

Virginia Railway Express

Let's Talk!

The next VRE online forum will start on Wednesday, June 6th at 12 noon.



There are currently 45 questions waiting to be answered.

VRE Management:

Thank you all for joining me on this nice summer day!

Speaking of summer, I know a lot of you have concerns about heat restrictions on the Fredericksburg Line. I am hoping that the completion of the second bridge over Quantico Creek, changes in the way CSX does heat inspections, and the reduction of switch and signal problems will allow us to have a better summer this year. With that said, let's get started.

Jim from Crystal City asks:

Why do all the "mechanical problems" on the Fredericksburg line seem to be in the morning? Are crews getting started early enough in the day to diagnose and repair problems?

VRE Management:

There were a couple of days last month where the same Fredericksburg line train was delayed as a result of different mechanical problems. With this exception, our records show that there has been no recent pattern of mechanical problems regularly affecting our morning service on the Fredericksburg line. We have added more mechanical expertise at our yards and it seems to be working, with improved imperformance.

Linda from Fairfax, VA asks:

Please, please, please talk to the Union Station folks to allow VRE riders access to the upper platform (AM and PM) without having to go through the station. I miss my afternoon VRE train #329 nearly everyday, after transferring from the MARC train from New Carrollton. This change has made an already inconvenient commute (1hr45min--one way) nearly unbearable. I KNOW I'm not the only one having to deal with this issue. We are not terrorists--just commuters. Thanks for anything you can do.

VRE Management:

I understand your concern. I am continuing to talk to Amtrak about ways to lessen the impact of new security procedures on our Union Station riders. However, as I said last month, it is very difficult to counter any changes that involve security.

Robert from Broad Run asks:

There are a lot of birds above the TVM's at Broad Run. Can anything be done? Lately there have been a lot of droppings on the concrete.

VRE Management:

This is something that will be looked at over the next several months. In addition to the TVMs, we are trying to find ways to protect the new variable message signs that will be installed later this year at all of our station.

B from Manassas asks:

I know that we don't have to remind you that last summer was not a good one for VRE performance. What have you done to try to mitigate the potential problems this summer? (i.e. negotiating with CSX and Norfolk Southern to get our trains better priority, etc.)

VRE Management:

CSX is taking a hard look at how they implement heat restrictions. So far this summer, there have only been a few days where CSX has issued heat restrictions on our tracks. We are seeing fewer delays as a result. On the Norfolk Southern side, a lot of the delays last year were due to flooding in June and tie replacement over the course of the summer. Hopefully, we won't see the same flooding conditions this year. Norfolk Southern does not have any plans for significant track work. I am looking forward to an improved summer.

Bob from Stafford asks:

How is Billy doing? #307 is just not the same without him.

VRE Management:

I knew he was out, but we have not had an update. With his vibrant personality, I know he is missed.

Patrick from Burke, VA asks:

What percentage of VRE Operations Board members ride the train daily? Weekly?

VRE Management:

Currently, all Operations Board members are locally elected officials who work in their jurisdictions. None work in Washington and therefore do not commute by VRE. However, many have ridden our trains over the past year.

ROBERT C from VA asks:

What is the main reason there can not be a train that leaves union station for fredericksburg at 7pm?

VRE Management:

There are actually two reasons.

First, Amtrak has a train operating in that time slot. Even if they were to change their schedule, CSX will not currently allow us to operate more trains. Which is the second reason.

With that said, we are working with them on several improvement projects. When these are completed, we will be able to add more service. Since I won't be able to add more service for at least a year, I have not made any decisions on when the additional service will operate.

Sam from Burke, Va asks:

Since the Virginia transportation legislation with a 25 million dollar increase per year for VRE got passed can we expect to not see the almost yearly ticket price increases?

VRE Management:

I'm not sure yet. I don't know how or when the Northern Virginia Transportation Authority will distribute the funding and for what the money can be used. I expect to know within six months to a year from now.

Paul from Brooke asks:

Since the Amtrak step-up tickets are going to the full cost of \$10.00/ea, will the weekend VRE/Amtrak step-up service be reinstated? Also, for those who rely on Amtrak on holidays that the VRE doesn't run, can a step-up discount be worked out?

VRE Management:

I asked Amtrak to reinstate the weekend cross-honor service. They decided not to permit us to offer this to our

passengers.

As for holidays, Amtrak is normally quite full and will not lower the cost on those days.

Matt from Rippon, VA asks:

The old gallery cars V459 & V460 look like cab cars because they have the red stripe painted down the back and has cab car windows, so why aren't they used as cab cars?

VRE Management:

Yes, they are cab cars. But, due to the high cost of restoring the locomotive controls in these cars, we only use them as regular passenger cars.

Linda from Manassas asks:

Could you please remind Manassas City riders that they must turn over the parking permit on July 1...for whatever reason, the new permits are two sided...if possible, could announcements also be made on the trains on the last word day in June?

VRE Management:

Thanks for the reminder. I'll have our staff send work on announcements for our trains and send a Train Talk.

Joe from Spotsy asks:

Where do we stand on Spotsy joining the family?

VRE Management:

No new news. The County's Board has tabled a vote at this time. I am hoping that a decision will be made later this year.

Vonda K from VA asks:

Who would approve a mini concession stand for coffee ect at the rippon station, like the one with a red cart at Lorton stn?

VRE Management:

Anyone interested in setting up such a service would have to first contact Prince William County. Since the County owns the main parking lot at Rippon, the vendor needs the County's permission to along with the necessary permits. Once permission has been granted and the necessary permits are in order, the vendor should contact us before setting up so that we can agree on an appropriate location near the station.

joe from stafford asks:

The latest free ride ticket I received has "non-renewable" stamped on the back in red. Is this one different than others

VRE Management:

Somewhat. We have been stamping FRCs as non-renewable for those that are exchanged at our office. However, is going to be a permanent change. In addition to the upcoming changes in our FRC policy, we will not be replacing expired FRCs. Since the latest batch of FRCs do not expire until July 1, 2008, most riders will not have a problem using up the tickets over the next year.

Me from Dumfries asks:

What's with this "Express Train" business when you experience mechanical problems? (re: a few weeks ago)
How do you justify bypassing commuters at Leland and Brook who were waiting for the 300 train and then picking up 300 & 302 train commuters at the other stops?

VRE Management:

When one train is late from its first station, that delay can cause a domino effect along the entire line. Rather than create delays for everyone, I decided to space out the trains so that they could all run better.

I know that this was frustrating to the Brooke and Leeland passengers attempting to ride #300, but I had to make a decision that was best for the overall system.

Roger from Burke, Va asks:

For about the last month the electrical generator has been shutting off on my train. Why is it taking so long to get this problem fixed?

VRE Management:

I experienced a similar issue on my train. We are experiencing shorts in the electrical cables between the rail cars. It's very hard to diagnose this problem since there is no observable damage to the cables. To eliminate the problem, we are having all the older cables on the trains replaced.

Peter from Burke asks:

Would you please address the daily loss of power that we are experiencing on 328? Seems like as soon as we pull in to Crystal City, the power goes off. What is causing this and when do you expect to have it fixed?

VRE Management:

Hopefully, the cable replacement will solve this problem, too. I'll have this train double-checked.

Mark from Fredericksburg, VA asks:

Since the Step Up tickets will go up 7/1/07. What will happen to the current step up tickets that we have with expiration dates in 2008??

VRE Management:

On July 1, Amtrak will only accept \$2.00 Amtrak step-up tickets in groups of five (5). Amtrak conductors are not in a position to accept fewer than five \$2.00 Amtrak Step-Up tickets along the difference in cash.

Riders with less than five \$2.00 Step-Up tickets after the fare change may use them as partial credit towards the purchase of a \$10.00 Step-Up. Simply mail the tickets along with your name, home address, daytime phone number, a check for the difference, and a brief explanation to our main office and we will send you a \$10.00 ticket.

Mary from Burke, VA asks:

This week I've experienced train cars so cold that they're almost painful. Is there anything that conductors can do?

VRE Management:

Temperature always seems to be a matter of personal preference. This time of year, we get only a precious few complaints that the cars are too cold. Mostly, people are looking to get out of the heat. With that said, if a particular car seems to be a problem, let us know by emailing gotrains@vre.org with the car numbers. I'll have our mechanical crews take a look at it.

Davin from Woodbridge, VA asks:

Why did CSX delay Train #304 yesterday and last week to let a Manassas Train go ahead of it? Train #304 was on time and the Manassas line train had a minor delay. If they let Train #304 continue on, it would have not been delayed.

VRE Management:

Yesterday, train #304 was three minutes late into Union Station. The CSX dispatcher held it south of Alexandria to

allow Manassas train #326 to proceed ahead of it. The dispatcher's responsibility is to move trains in a way that permits the best flow of train traffic and that's exactly what he did.

Frank from Broad Run asks:

I have heard that VRE was going to extend its service to Culpeper but in reading your web site it never talks about Culpeper just only Haymarket. Is VRE going to expand in Central Virginia (if so when is the best guess time frame) or will it only develop along the major road networks? I ask because of over hearing one rider that was complaining too many non-Manassas riders were taking up the parking spots at the Broad Run station.

VRE Management:

Our priority is to extend our service towards Gainesville/Haymarket because the potential for ridership is greater and the extension is within Prince William County, which already is a member jurisdiction.

Tired of holding on from Fredericksburg, Virginia asks:

Why has there been no progress made with the issue of the wheelchair locks? The Kawasaki cars and the Sounder cars both have at least one constraint on each consist. It is understood that there is no "ADA regulation" requiring these constraints, one would have thought VRE would have followed suit and kept safety in mind when approving the engineering of the new cars. VRE has digressed in the SAFETY/comfort of its passengers. This is the second time this question has been asked, it appears that VRE Mgmt. doesn't want to address this issue. Do I need to bring a 2x4 to steady the chair???

VRE Management:

Please call my Manager of Customer Service, April Maguigad, at 703-684-1001. She will be happy to discuss options with you.

David from Gainesville, VA asks:

Are there any plans to replace or overhaul some of the older locomotives? There seems to be problems with them from time to time. BTW, job well done on the new gallery cars!

VRE Management:

We currently overhaul two or three locomotives a year. In addition, I intend to lease three more locomotives in the next month to tide us over until we can procure 20 new locomotives. I anticipate that it will take at least three years to replace our current stock with new locomotives.

Dale from Lorton, VA asks:

What is the status of the new third track and why are they using rusty tracks?

VRE Management:

The third track at L'Enfant is scheduled to be completed by this Fall. The rails are currently rusty because they are not in use. Once the track is tied in and trains operate over them, the rust will wear off and the rails will be shiny.

Ken from Burke, VA asks:

We generally validate before the announcements of delays and cancellations hit the platforms. I could ask if I'm effectively paying for services not rendered. What recourse do riders have in that situation? Given the FRC situation, many are wondering.

VRE Management:

Just as before, if you validate your ticket and choose alternate transportation because of a delay, you may request an FRC from our office to replace the ride not taken.

Dawn from Fairfax asks:

How many parking spaces will be added by the Burke parking structure? What's the current expected opening date?

VRE Management:

There will be 1,100 parking spaces in the new Burke parking structure. It's scheduled to be completed in the summer of 2008.

Annoyed from Manassas Park asks:

As stated before, there are issues I would to bring to the attention of other riders. For one turn off your head lights after you park your car, blinding the people sitting in their cars opposite you would greatly appreciate it. Secondly, I have had it happen to me twice yesterday leaving Manassas Park, riders jump starting out of their parking space. Lastly, can something be done about people idling in front of parked vehicles blocking the flow of traffic, it seems this is a constant problem.

VRE Management:

As I always say, courtesy is a difficult issue. But, it is also contagious. Let's all live by the "golden rule."

Dan from Broad Run asks:

Can we get the parking lot at Broad Run restriped? There are 2-3 sets of stripes that are confusing, particularly before sunrise or in wet weather. Parking is already tight, and it's frustrating to see multiple cars parked across 1.5 spaces apiece because the lines are misleading.

VRE Management:

I attended the Broad Run Meet the Management and this was brought to my attention. I'll see what I can do since funding is tight.

Tom from Woodbridge, VA asks:

Speaking of Heat Restrictions, what is CSX threshold temperature this year and I read that they would put in on sections, instead of the entire line. Is that true?

VRE Management:

Normally, heat restrictions go into effect at 90 degrees. However, CSX has also indicated that areas of recent track work may have speed restrictions placed upon them at 85 degrees.

While I have not received an official statement, I am working with CSX on having them segment the railroad when they issue slow orders due to heat.

I know that the new bridge will help traffic flow in these conditions. I will monitor this with CSX and anticipate that this summer will be better.

Tom from Manassas, VA asks:

Do the crews on the train have any mechanical expertise to repair the train if experiences mechanical difficulties enroute?

VRE Management:

They can troubleshoot and make minor repairs en route. But serious problems must be handled by skilled mechanics.

VRE Management:

That's all we have time for today. Since the next forum would fall on July 4, I'll plan on chatting with you on Wednesday, July 11. Until then, have a great start to your summer.
