

Virginia Railway Express

Let's Talk!

The next VRE online forum will start on Wednesday, April 4th at 12 noon.



There are currently 95 questions waiting to be answered.

VRE Management:

Welcome back to our on-line forum. While it was good to have Spring here for a while, this chat with you gives me a good reason to stay in from the drizzle.

As those of you on the Fredericksburg Line know, the Quantico Bridge work finished early -- and within budget.

I was glad that we were able to return to our regular shedule sooner than planned.

With that good news -- on with the questions!

Dawn from Fairfax, VA asks:

Are you going to add armrests to every seat on the new gallery cars? Not having them is a discomfort and a safety hazard.

VRE Management:

The armrests on the new cars are between the seats. Before we purchased the new cars, we had some feedback about getting in and out of seats comfortably, so we chose to put them in the middle.

James from Washington, DC asks:

Will VRE ever expand service into the District of Columbia? I live in Adams Morgan and would like an alternative to Metrorail and Metrobus. Thanks, James

VRE Management:

Not likely. Since we already have two stations, one at L'Enfant and the other at Union Station.

Frank from Lorton, VA asks:

During the Lorton Town Center construction, the VRE sign was removed. The VRE station is hard to find for new riders and taxis, as it is tucked back behind the new shopping center. Any plans to replace the sign? Also during the construction, right after the new asphalt was laid, the contractors immediately dug 2 long trench-like holes in the access road and then failed to re-fill them adequately. Can VRE exert some "influence" with Fairfax to get these 1ftx6ft trenches in the roadway filled? Thanks!

VRE Management:

Thank you for bringing this to our attention. I agree that VRE signs should be placed so that the public can easily locate our stations. We also understand your concern about the holes. I'll see what I can do.

Deb from Spotsy asks:

I just noticed you office Senior Discounts (65 and older). Is this avaiable when using the Metrochecks?

VRE Management:

Yes, if you go to a vendor you can purchase any of our tickets with Metrocheks.

Dagunny from Fredericksburg asks:

I witnessed a passenger get stuck attempting to board train 300 Tuesday morning at Fredericksburg. When the door to V704 (2nd car) didn't open, she made an attempt to get on the north bound door of the third car as did many others. Her foot slipped between the trap and the platform and she was stuck. Other passengers had to hoist her up as she yelled out. The problem is only one door is opening and everyone surges to the one door that does open because they want certain seats. The southbound door on car V704 again did not open. Some mornings nothing works, sometimes the door only

VRE Management:

Thank you for letting me know. I will have our Director of Rail Equipment and Services inspect the doors to have the situation taken care of as soon as possible.

Erik from Fredericksburg, VA asks:

Do the conductors have any (non-obvious) pet peeves when it comes to passenger behavior? How about the good side-- any preferred practices?

VRE Management:

Some of their pet peeves include many basic courtesy practices. Including saving seats on a crowded train, not displaying a ticket, asking about FRCs for other trains. On the flip side, conductors prefer that everyone have their ticket out for inspection, so that they don't have to disturb you while you are reading, working, or sleeping.

Erik from Fredericksburg, VA asks:

It looks like the new tracks near the Quantico Bridge use concrete ties. Is this true? And if so, does it mark the beginning of a trend that might-- eventually-- cut back on tie replacements?

VRE Management:

Yes. In fact, in all future capital improvements -- especially switches and associated track, will have concrete ties. This is because the life expectancy is double that of timber and it provides more track stability.

Dave from Leeland Station asks:

When inclement weather arrives, the Leeland Station stop has very little covered area, not enough to handle the amount of people on the departing trains. Is there a plan to increase the covered area? thanks..

VRE Management:

As we gain additional capital funding, we want to extend platforms and canopies to accommodate longer trains and provide more protection from the elements for our riders.

DaGunny from FBurg asks:

Amtrak Step ups. Talking with the vendors they are advising mid-April that the cost will go to \$10. How come they know and we do not? What is the straight skinny? If we buy enmass they are good for a year. Will Amtrak stop at L'Efant for 1 year?

VRE Management:

I have asked Amtrak to lower their fee. If they agree to reduce their fee to us, we'll, in turn, reduce the Step-Up fare and simply ask that our passengers pay us the same amount we pay Amtrak. If I can reach an agreement with Amtrak, we'll let you know.

Gunnys Friend from FBurg asks:

How about a NO BACKPACKS ON INSIDE THE TRAIN rule? Sitting in the seats on the new cars aisle passengers get creamed. Really. If I am sitting there with a laptop and the screen gets damaged by a backpack

will VRE pay? That's \$1k at least.

VRE Management:

I can't ban backpacks or require that passengers take them off, but I can have the conductors make an announcement reminding passengers to be aware of their backpacks when passing through the aisles.

Esther from Fredericksburg asks:

Have you found a new vendor in Fredericksburg to sell tickets?

VRE Management:

We believe that we have located a potential vendor. Once the communication lines and equipment are in place, we will be in a position to make that announcement.

AI from Lorton, VA asks:

Was their a track problem yesterday between Franconia/Springfield and Lorton causing trains to go slow and be late?

VRE Management:

No. The mid-day train (301) was delayed due to unauthorized persons on the tracks. Later evening trains were slowed due to temporary speed restrictions in that area.

Gunny's Corpsman from FBurg asks:

Will you please publish what the passengers rights are in the event of an accident? Injury and personal property damage.

VRE Management:

In the event of any incident, personal or property related, passengers should alert the conductor who will complete a report with you. If you do not have a chance to speak with a conductor, contact our office immediately to complete a report. Your report will be investigated and handled accordingly.

Casey from Burke, Virginia asks:

Has VRE considered providing funding only and turning the entire operation to Amtrak?

VRE Management:

Amtrak is one of the contractors we use to operate our service. We currently contract our train crews and mechanical/ yard personnel from Amtrak.

Jim from Manassas Park asks:

Most of the TVM's at many of the stations are not working and will not let you purchase a ticket. What is being done to fix these machines?

VRE Management:

Our fare collection staff is aware of some difficulties riders have had purchasing tickets at our TVMs. We are working to replace the credit card readers in all of our machines as we receive replacement units from the manufacturer. The same goes for touch screens that are non-responsive. Unfortunately, the replacements are not readily available. As soon as we receive the new units, our technicians will begin working on the TVMs. In the meanwhile, please let our fare collection staff know what kind of difficulties you are experiencing by submitting a TVMs Information Form. The form is located on our website at <http://www.vre.org/feedback/tvmconcerns.php>.

Pat from Broadrun asks:

Have you thought about a reading pool on the trains. Numerous times I forget to bring something to do as I ride. So how about a reading club where a person could drop off a good book or magazine?

VRE Management:

Thanks for the suggestion! However, this may prove difficult to create since we do not have storage space

available on our rail cars for a collection of reading materials. Also our crews do not have time to monitor reading collections left on board our trains and we do not have any additional staff to keep such a project organized.

Joseph from Stafford, VA asks:

I have ridden on those new and improved cattle blunders and as anticipated the air conditioners do not work adequately to keep the inside cool when it is hot outside. What gives? I do not care to sweat while commuting to and from DC. Cold in winter - Hot in summer?? How is this an improvement?

VRE Management:

Certainly, I can see your point. The problem may be with maintaining the proper HVAC settings between service runs. Since it is still cool in the mornings and warm in the afternoons, crews may not be resetting the systems before in every car before service runs. I'll have our staff work with Amtrak (from whom we contract our crews) to remind train crews to check the settings in every car before service.

Jess from Alexandria, VA asks:

is there any possibility of putting a TVM at the other end of the alexandria station?

VRE Management:

We have no plans to put a TVM at the south end of the Alexandria station since we would have to completely redo the communication lines and this would be cost prohibitive.

Joe from Spotsy asks:

Just a comment. The last 2 weeks have been inconvenient for everyone. I think VRE did an outstanding job in easing the problems. It seemed like you planned very well. Kudos!!!

VRE Management:

Thank you! We worked very hard with CSX to provide a reasonable amount of service under the restrictive conditions, while allowing construction to finish quickly. Needless to say, I am happy that the project was able to be finished early.

Jim from Manassas, Va asks:

I need to use a Segway for medical reasons. Can I bring my Segway onto the train?

VRE Management:

It is our understanding that the ADA does not require us to permit Segways on our trains because their use is not limited to those with disabilities.

As such, we do allow them on our trains.

Barry from Fredericksburg, VA asks:

Is there any progress on the plan to add an early express run from Fredericksburg/Leeland Road to DC?

VRE Management:

I am still looking at it. But, we have to complete a few more railroad improvement projects and get funding for the additional train set. I'll keep working on it.

Nick from Stafford, VA asks:

Since receiving the new cars, I have noted that there has been an increase in electrical problems throughout the various consists. Is there a compatibility problems between the new electronics and the antiquated cars of VRE? I know that I have problems linking new computer parts with those a few years old and VRE's cars are decades apart.

VRE Management:

The short answer is "Yes." However, it doesn't really involve the age of the rail cars. It's simply an issue of getting

the different types of rail cars to "communicate" properly with one another.

Cj from Fredericksburg, VA asks:

First I want to say that you have done a wonderful job of communicating issues and developing alternate contingency plans for all the construction, delays, etc. that have occurred this Spring. This enhanced communication between VRE and the passengers has made it easier for everyone to accept what is going on to and to adjust our commuting as required. Thank you. My question: What is VRE doing to increase the reliability of its locomotives?

VRE Management:

As you may know, we are currently working to overhaul our locomotives. The process takes two months per engine and only one engine may be serviced at a time. While this process will greatly reduce our mechanical breakdowns, it will take some time before all 19 engines are overhauled. I have also asked that our mechanical crews be shifted around, increased personnel at our layover yard and began performing more inspections. I am also working on obtaining funding to purchase new ones. In the meanwhile, we hope that these efforts will help to minimize our locomotive troubles.

Joseph from Fredericksburg line asks:

I read that a Richmond to Fredericksburg bus route will soon be becoming reality. FRED is another likely provider of additional riders to the most southern end of the line. What is VRE doing to prepare for this additional influx of non-membership riders? Fredericksburg and Stafford County is getting hit hard with huge VRE subsidy request without reaping any benefits.

VRE Management:

At this time, we believe that most of the people taking advantage of these services will be current riders and that this will help alleviate some of the parking issues. I will monitor the ridership at the Fredericksburg station and make adjustments if necessary.

Diane from Fairfax asks:

There is still a problem with the Shuttle Bus drivers at Burke not validating our EZ passes. Every time we have a different driver, which seems to be every other day, they are unable to validate our EZ passes. My EZ pass has not been validated in 4 days.

VRE Management:

Thanks for letting me know. I will have someone contact the EZ Bus Supervisor and see what we can do about this.

Don from Manassas, Va asks:

On 324 and 331 (at least) the recorded announcements are often wrong. We hear "Alexandria has a low platform..." when we're en route to Crystal City. A couple of times we've been told that the "next stop" is 1 or 2 stops back. Why not just have the conductors make the announcements? They have to fix the wrong ones anyway, and they know where the train is.

VRE Management:

We are working to increase the accuracy of the timing on the automated announcements in our new cab cars. I will have our Director of Rail and Equipment Services check on our progress and make sure that he knows it is an issue on your train.

Tim from Springfield, VA asks:

Why did VRE buy so many more cab cars, when they have 15 - 11 New Gallery Cab + 4 Kawasaki Cabs? You currently only have 10 train sets. Is it for future expansion?

VRE Management:

Yes and no. As you may know, cab cars are unique since they are used to operate our trains when they are northbound into Washington. We sold 10 single-level cab cars and the 11 new cab cars are their replacements.

We purchased 50 additional cars which start arriving in December, 2007. These will replace old coaches plus allow us to add more trains when possible.

Peter from Lorton asks:

The newspapers have been reporting that CSX has been cited, and possibly fined, for numerous unsafe violations. What that in mind, would you comment on how you see the safety of VRE trains running on CSX tracks.

VRE Management:

These articles were concerning tracks in other parts of the CSX network. They are not representative of the tracks on which we operate. In addition, major improvements have been made to the track and switches located in our territory over the last two years. Safety is foremost at CSX, Amtrak, and VRE.

Marsha from Manassas, VA asks:

Reading the above regarding a passenger getting stuck in a malfunctioning door. A friend had a leg severed jumping off of a train in Illinois on Metra. This is where our old Gallery cars are from. I so urge all riders to take proper safety precautions. A missed train or walking to an open door is a small inconvenience compared to a life threatening accident.

VRE Management:

I couldn't have said it better! Certainly, the inconvenience of missing your stop is minimal compared to what could happen.

Larry from Fredericksburg asks:

After driving into Springfield twice last week, fighting through an hour's worth of traffic, sitting on the Metro's uncomfortable and smelly seats for another 45 minutes, my appreciation for VRE's service (late arrivals and all) is even greater than before. VRE certainly tops any other kind of commute. Thanks!

VRE Management:

Thanks! We'll keep trying to make things even better.

Jim from Manassas Park asks:

I noticed at LeFant station, CSX is adding a 3rd set of tracks. How will this help VRE? It looks like it will add flexibility for freight and other traffic. Any other thoughts you can share?

VRE Management:

You are correct. It will add flexibility for freight and other traffic. Therefore, allowing the track closest to the station to be available for passenger service.

Marsha from Manassas, VA asks:

4 days, 7 rides so far and 4 FRC's since Friday, 3/30/07. 2 of these were mechanical issues out of Broad Run. Why not send out the next consist when it is clear it will be a lengthy delay? Certainly crews must be on hand to get that equipment ready to go.

VRE Management:

You are right. We should have dispatched the next train more quickly. I am working to insure that once a train is delayed 10-15 minutes, the next one is sent out in its place.

Rather not say! from **C'ville** asks:

I would like to express my displeasure with people leaving the train stations in the afternoons. Since they feel that they have to be the 1st ones out of the parking lot, they are going out the wrong way even though the signs are clearly there "DO NOT ENTER". Then they expect everyone else to stop and let them out or get "bent out of shape" when someone won't stop to let them out. I don't give way to people who disobey their traffic signs!

VRE Management:

Well said. Courtesy in the parking lots goes a long way towards everyone getting home quickly.

Ken from Fairfax VA asks:

Can you look into getting the PA system at Burke repaired? Since construction began, it's been out much of the time. (Hit Utility rather than Miss Utility seems to be the case). Of course, we only know that when there's a problem. Fortunately, many of us get Train Talk to pagers and Blackberries!

VRE Management:

This is my station and I have noticed these problems too. The construction has wreaked havoc on the station communications system at Burke Centre. Our technician has been out there every day this to resolve these problems. But, the fix is not easy and we are working on it.

Buffy from Stafford asks:

Where are the minutes to the March Ops Board meeting? Why weren't they posted online before this forum?

VRE Management:

Thank you of making me aware of this oversight. I will have it corrected today.

Manassas Rider from Manassas, Va. asks:

Is VRE aware that the edges of the handlebars bolted into the top of the seat backs of the older trains are extremely sharp and are able to cut through skin deeply almost to the bone? Having my thumb bleeding the entire way to work was not fun.

VRE Management:

Please contact Detrius Bolton in our office at 703-684-1001 to fill out an incident report and she will take it from there.

Russ from Fredericksburg asks:

In order to make the system more wheel chair friendly, and avoid issues with the lifts, would it be possible to disassemble the Bombardier train and distribute the cars among as much of the rest of the fleet as possible? They seem to require a much simpler ramp system, rather than a complicated lift system. I know there are only a few Bombardiers, but it seems like it could help to spread them out. Thanks.

VRE Management:

The Bombardier cars are like spoiled children, they don't always play well with others. So, while your idea is a good one, it would cause more problems in the long run.

Dirk from Clifton, VA asks:

What is the status of the new gallery car trailers and new locomotives?

VRE Management:

We will start receiving 50 new Gallery cars in December. If the transportation budget passes today, we will immediately start working on procurement of new locomotives. I anticipate that it will take at least 18 months before we can expect to receive a new engine.

Bob from Woodbridge, Va asks:

Spring is back, and so are the kids hanging around the Woodbridge garage. The graffiti has started showing up again, too. Can you have someone look into it? Thanks.

VRE Management:

Yes, we have talked to the security guard that patrols that station and he is going to make more frequent trips through the interior of the garage.

Toby from Fredericksburg, VA asks:

Two of the last three mornings, I have sat across from someone with a zone 5-3 ten trip ticket. It's hard not to notice the "5-3" and upon closer inspection (the guy was sleeping), it hadn't been "punched" since last October. When I get on at Brooke (Zone 8) and off at Alexandria (Zone 2), he's there sleeping with his 5-3 ticket. I am sure he'd like to thank you for his 50 straight free rides, but probably wants to see if he can set a new record! And yes ... conductors do come around checking tickets!

VRE Management:

Please email "gotrains@vre.org" with the train number and I will look into it.

MJ from Manassas Park asks:

Why is it that the pending questions from these sessions are never answered in the transcript? Also, what happened to the management explanations (e-mails) that used to accompany service failures?

VRE Management:

There are simply too many questions for me to answer all of them in the time available. I highly suggest that anyone with a serious concern email "gotrains@vre.org".

As for the management explanations by email, this information can now be found online in the Daily Download section of our website where we address all service delays.

VRE Management:

That's all we have time for today. I know that I always say this, but the hour really flew by!

Thank you for all of your questions and feedback. I hope to see all of you at some of the upcoming Meet the Management functions starting next week.

We will chat next month.

Dale

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