

Virginia Railway Express

Let's Talk!

The next VRE online forum will start on Wednesday, May 2nd at 12 noon.



There are currently 15 questions waiting to be answered.

VRE Management:

Thank you for joining me. I know that I say this every time, but I can't believe that another month has come and gone!

Before we begin, I would like to let you know the current status of our locomotive situation. Hopefully, we will begin a request for proposal with the next 30 days for procurement of new locomotives. We are also reviewing proposals to lease locomotives as a short-term measure until we receive new ones, as it will be at least two years before we see new locomotives.

Let's begin!

jess from asks:

Given the fact that the some of the new rail cars are in use, are you going to change the bike policy?

VRE Management:

Because bicycles and priority seating are in the same area, we do not plan on revisiting our bike policy until we have more cars in our system. Early next year, we will be reviewing the policy.

Montague from **Fairfax County, VA USA** asks:

Are there any FRA regulations that prohibit passengers from blocking egress, especially in a stairwell (on the gallery cars)? I've noticed many instances where passengers will sit in the stairwell despite the availability of seats, then grunt groan and moan when asked to make way for detraining passengers. Instead of spending money on gladhanding giveaways by VRE management perhaps signs and announcements with rules of conduct and courtesy may be money better put to use.

VRE Management:

There are no formal rules about sitting in the stairs. This is more an issue of courtesy, which are always the toughest ones to address. When we post signs and make announcements, the ones who need to pay the most attention are normally the ones who won't. That being said, we are due for another round of our courtesy campaign and we'll address this issue along with many others.

Mikey from **Annandale, Virginia** asks:

What is the REAL story behind OAK OIL? A group of us quiet car riders recently had a heated (though quiet) debate on whether there even is such a thing as OAK OIL.

VRE Management:

Leaf oil is very real! So real that The Wall Street Journal published an article about it on November 22, 2006 discussing many of the nation's rail corridors that were hampered by tree leaves. The article came out after our tree season, and we are hoping to get rights to publish it next fall. For those of you who are reading this with complete confusion, in the fall, when it rains, the tracks become covered with leaves. The trains that go over them compress the leaves and extract the oil, making it difficult for trains to gain traction on the rails. We try to account for this by having heavier locomotives on the trains with sand that can be dumped for traction.

Duke from Burke, Virginia asks:

My buddy and I plan on taking off work a little early to attend the meet the management in Alexandria this evening. What is the earliest we can arrive? We would like to take the early train leaving Union Station at 1:15. How early will snacks and refreshments be available? Thanks and congratulations on another GREAT YEAR OF SERVICE!!!

VRE Management:

You are welcome to join us. We normally are set up about 30 minutes before the first train arrives, in this case about 3:30p.

Elizabeth from Bristow asks:

I am a federal worker, and my agency is moving us all away from paper Metrocheks to SmartBenefits (as they can). How/when will VRE (eventually) accommodate SmartBenefits?

VRE Management:

The ultimate goal is to make our system compatible with SmarTrip cards as a form of payment. Because we have a different fare collection vendor than Metro (who administers the program), there have been a number of obstacles to overcome. Until then, there is a pilot program in the works that will test an interim measure. However, Metro has assured us that they will support Metrocheks until all of the regional transit systems that accept them (more than just VRE) are capable of using SmartCard technology. Be sure to let your employer know that you commute using VRE.

Idalia from Burke, VA asks:

It looks like they are moving rapidly on the construction of the Burke Library on Pope's Head road. How is that going to affect the Connection shuttle? Will they be able to reserve some spots for the VRE riders or will we have to go somewhere else.

VRE Management:

Yes, the library parking should be sufficient until the summer of 2008, when the parking garage is complete.

John from Burke, Va asks:

I was disappointed to see the reduction in the quality of snacks that were served at the last meet the management. The small bag of pretzels was even less than is served on airlines.

VRE Management:

Every year, we receive comments about the money that we spend on Meet the Management, which normally occurs around the same time that we are raising fares. In addition, we had received an equal amount of comments that we were not offering healthy snacks. In response to the feedback, we chose to offer pretzels for our evening events. In the mornings, we plan on offering granola bars and juice.

Paul from Stafford asks:

Can something be done about the obnoxious, repeatative, irriatating, inaccurate and all too loud automated announcement system, especially on VRE 311. For exampe, I hear "This is Train 311" 30 times between Union Station and Alexandira. Enough already! Conversely VRE 305 announcements are comparatively toned done. Please help.

VRE Management:

The automated announcement is made two times at each of the four inner city stations on southbound trains. This is being done to prevent riders from inadvertently boarding the wrong train. I'll have the mechanical department check the volume of the announcements on #311.

Where Am_I from Falmouth asks:

Today's newsletter talks about what to do if one misses his station. Fewer people would miss their stops if the

public address system worked, was louder or clearer. Often Automated Annie is broken in certain cars, or the conductors just don't feel like making station announcements. My favorite is announcing that the next stop is "X" just as the train pulls away from the current station. Second best is announcing this is station "X" just as the train doors are closing. At least have the engineer slam on the brakes and bounce us around to wake us up.

VRE Management:

While we are on the subject, we know that the announcements have been less than perfect. We are still working with the crews on integrating the automated system into their duties. For those of you who were around in 2000, when we put the Kawasakis into service, we experienced similar problems.

Deb from Spotsy asks:

Good Afternoon! I take the 305 home. Can someone PLEASE lower the volume of the PA system? I jump out of my skin each time it's used. I guess we're spoiled by not having any PA system on the 302. Thank you and keep up the good work of getting us there on time!

VRE Management:

While we are continuing on the subject, we will check the volume on #305. We will also look into why you are hearing announcements on #302.

Bob from Woodville, VA asks:

Are you still on track to eliminate FRC's? I think it will be a large shame because it is the one way VRE has of saying to your passengers "We are sorry for offering you lousy service, and we want to do something about it".

VRE Management:

I decided after the public hearings, and with the approval of our Operations Board, to continue our Service Guarantee program. However, the time needed to qualify for an FRC will be increased to one hour. This represents a compromise between keeping our passengers happy and balancing our budget. The change in this policy goes into effect on July 2.

Pablo from Manassas Park asks:

Helo sir I do not speak good english and would like you to labol trains in spanish also. It would be good if tickit machine was Spanish to. Also train conductor should talk spanish and english and train stops should be spanish to. Can you help me sir?

VRE Management:

holla amigo, porque nuestro numero de pasajeros que hablan espanol no son suficiente para cambiar el sistema y no hay los fondos

Shannon from Manassas, VA asks:

Is the money that you're getting from the General Assembly enough to bring back train 334?

VRE Management:

Good question. I know that this was a popular train. I am looking at ways that I can bring this train back.

Joe from Stafford, VA asks:

With the new Quantico bridge finally completed and possessing new rails, why does VRE continue to use the old bridge with the old rails? I can understand that all the stations were built on the east side of the tracks but it was not CSX's money that funded the project. I would hope that the ride through that area would be smoother, but it is not.

VRE Management:

The Quantico bridge project was designed to add flexibility to the overall area. While we may not use the bridge often, we have already seen a dramatic decrease in the number of delays that occur in this area. While it might seem fairer to you to use the new bridge, it is more important to us to get you home on time, regardless which set of tracks are being used.

Tim from Fredericksburg asks:

One complaint about the new Gallery Cars: Unlike the Kawasaki cars, there is no toggle switch to keep the vestibule doors open while people are boarding or disboarding. It is a real pain to have the doors slam shut on you when a whole crowd of people are trying to exit (especially a wheelchair passenger). Can the cars be retrofitted with such switches?

VRE Management:

The doors have sensitive edges that cause the doors to re-open when they encounter an obstruction. They are not working to our satisfaction. We are working with the manufacturer to improve their performance.

Marie from Manassas Park, VA asks:

Can VRE negotiate with Whoever to correct the new foot-traffic pattern through Union Station? It's nearly impossible to work through crowds while hurrying 2 platforms PAST the train, worm through passengers lined up for Amtrack, get glared at, cross through the sitting area, walk down the long back hallway, cross BACK up the lobby, validate a ticket & still make the train! Why can't VRE passengers show their ticket at the center door (there's a guard there any way) by the ladies' restroom? It's simpler, more efficient, & DOESN'T treat us like terrorists!!!

VRE Management:

I know that this is inconvenient to our Union Station riders. However, it is difficult to counter an argument that involves security. Certainly, there could be some improvements as to how our passengers to reach gate L. We are working with Amtrak on this.

Bill from Spot-v asks:

Why aren't all question answered in the Let's Talk Forum, Several people have committed that their questions are never addressed, but you have time to play with PABLO?

VRE Management:

Pablo has asked his question in many forums. I wanted to answer his question, but I wanted to wait until one of our Spanish speaking staff members could assist with a response. All questions that are submitted are taken seriously, even yours and Pablo's.

Tom from Lorton asks:

Can we get lifejackets for river crossing, I fear for Pablo's safety.

VRE Management:

This one doesn't need a response.

Ralph from Manassas asks:

Is there any correlation between locomotive break downs on Manassas line and switching maintenance crews between the two lines?

VRE Management:

There is no correlation because locomotives are moved freely between the two lines.

Phillip from Fredericksburg VA asks:

Why are we having to endure overheated car compartments lately? I mean, I am sure the conductors are aware of the forecasted weather, so I see no reason for having the afternoon cars - happened at least three times in the 303 train, towards the mid cars, where just a few 'cold-blood' people can sustain a ride with temperatures soaring above +80 degrees.

VRE Management:

Our cars are designed so that the air conditioning switches on at a certain temperature and, likewise, the heat switches on when the rail car temperature goes below a set temperature. If there is a problem, there is very little a

crew can do. It must be fixed when the train reaches the yard in the evenings.

Davin from Woodbridge, VA asks:

What are VRE's plans for its 15th Anniversary next month?

VRE Management:

We are thinking about it! But, no plans yet. Thanks for asking.

D from Warrenton, VA asks:

What needs to happen to get the morning trains at the Broad Run would pull up to station sooner especially when the weather is bad (e.g. very cold, cold and windy, precipitating)? It is very miserable to stand on the platform when the weather is bad while the trains sit in the yard and pull up to the station only a few minutes before the scheduled departure time. This also applies to trains originating at the south end of the Fredericksburg line.

VRE Management:

I know that this can be frustrating. I will work with Amtrak on it.

Dave from Woodbridge, VA asks:

Why is VRE having several problems with it's NEW cab cars? Their NEW, so you shouldn't have many problems

VRE Management:

Just like any custom purchase, there have been some "punch list" items. Rather than comparing these rail cars to an automobile, they are closer to being like a custom house. The basics are working fine. But, we asked for a lot of things that are specifically tailored to VRE. Then once they are in service, we find some tweaking needs to occur.

AI from Lorton, VA asks:

I was reading about the signal incident on your Manassas train and was wondering are railroad signals like traffic signals where red means stop and green means go?

VRE Management:

Yes and no. They do have red signals for stop and green signals for go. However, the signals are more complex as all three lights can shine all three colors, some might blink, and all can be on at the same time. Instead of just saying stop or go, the signal also indicate speeds at which the trains must operate.

Michael from Centreville, VA asks:

MARCS's locomotives are the same type as ours. They don't break down nearly as often. Stop using the age excuse for poor performance.

VRE Management:

MARC has had the same issues that we have had in recent months. These include a number of cancellations due to locomotive failure.

Doug from fburg asks:

Can any thing be done about the bottle neck on the main lot in Fredericksburg, like remove the chain from across the public street and us that other exit?

VRE Management:

Unfortunately, no. The local residents have convinced the City that the use of this exit causes traffic woes through their neighborhood. As a result, all cars must exit through the main lot and are not permitted to turn right onto that street.

Van from **Burke, VA** asks:

Hello and kudos to VRE for making our commute an overall pleasure. Unfortunately there seems to be an increase in bad behaviour or should I say a lack of common courtesy by some riders. To wit, personal grooming; feet propped up on seats even if it is in another passenger's face; legs and arms akimbo in the aisles; etc. Are conductors tasked with dealing with the offending discourteous rider? Should passengers police each other?

VRE Management:

As I have said many times before, courtesy issues are one of the most difficult to tackle. Crews are not required to deal with courtesy offenders. However, some will do so when asked by passengers. I suggest that you take this course of action, rather than police your fellow riders.

VRE Management:

Well that was exciting. I never realized that answering someone in Spanish would stir up so much controversy. But seriously, I try to answer those questions that are relevant to the majority of our riders. Today, I gave you an opportunity to see that some are not appropriate to answer.

I'm looking forward to chatting with you again next month. Until then, I hope to see at some of our Meet the Managements.

Dale

Copyright © 2005 // Virginia Railway Express