminate some of the slow orders.

VRE Management:

I expect to have significantly less delays when the tie program is complete. I appreciate all of you hanging tough as we go through this project. Now, on to the questions.

Suzi from Fredericksburg asks:

I am a new rider, and I have to wonder....WHY is the air conditioning on during the morning rush? It's been in the 50s/60s outside every morning (chilly enough for a sweater). And then I step on the train and prepare to freeze for the next hour. Can something be done to stop the excessive air conditioning?

VRE Management:

The trains are set to remain within a specific temperature range, between 68 and 72 degrees. With many people having different temperature preferences, we have found this to be the best happy medium. When it falls below 68, warm air should start to circulate. When it goes above 72, cool air is circulated. If it is between these temperatures, the air will circulate at the same temperature, but may feel cooler. With that said, some areas are cooler than others. The area near the doors (especially on the Kawasaki cars) are generally cooler. The upstairs and the car closest to the engine tend to be the warmest.

JM from Woodbridge asks:

Why is it that VRE has no weekend service? With baseball, football, events on the mall it would be nice to take a train into DC rather than drive. Even limited service, 3 trains in and out would be better than driving on I-95. Other cities with rail systems have service on weekends why not the METRO DC area?

VRE Management:

Several years ago, we had an agreement with Amtrak that allowed our passengers to use their trains on weekends. However, in times of tight budgets, the number of people using these trains did not warrant the cost and the program was discontinued. We are, instead, focusing on our core business, commuter traffic.

Jim from Quantico asks:

Later train service please? VRE should consider running a later train in the evenings. A lot of people work late or would like to shop, or have dinner out but if you don't catch the 311 train at 645 your out of luck. A train for example 8pm would be nice for late workers.

VRE Management:

When we look at our ridership patterns, this is not where the riders are. Our last two trains are the least used in our rush hour service. However, we know that there are some who would like later trains. Once several of CSX's capacity improvement projects are complete, we will be in a better position to add trains. In addition to an earlier morning train on the Fredericksburg line, a late evening train on the Manassas line with bus service to Fredericksburg line stations is being considered.

Tony from Spotsylvania asks:

Doors that don't open. A lot more frequently the doors are not opening or the top half opens and the trap doesn't drop on the Kawasaki cars. I usually get first out the door and don't even open the inside door until the opposite trap drops, so no one is breaking the light beam. Unfortunately, it takes 2 weeks to get an answer back from gotrains. A lot of good that does. Sure would be nice if the equipment worked or we had a place to report it that would have TIMELY results.

VRE Management:

Yes, I know that gotrains sometimes gets backed up. While it may take some time to get back to you, messages are normally forwarded to the responsible department for action when the message is received, not when it is answered. Moving to your concern, I will have our mechanical department address this.

Tony from Spotsylvania asks:

What's it take to get the windows washed on the cars? They are getting really nasty.

VRE Management:

The equipment that cleans the exterior of the cars is located in our mid-day storage yard. We try to wash each set at least once a month. With congestion in the yard as we make bigger train sets and try to move equipment around for repairs, it becomes difficult to maintain this schedule. We are working to get more car washing equipment at our outlying yards in hopes of returning to a more routine schedule. However, I will start a program to clean the windows.

Tony from Spotsylvania asks:

Kudos to the conductor that came on the PA system for admonishing the passenger that jumped off a moving train. Good job.

VRE Management:

Thanks, we'll make sure he knows.

Eve from Fredericksburg, VA asks:

Why isn't the Amtrak step-up fee waived when the Amtrak pulls into Fred at 7:15 and makes train 308 late? VRE is responsible for having a train that leaves the Fred station at 7:15, if it happens to be the Amtrak why can't we ride without penalty?

VRE Management:

We know that other trains, even Amtrak, can delay our trains. The situation you describe is a frustrating one. Even if the Amtrak delays our train, we still have to pay for the people on board that train. The reason for the Step-Up is to off set some of the costs of the price that VRE pays for our riders to use Amtrak. Because of this, the Step-Up is still necessary.

Penelope from Fredericksburg, VA asks:

People get up and wait in the aisle for the Leeland Road stop right after we leave Brooke, making it nearly impossible to move through the cars to get to a restroom. Can't the conductors force people to stay seated? Politely suggesting that people stay seated is NOT working.

VRE Management:

If you are having a problem with people queuing, please let you crew member know. If he or she is not able to deal with it, they will work with us and with their service manager on a more stringent policy.

Joe from Springfield, VA asks:

What if we really want to talk trains? How can we reach you outside of this chat?

VRE Management:

Your best option is to email gotrains. They will forward your message to me.

Jackson from Quantico, VA asks:

I usually travel zones 6-9. I have a 10 trip (zones 1-9) that I bought because I occasionally travel to DC. The 10 trip is about to expire and I still have 4 rides left. Why can't I exchange this ticket for a new one so that I can still get my 4 rides? How does it benefit VRE to make the 10 trips non-exchangable? Sounds like you are just trying to stick it to me...

VRE Management:

I'm sorry to hear that you feel like we are sticking it to you. Tickets are good for one year from expiration. As long as fares haven't risen since the ticket was purchased, we can give consideration to exchanges. It is handled on a case by case basis.

Judy from Manassas, VA asks:

Is it possible to make the VRE/Metro monthly pass more durable (perhaps like the "Smartcard" that Metro offers)? I find that the pass sometimes gets pretty mangled.

VRE Management:

Metro's magnetic strips and SmarTrip technology is proprietary. The TLC is their ticket with our artwork. Right now, our conductors would not be able to tell your zones with just a SmarTrip card. We are part of a regional fare initiative that is working towards creating one method for all of the transportation agencies in the metro DC region. Since it is still in the planning phase, we don't expect to have anything available to passengers for at least 2 years.

Joe from Fort Belvoir asks:

What is the chance of adding an additional car to the 303? I along with 50 or more people who catch that train are finding it hard to find a seat by the time we board.

VRE Management:

We have more Gallery cars on the way. As they arrive, we will look at ridership numbers to see what trains should be expanded. Train 303, among others, will be looked at closely at that time.

Jeff from Broad Run asks:

I don't have a question, but I just wanted to say that VRE really does do a fantastic job of managing what is a wide collection of assets that are largely beyond its control. You guys rock! The only thing I dislike about VRE is having to listen to my fellow passengers whine and complain about everything. All I ask is that you keep up the good work, stay frugal and try to minimize VRE's public funding needs. Thanks!

VRE Management:

Thanks for your support. It is always nice to hear!

Robert from Rappahannock County, VA asks:

This morning, as has happened many, but not hundreds, of times, Train 324 was running on schedule until it was approaching Alexandria. There we had to stop and wait, I believe for an Amtrak train, and for VRE 300. If we had been allowed to proceed, we might have delayed those two trains' arrival by as much as two minutes. Instead, they delayed us by about twenty minutes. Isn't there a lack of logic and courtesy there?

VRE Management:

The dispatching of the trains at AF (where the Manassas and Fredericksburg line come together) is handled by CSX. Ultimately, they make the decisions based on the overall flow in the area. Some time is built into the

schedule for trains to slow as they weave in together. When one train is significantly delayed, as in the case of train 300, the dispatchers may make the choice to slightly delay 324 to prevent further delay to 300. I can see the argument on both sides. I'll have my staff closely monitor train 324 and see what can be done to improve this situation. Ultimately, if we can get 300 back into its regular slot, the problem for 324 should resolve itself.

Scott from Fredericksburg, VA asks:

What is the plan for the rehabilitation of the Fredericksburg train station? When (year) can we expect to see construction? Will the station be changed or simply repaired?

VRE Management:

Congresswoman Davis was successful in obtaining \$2.5 million towards the rehabilitation of the Fredericksburg station. Other than funds being earmarked towards this project, no other plans, designs, etc. have been advanced. We expect that whatever is done will be more on the maintenance side than on a rebuild.

Erik from Fredericksburg, VA asks:

On several recent occasions, one of your fine conductors has flashed back to his USMC days and shouted at the passengers over the announcing system in response to, for example, the passenger who jumped from the train as it was pulling away from Woodbridge. Could you please gently remind your conductors that riders are their customers, not their recruits, and that a misstep by one passenger does not mean that everyone should "drop and give me 20!". Thanks!

VRE Management:

The other side: Jumping from a moving train is never something that can be taken lightly. Just like the good kid in the class in first grade, sometimes in order to make sure everyone gets the message, everyone needs to be reminded of the rules.

Josh from Stafford, VA asks:

Is it true you will be adding more VRE stations in the future? I've heard rumors of plans for stations at Widewater and Cherry Hill...what's the story? Have you asked commuters how they feel about more stations? Maybe they think the ride is long enough already?

VRE Management:

Spotsylvania is considering joining VRE with a station being constructed near our yard in Spotsylvania. There will be a referendum on November 8, which Spotsylvania residents will vote on. There are no current plans for a station at Widewater. Plans are being advanced for a station at Cherry Hill. However, final approval has not been made by CSX. We are in contact negotiations. That is an item up for negotiation.

Alphonder from Woodbridge, VA asks:

You got money from selling your Mafersa cars, commonwealth of VA and some from the federal government. Is that not enough money to buy new rail cars?

VRE Management:

We will eventually gain roughly \$13 million from the sale of the Mafersa cars. Proceeds could be used for the purchase of 50 new rail cars which have a total cost of approximately \$90 million. An average bi-level rail car costs about \$1.7 million. The rest of the funds from the Commonwealth and the Federal government will also be put towards the purchase of any new cars. However, funding the delta between what we have and what we need is the focus right now.

Alphonder from Woodbridge, VA asks:

Do the trains (locomotives) stay idling for several hours at the mid-day storage? If so, turn them off to save fuel and polluting.

VRE Management:

Trains stored longer than four hours are put on "way-side" power. It takes a significant amount of time to re-acclimate a train once its been turned off. Adding way-side power to our yards to save fuel and lower pollution is a

priority. We now have that ability at all of our yards.

Marie from Manassas Park, VA asks:

Manassas train 324 has been HORRENDOUSLY crowded this week due to 'equipment failure' shortening the train. Passengers have been forced to stand on the upper gallery walkways because the aisles were packed. Train 324, under normal passenger loads, is usually crowded to standing room only, so my question is: Will train 324 be lengthened by an additional car (in addition to returning the missing car) soon?

VRE Management:

Train 324/333 should return to its normal consist by tomorrow afternoon.

Nick from Stafford, VA asks:

Based upon your bulliten today regarding the overbudget cost for diesel, I was wondering if the cancellation of the evening Fredericksburg train (MTW) has provided any significant benefit relating to the fuel cost? It would seem that it has a positive effect for the month loss.

VRE Management:

Yes, we are saving on fuel, but at the same time we are losing on fare revenue. Of course, every little bit helps.

Bob from Woodbridge asks:

Realizing that fuel costs are sky-rocking, how will this effect our prices in the near future. I would expect any price increase is already being planned for next year or earlier.

VRE Management:

Right now, we are looking at all options to include: cutting expenses, looking at fare changes, and asking for additional funding from local and state governments to make up for the difference in fuel costs.

Krista from Fredericksburg, VA asks:

This morning as I pulled into Lot A there was a man sitting on his car with his briefcase. I stopped and asked if he needed help with the train or tickets. He told me that he wasn't riding the train but waiting for his ride to pick him up so they could drive into DC. Is the parking in Fredericksburg meant for VRE riders only and, if so, is there anything that can be done to prevent people from using the already tight parking as a "Park and Ride"?

VRE Management:

All VRE lots are designated as "Park and Ride" lots in the funding classification system. Unfortunately, that means we cannot keep people from using it for other modes of transportation. It's irritating but that's the way it is.

David from Stafford, Virginia asks:

I realize 95% of the current delays are not anything you have much control over, but what is the status of the current track work on the Fredericksburg Line? Can we reasonably hope to return to something close to the published schedule soon, after a VERY frustrating past few months?

VRE Management:

Someone from VRE talks with CSX on a daily basis. They have assured us that they will be done in early November. They have recently added another gang to increase the production.

Basil from Gainesville, VA asks:

What's the status of the Gainesville/Haymarket extension?

VRE Management:

A draft report is posted on our website under our September Board items.

Robert from Fredericksburg, VA asks:

Why do the restrooms smell so bad during the evening trip on the Fredericksburg line. This is unacceptable and unhealthy.....

VRE Management:

I agree that this is unacceptable. Email gotrains with the train number and I'll correct it.

Tim from Fredericksburg asks:

What is the timeline for the new bridge in Quantico? When will it be completed? Will there be one or two tracks? How will this improve the VRE commute?

VRE Management:

The bridge is to be completed and operational by the first quarter of 2007. There will be one track on the bridge, making it a two track area. This will improve VRE service because it eliminates a single track choke point that we have now.

Nick from Stafford, VA asks:

Can you provide the approximate date for the arrival of those allegedly new and improved cattle, sorry Gallery cars? I am really curious to see what you bought.

VRE Management:

The first one should arrive by December 2006. You will find that the interiors are substantially different from the current vintage Gallery cars. Very shortly, we will post a Power Point preview of the new equipment. We will announce it through Train Talk when it is ready to be viewed.

RP from Spotsylvania asks:

I heard that VRE imposes a maximum speed of 45MPH, while the speed signs that I have seen show 60MPH for passenger trains and 55MPH for freight. Why is this?

VRE Management:

Your source steered you wrong. Maximum allowable speed on the Fredericksburg line is 79 MPH. Because of varying track conditions, other train traffic and ability to accelerate between stations, we rarely reach these speeds. But, our engineers will operate at the highest possible safe speed in order to expedite your trip.

David from Stafford, Virginia asks:

Any possibility of 308/311 keeping what is currently the "extra" fifth car? I ride both trains, depending on direction, and with the old four car configuration it is very often at or over seating capacity.

VRE Management:

We know that it was close to capacity when it was only 4 cars. The fifth car was added because of the cancellation of train #313. When track work is over, we will look at our ridership patterns and if any other cars have become available. But, our plan right now is to keep it there.

VRE Management:

Many have inquired about the status of VRE to Culpeper and Bealeton. Although we have analyzed the possibility in our strategic plan, it is not part of our current thinking to head in that direction. Instead, we are focusing on the possibility of Gainesville/Haymarket and Spotsylvania.

VRE Management:

We only have a few minutes left. I will answer a few more questions, but there are over 100 pending. I won't be able to get to all of them.

Pat from Broadrun asks:

If the BRAC moves organizations to FT Belvoir will VRE be sending trains to FT Belvoir from Broad Run? The drive across Prince William County is worse than 66 or 95 even with the improvements.

VRE Management:

Should all of the BRAC changes be implemented, there will be some wholesale commuting pattern changes. However, VRE does not anticipate running trains from Broad Run to the Fredericksburg line. Once more is known about the final decisions, we will be in a better position to consider any service changes.

Rich from Fredericksburg, VA asks:

With the consists becoming so long, the entire ramp is now a boarding area. Isn't it time we asked that there be no smoking on the ramp.

VRE Management:

Smoking continues to be one of the more difficult on platform issues we deal with. However, because our stations are outdoors, we do not anticipate changing the current smoking zone.

Ken from Stafford, VA asks:

I've been riding VRE for close to a year now and I have to tell you I think it's the only way to go. Maybe you can clear one thing up for me though. Where do I find more information on the prizes that are given for the first people out of the parking lot at night? Every evening I see people running from the train and driving out of the parking lot like they are auditioning for NASCAR. What am I missing?

VRE Management:

We say everything you can possibly want to know about VRE is posted on our website. I guess the prize list must be buried in there somewhere, but I haven't seen it. ;) But seriously, parking lot etiquette, especially now that days are getting shorter is extremely important. Please, everyone, take care as you leave the lots, because it will be a sad day when we hear of someone getting hurt as a result of a rush to the exit.

Dave from Woodbridge, VA asks:

I was watching a music video and it should the artist riding a train that had luxury seats, that recline and have table on backs of them. They also have plenty of leg room. It would be nice if VRE had cars like this.

VRE Management:

That does sound like a good fantasy. I enjoy finishing our chats with some of these more "fun" questions. While the new Gallery cars won't be quite this well appointed, I do think you will like them.

VRE Management:

Right now, we have over 100 questions that I was not able to answer. I continue to be amazed by the popularity of this forum and the number of questions you pose. I am glad that you all feel that this is not only useful, but helpful. For that reason, I will continue to hold these forums. Our next meeting is Wednesday, November 2. Talk to you then.
