

Virginia Railway Express

Let's Talk!

The next VRE online forum will start on Wednesday, December 5th at 12 noon.



There are currently 100 questions waiting to be answered.

VRE Management:

Glad you all could join me on this snowy day. From what I hear, it was a good day to be on the train instead of on the roads!

Now, let's get to the questions!

Tom from Burke asks:

Who is responsible for parking at Burke Centre? There are too many people parking in ways that block the pedestrian path and others in the roadway. These cars deserve fine bearing tickets. It seems to me that VRE management has some responsibility to notify the police to ticket improperly parked cars...do you agree? If so, will you call them today?

VRE Management:

The Fairfax County Police patrol this lot. I will ask the County to look into having more frequent patrols at the Burke Centre lot and ticketing of the more serious offenders.

PJ from Manassas, VA asks:

Who patrols the VRE parking lots (Manassas Airport specifically) for parking violations? Lately, quite a few people blatantly "add" spots by parking illegally at end of rows or sections making it difficult to drive.

VRE Management:

Prince William County Police look after this lot. I'll also look into increasing the frequency of patrols. However, because we do not have room for expansion, the County is only ticketing the more serious offenders.

Jose from Mechanicsville, VA asks:

Can VRE urge the city of Fredericksburg to power-wash the Fred Station? The awful smell of urine and waste going up the steps to the platform is herendous especially at 6:00 am in the morning. I am a new customer to VRE from Fred to Crystal City and expect to ride to VRE for quite sometime. Thanks, Jose

VRE Management:

I know that this is a constant problem. I'll see if we can work with the City on this.

PJ from Manassas, VA asks:

Is there a set time for trains to pull up to the platform for the Manassas Airport and Fredericksburg lines in the morning? For example, trains are supposed to pull up 5 mins before scheduled departure time. This set practice would alleviate passengers waiting out in the cold winter morning weather at these originating locations.

VRE Management:

I understand that it would be nice to have the trains arrive early at Broad Run and Fredericksburg, now that the weather has turned colder. However, our crews have several duties to perform before service (equipment checks, etc.). Since these duties may take longer to complete on occasions, the endpoint stations are treated like any

other in the fact that trains are not required to arrive early and board passengers ahead of time.

John from Burke, VA asks:

Last year after snow plows cleared the lot at the Rolling Road station they created a large berm of snow that blocked the access sidewalk (the short sidewalk that runs from the public sidewalk into your lot). That made it necessary to climb over a hill of snow just to get into your lot to walk across to the station. It was dangerous, and I fell while climbing over it last year. After complaint messages nothing was done to clear it, and in fact after the next snowfall the plows made it even worse. Will this be addressed this year?

VRE Management:

Fairfax County is responsible for snow removal in the Rolling Road parking lot. I'll ask our facilities manager to see if we can work with them on a better solution.

Karen from Manassas asks:

What is the schedule to complete the Manassas City parking garage? What is the planned usage of the parking garage? Rumors are that most of it will be for short term and other city parking, not VRE commuters. How many spaces will VRE commuters have in the garage and will we retain the current surface lots?

VRE Management:

The Manassas garage is scheduled for completion in Summer 2008, with 321 spaces for VRE commuters. We will retain all existing parking -- so there will be a net increase of 321 spaces.

B from Manassas asks:

Would it be easy to put the time on the new monitors at the station? It'd be nice to be able to see - for example - news of a 10 minute delay right next to the current time, so we can make the mental calculation of the wait time. Not a huge deal, obviously, but it would be nice, especially if it's a simple matter.

VRE Management:

Time is a funny thing. I purposefully did not put time on the new signs because there was no guarantee that we could sync them with U.S.N.O. time. While I understand your point, we did not want people missing trains because the clock was off.

R. Aman from Bristow, VA asks:

As a rider for over 10 years there was a point when there were not sufficient riders to justify a Friday after Thanksgiving running of the trains. This could be seen days before the holiday with a significant drop off in rider ship. However, this is no longer the case and there seems to be no justification for not running an "S" schedule at minimum on Friday after Thanksgiving or has the VRE placed this as a standard holiday in the package for their employees?

VRE Management:

We received a lot of feedback on this. I am looking into the possibility of adding the day after Thanksgiving back into our "S" schedule.

Marty from Fredericksburg asks:

I regularly e-mail my local Spotsylvania Supervisor about Spotsylvania joining VRE, but without success. Any suggestions on how to proceed?

VRE Management:

I am going to meet with the Chairman of the Spotsylvania Board next week. I'll let you next month if we are getting any closer to Spotsylvania joining VRE.

Beverly from Manassas, VA asks:

Do you expect to raise fares anytime in the future?

VRE Management:

As of now, I am not recommending any fare increases. However, the budget for next year has not been approved by our Board.

Greg from Springfield Va asks:

Can you make sure the conductors routinely turn off the vents on the trains when they are going through the tunnel under Union Station? They have NOT been doing so lately despite many repeated requests.

VRE Management:

We do ask our crews to do this. However, the Gallery car vents cannot be completely closed. Please note the number of you train and submit a Train Information form (<http://www.vre.org/feedback/mechanicalconcerns.php>) from our website with the information. This way we can work with Amtrak to remind the crew of your train.

Michele from Fredericksburg, VA asks:

It would be nice if the conductors of 310 (aka the tourist train) would make occasional announcements regarding the "quiet car" policies. There is a lack of signage in the car, especially on the lower level, which means that the passengers must tactfully inform those who are violating the rules. Those with children especially need to know ahead of time so they don't have to move once they get settled into their seats.

VRE Management:

Thanks for the suggestion. I'll see what we can do about issuing these reminders and have our cleaning crews check to make sure that all of the quiet cars have enough signage.

Jackie from Burke, Virginia asks:

Why has there been only one conductor for the past two weeks on VRE 330? Also, on VRE 331 it very dark outside and we have had no announcements indicating what stations we are approaching. I noticed last 2-3 people in the car that I was riding missed their stops.

VRE Management:

We have had a shortage of train personnel as a result of illness, training and vacations. Unfortunately, we have had to run #330 with only one conductor. I understand that this has caused some issues on this train and I am working with Amtrak to get them corrected.

As for #331, I will ask for our mechanical crews to take a look at the announcement system to make sure that the automated announcements can be made on a regular basis.

Steve Jones from Burke, VA asks:

When do you expect the VRE to begin accepting electronic payments using the METRO Smart Card? Is the parking lot being built at Burke Center Station on time. Will there be any fees for parking in the lot? When do you expect it to open? Finally, will the roadway that is around the parking lot under construction receive some maintaince? There are a few holes that hinder driving. Also, can anything be done to help keep walkers safe as they head from the trainstation to their cars in the lot? I'm surprized no one has been hit by a car yet. Thanks!

VRE Management:

We hope to start accepting SmarTrip cards as a form of payment at our stations in about two years. Unfortunately, we are not in the financial position to modify our fare collection equipment until the specifications for the upcoming regional fare collection system have been finalized. Once the design of the regional system has been completed, we will begin to work to have our equipment upgraded to be part of the regional system.

As for the Burke Centre garage, Fairfax County tells me that the construction is on schedule and that they hope to have it available for use next May. There will be no fees to use the garage.

I'll see if we can work with the County about the pothole and pedestrian issues, too.

Davin from Woodbridge, VA asks:

What is the status of the Woodbridge Station expansion? Did it get delayed, as I saw on the website you cancelled the RFP?

VRE Management:

We intend to reissue the RFP for a second platform and pedestrian bridge.

Al from Woodbridge, VA asks:

What happened to the courtesy campaign announcements that were programmed for your rail cars? I've only heard it twice on Train #304 earlier last month and haven't heard it since.

VRE Management:

Because of the style of the new courtesy announcements, they were not intended to be run on a regular basis. Instead, we ask that crews use them intermittently - according to a predetermined schedule.

Ron from Bristow, VA asks:

How do you keep track of total mileage on locomotives since they travel in both directions? Do odometers record both forward and backward movement?

VRE Management:

Locomotives do not have odometers. Instead, we track hours the engine runs.

Bill from Fredericksburg asks:

Question--not a complaint. You have indicated that the train status is updated every day at 4:30 am on your homepage. However, occasionally when I log on at 4:45 there may be status updates from the previous evening still showing. How reliable is your morning update?

VRE Management:

Sorry for any confusion information on our website may have caused. Service information is only updated by 4:30am when severe weather (snow, ice, possible flooding, etc.) is forecasted for our service areas or planned railroad maintenance may affect our service. Otherwise updates are provided on an "as needed" basis once we are informed of a problem. I'll check with our webmaster to see if we can remove information about evening service once it's over. That way if you check the website the next morning, no news will be good news.

Marianne from Burke, VA asks:

It's great news that the VRE will some day run to Gainesville. However, I'm concerned that the additional riders will result in lack of seating for those of us further down the line. Is VRE planning on adding cars to the Manassas line trains to compensate for this?

VRE Management:

Yes. As part of our expansion to Gainesville/Haymarket we will have additional equipment.

Ron from Woodbridge asks:

Whatever happened to courtesy and common sense (whoops, sorry, I know, these behaviors have become obsolete in our me-first society) and simply waiting in one's seat until the train comes to a stop? I suggest it's also a safety issue - if one of those overly-anxious commuters happen to fall, we could really have a mess. How about some drastic action - the train doesn't move unless everyone is seated? You think it might be time to exercise some authority?

VRE Management:

I know that queuing before station stops is on the rise and we have been issuing reminders about it. Check out today's edition of VRE Update for more information on how we are going to address the problem.

Unvalidated from Leeland Road Station asks:

TVMs will not validate tickets for zones other than the present location. Example: The day-to-day commute is from Leeland to Lorton on a weekly or monthly pass. To make the occasional trip beyond Lorton, a ticket from Lorton to farther down the line is purchased. The TVM at Leeland will not validate the ticket from Lorton to other destinations. Do you expect me to jump off at Lorton with all the other people getting off, and the hordes getting on in time to catch the train. Be realistic and change the TVMs.

VRE Management:

Since our fares are based on the distance traveled, the fare collection system is set up to only validate tickets that are within those zones of travel to make sure that riders pay the correct fares for travel. If you travel from Leeland (zone 8) to Lorton (zone 4) then you can only validate your tickets at stations located within these zones. Since a trip north of Lorton or south of Leeland costs more, the machines won't accept your tickets. If you sometimes travel outside of these zones, you may wish to consider buying a 2-trip (or 10-trip) ticket between Leeland Road and your other station north of Lorton ahead of time and use it when you travel outside of your usual route.

Dudley from Nokesville asks:

I saw the US Marines at Broad Run on Saturday, assaulting a train. Was this to enforce quiet car ediquite? What gives

VRE Management:

What you actually saw was one of our annual emergency drills. The scenario was a hostage takeover of a train and a marine SWAT unit responded to the situation.

While they did a good job, I am not going to ask them to enforce quiet car or other courtesy issues.

Tara from Manassas asks:

When will the last 'sounder train set' be removed from the manassas line? The seats are starting to break-down and the "knee-to-knee" seating is not comfortable. Thanks

VRE Management:

The last Sounder set will be leaving in the February/March time frame and will be replaced with a new Gallery set.

Dan from Washington, DC asks:

What is the status of the delivery of the new cars scheduled to start in December?

VRE Management:

The first five of the 50 new Gallerys will leave Chicago for VRE on December 12th.

Joe from Manassas, VA asks:

If Amtrak strike happens, what plans does VRE have to deal with the strike? Will VRE trains still run? Limited?

VRE Management:

Amtrak updates on a bi-weekly basis on the status of their union negotiations. If a strike were to occur, it would more than likely happen the latter part January. We will keep you apprised of the status in our Train Talks.

Mike from Manassas, VA asks:

I think all those people who complain about queing are nut jobs. Big deal, stop crying.

VRE Management:

Mike, from the responses we have gotten so far, you are truly in the minority. Please the following messages.

Debbie from Manassas asks:

Thank you so very much for the new queuing policy announced in this morning's paper Train Talk! I detrain at Manassas and have days where I barely make it through the queue line for Broad Run. This sounds like the best

way to resolve it for me and my fellow Manassas passengers.

VRE Management:

Jo from Fredericksburg, VA asks:

This is not so much a question but rather a huge THANK YOU!!! This morning's edition of the VRE Today announced that you are going to get tougher on queing. I, for one, am truly happy that you are taking this measure. To follow up with a question though, will the conductors be walking through to ensure there is no queing at the doors that are normally unattended? Thanks again!!!!

VRE Management:

Barry from Bristow asks:

I was glad to read in today's newsletter of the new approach for stopping the "queuing" by making passengers get off the train where they assemble. The problem has gotten so bad that I have seen Manassas riders stopped and confronted by Broad Run passengers, before they were "allowed" to pass through a gauntlet of as many as ten people. My co-workers ridicule this calling Broad Run the "daily running of the bulls." I think the local news stations or UTube might find a video of this entertaining. Thanks for taking action. I wonder why you are waiting until January for enforcement?

VRE Management:

James from Crystal City asks:

Do you expect the trains to be on time today???

VRE Management:

If you are asking about the snow? We don't expect it to cause any problems with service today.

AJ from Alexandria asks:

Several months ago I saw what I think was a beautiful old style pullman car attached to the end of an Amtrack consist. It had Virginia Railray Express written across the side. Have you seen it? What's the story on that?

VRE Management:

Unfortunately, we had to sell them all and go to double-deckers to handle our increased ridership.

Mike from Woodbridge, VA asks:

Would it be possible to install one of the new messaging signs at the entrance of the Woodbrige garage so that we can see the train status when we arrive? When I come I've seen some cars leaving when the train is late. If they knew earlier, then they wouldn't have to enter the garage in the first place.

VRE Management:

Unfortunately, the new screens can't be seen very well in direct light and the communication lines are not accessible from the front of the garage or station. So, at this time we can't place a sign on the front of the garage or station. I'll keep it in mind for future improvements.

Joe from Woodbridge asks:

U.S.N.O. time?

VRE Management:

United States Naval Observatory time. It's the time our conductors synchronize their watches to and our trains operate.

H. from Woodbridge VA asks:

My work is transitioning from metro checks to Smartbenefits. I can find nothing on your web site about how to use the Smart Trip card to purchase my VRE ticket. Can you please add instructions, links, etc., as needed to your web site to enable us to use our work-provided transit subsidy benefit using the Smartbenefits program?

VRE Management:

While you cannot use a SmartTrip Card to purchase VRE tickets, information is available on our website about how to purchase VRE tickets using SmartBenefits. The link is located under "What's New" on our homepage (<http://www.vre.org>).

RJ from Manassas, VA asks:

Can VRE power-wash the L'Enfant Station? The awful smell of urine and waste going up the steps to the platform is herendous especially at night. This is a long time problem that does not seem to go away. Thanks.

VRE Management:

I will ask our facilities manager to look into it.

Jon from Bristow, VA asks:

Has VRE been in contact with Prince William County over the intersection and new traffic lights at Piper Lane & Rt. 28 (the main exit for the Broad Run station)? When the new Target shopping center opens, VRE passengers exiting Piper Lane in the evenings will be facing oncoming traffic for the first time. It is imperative that we have a left green arrow on the traffic light--which lasts at least as long as the regular green light does now. Otherwise the traffic backup on Piper Lane will be so bad that Broad Run VRE passengers may choose another form of transportation.

VRE Management:

You gotta be kiddin' me! I'll start working with Prince William now.

VRE Management:

We've got more on the queuing issue!

Let me emphasize that you need to stay in your seats until after the train leaves the station before your intended destination.

Marie from Manassas Park, VA asks:

Thank you for the 'queuing reminder' in the newsletter today. I was wondering, though, if you were aware that those who queue up also open the doors to the vestibule, entering & filling it, long before the station is reached. This is now letting cold air into the cars as is riders leaving the doors standing open when they enter. Can something be added to the queuing reminders about closing the doors?

VRE Management:

JOE from FREDERICKSBURG asks:

Only a comment to share. Thank you for the VRE UPDATE this AM. I read it. I can only hope the other people on the 300 train read and heed. They did not this morning. The QUEUE started well before your recommended time. Looking forward to the enforcement of DETRAINING these individuals. Thank you for your superior service.

VRE Management:

Chuck from Rippon asks:

Any thought to working with the Prince William County Police to address the constant vehicular assaults perpetrated by persons driving criminally recklessly to and from the station? Many of us are tired of being subjected to physical injury because of mal-intent drivers.

VRE Management:

If you are injured by a reckless driver, you need to call the police. While I would love to be able to have someone posted at every station to try and prevent these types of situations, it simply is not feasible.

BUT, I will contact Prince William Police and ask them to patrol the area.

Jo from Fredericksburg, VA asks:

I've read your responses to the first two questions about illegal parking. Can you please add Leeland Road to that list? There's an overflow lot that rarely, if ever, fills up, yet I see people make their own parking spaces closer to the station each and every day. Many times I've seen people start parking in illegal areas even before the main lot fills up.

VRE Management:

Yes, I'll add Leeland to the list.

Craig from Manassas Park, VA asks:

Recently, a group of developers has outlined a DOD facility in Manassas Park called Blooms Grove Station, with part of their plan calling for an increase in VRE service, including reverse trains. Has VRE been approached about this, and what can VRE do to help bring this about?

VRE Management:

Yes, we were approached and are aware of the project. We will support it if it is selected as a BRAC site.

John from Manassas, VA asks:

What is the latest from Amtrak on their attempt at having more riders by increasing the step-up fare?

VRE Management:

The change in price from \$2.00 to \$10.00 for a Step-Up ticket has reduced the number of people riding Amtrak trains by two-thirds.

I haven't given up trying to reduce the price to \$5.00.

Steve from Fredericksburg asks:

Good Afternoon: Is there a reason why VRE will not/can not sell tickets a-la-carte, on board, even at a premium price, to end the need to issue summons? Chicago's Metra sells tickets on board and doesn't send folks to court for not knowing how to buy a ticket. Recently on the FBG line, we had to sit and wait at Quantico for the police to write a summons. Lost time for those on train, and all the blocked traffic on the public roadway.

VRE Management:

Virginia State law states that passengers must have a valid ticket prior to boarding VRE trains. Selling tickets on board is not possible.

R from Bristow asks:

Me and several of my friends are sitting here in the office watching this chat and wondering why you have not answer our question. Several of my friends have asked, "When the Gainesville/Haymarket stations are finished what will happen to the Broadrun station. Will there be a Broadrun station in our future?" I hope that you are not just avoiding our question.

VRE Management:

I wasn't avoiding the question. The Broad Run station will remain.

Additional stations will be built between Manassas and Haymarket. Ideally another train yard will be built for this extension and we will operate out of the Broad Run yard and the new yard.

Jack from Fairfax VA asks:

With all the emphasis on Not Queuing, 1. Can you get reliable PA system in all cars? I'm seeing the PA out in my car generally twice week. 2. If you don't want me to stand, we need to add seats. I've walked through four cars to

get a seat three times in my last ten trips home. 3. Ask the conductors to wait until we get off before complaining about how slow we unload. My last thought of VRE shouldn't be the one that inspires. Guys, we've had some full and less than fully capable trains of late. A little patience by all would help.

VRE Management:

Good Point! I'll see what I can do.

StaffordRider from **Stafford, VA** asks:

I saw the question about the Smartbenefits program. I joined Smartbenefits in September and it is working very well. I receive my monthly pass at my house around the 20th of the month. However, there is one thing the instructions don't tell you and I found out the hard way. When you set up your account on Commuter Direct, which is the vendor who mails your tickets to you, you must set up your account by the 10th of the month in order to receive your tickets in the same month. Setting up your accounts on Metro and on Smartbenefits can be done by the 15th of the month.

VRE Management:

I'm glad it's working well for you. I know that we are trying to make the process easier and will include this in our list of changes.

Ben from **Manassas, VA** asks:

Thanks for installing speakers and display at the far platform in Manassas.

VRE Management:

You're welcome!

VRE Management:

Our hour is up! Be careful go home today. I've noticed the snow falling as I've been answering questions. The next forum will be on January 10. Have a great Holiday Season and I'll talk to you next year!

Dale
